

Support Following Bereavement



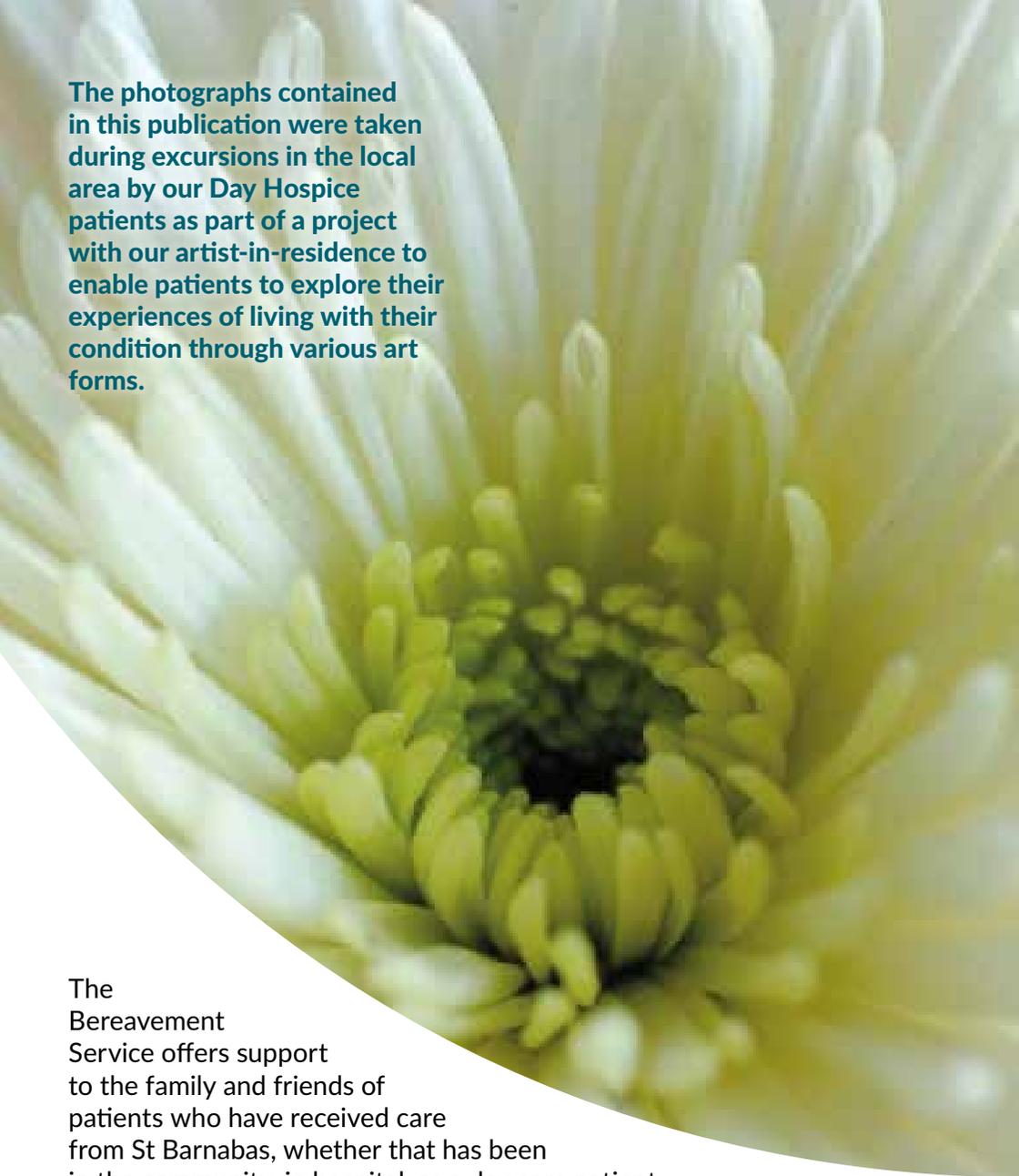


The Bereavement Service

While grief is a natural part of life when someone you love dies, it can also be a difficult and devastating experience.

It can sometimes help to talk things over confidentially with someone outside your family and friends. If you would like some support or have a question, please telephone St Barnabas House on 01903 706341 to speak to a member of the Family Services Team. If your call goes to an answerphone please leave your name, telephone number and address and we will be in touch with you as soon as possible.

