

# Cruse Bereavement Care



## Bereavement and Older People

The death of someone very close, at any age, can be a lonely and bewildering experience.

The loss of a partner, sibling, parent or child is a major life change. It may affect the lifestyle, attitudes and personality of the person who is bereaved and their relationship with those around them. Intense feelings, confused thoughts and strong physical reactions are common to bereaved people of all ages, and many find that the invaluable support and comfort which is often available in the early days of bereavement may no longer be there when the full realisation of loss sets in.

For older people, bereavement may have a special poignancy. It can occur when we feel least able to deal with the life-changing impacts that the death of a lifelong partner, friend, sibling or child can have. A death can trigger the memory of a series of losses experienced over a long lifetime, such as the deaths of parents and friends; and it can come at a time when previously reliable support systems have become weakened or disappeared.

When we are bereaved we have to cope with a world which seems to have fallen apart. In practical terms, our life may have changed dramatically. We may have much less money, or we may be better off financially. We may be eating and sleeping alone for the first time, or faced with household jobs which we used to share with the person who has died. Losing a close family member or an old friend can mean that we have no one who shares our childhood memories and family jokes.

Yet the biggest changes are probably inside us. When someone close dies, it can seem as though everything we took for granted has gone; that we have lost our sense of identity and self-worth. We may feel we have lost almost everything and haven't much left to fall back on or look forward to, and we may feel like this even though we have loving friends and family around us.

Getting used to the death seems to happen in fits and starts and is often not as simple as it sounds, especially if we have shared our life with the person or known them from childhood. If we have lost a younger relative, such as a son, daughter or grandchild, it may feel as if the natural order of life and death is reversed and this can seem particularly unjust.

### **What can help?**

Allowing our feelings to come out can help us get used to our loss. Talking about the person who died, dealing with the practicalities of our new situation, and trying to think of the present as well as the past, can all help us get used to the reality of the death and get through some of the anguish we may feel. As we do this, we will probably, slowly, begin to find a way of living without the person along side us, but still with us in our thoughts and memories.