This booklet gives details about the Bereavement Service at St Barnabas, and looks at many questions that bereaved people ask when they are grieving. Some things you may instantly recognise and others may not make any sense at all, because people express and experience their grief differently. What can be helpful is knowing that your grief can bring extreme emotions and reactions, and that this is normal.



The photographs contained in this publication were taken during excursions in the local area by our Day Hospice patients as part of a project with our artist-in-residence to enable patients to explore their experiences of living with their condition through various art forms.

The Bereavement Service offers support to the family and friends of patients who have received care from St Barnabas, whether that has been in the community, in hospital, as a day care patient or staying on the In-patient Unit. It is led by the Bereavement Services Coordinator, who manages a team of bereavement volunteers who are trained and supervised within the hospice. We offer bereavement support at the hospice or at home to those who live in our catchment area of Worthing, Adur, Arun and Henfield. We will also help find local bereavement support for those who live further away.

We offer the following

Individual support: Both one-off or on-going session, by one of the Family Services Team at the hospice or visiting in your home. Support is provided by both staff and volunteers through:

- Counsellors, who are qualified or are in training and have completed an additional bereavement and loss course.
- Bereavement visitors who have completed a comprehensive bereavement and loss programme at the hospice.
- Hospice social workers who can provide emotional support and practical advice.
- The chaplain who can provide spiritual support in your bereavement.

Early Bereavement Group: We welcome bereaved people in the first 6 months after a death, to come and share experiences with others.

A Time to Remember: Approximately four months after the death of your loved one we invite those of you who live locally to a Time to Remember event held at the hospice. This is an opportunity to meet others bereaved at roughly the same time as you and to participate in a brief act of remembrance.



services:

Social Evening: We invite those of you who live locally to come to our monthly social evening, usually about six months after the death of your loved one. You are welcome to come to the social evening until 26 months after your bereavement.

Thanksgiving Service: We invite you to a Thanksgiving Service, which is held at one of the churches in our community and is led by our hospice chaplain. This is usually between 9 and 15 months after the death of the person who died.

Light Up a Life: Every December we hold a carol service where we remember the lives of loved ones who have died and light candles to celebrate their lives.

Other support groups: We continue to develop the bereavement service so please contact us to find out about other groups and support on offer.



Most people, whether they are young or old, have many intense feelings when someone dies. People often feel sad, confused, angry, guilty and sometimes relief.

I don't believe he's gone....I can still hear him...I can still see him...

Even when you have known for some time that someone is going to die, there is still a sense of shock when the death occurs. You may feel cold, numb and unreal for a time, and have trouble believing that he or she is really dead and is not coming back. This feeling of shock usually starts to fade in a few days or weeks, although it might come back from time to time. You might feel that you can hear or see him or her again, and if this happens you may feel a fresh sense of shock and disbelief. You may have vivid dreams of the one who has died or pictures of them in your mind, particularly of the last few days and weeks of life. Some of these dreams may be sexual. All these feelings, while not being the same for everyone, are normal and do not mean you are going crazy.

I don't seem to be able to settle down to anything, yet there is so much that needs doing...

You may well find this a confusing time. It can be difficult to concentrate on anything, and everything may seem to be an effort. You may find yourself staring aimlessly through the window sensing you have lost something and suddenly have a new realisation that he or she is dead. And perhaps you will feel that life has no meaning anymore and ask yourself 'What is the point?' When someone you have loved dies it is normal to question what life is all about. Some people find themselves having strong spiritual experiences and others can find they have lost all faith.

I don't feel well...

You may feel tired and low and yet not be able to sleep, and your appetite and enjoyment of food may temporarily disappear. It is important to look after yourself, and try to eat a little food regularly and drink plenty of fluids. Your bereavement can be a big shock to you on all levels and it is not uncommon for people to be susceptible to minor infections and need to make more visits to their GP. Grief can be a very stressful experience.

I think I am going mad...

Grief can bring intense and strong emotions, perhaps more than you have felt before and you can feel as if these emotions are taking you over. You may feel like you are going mad and find that you feel and act differently from usual. It may be tempting to feel that things would be easier if you moved house or disposed of the possessions of the person who died. This is not always the best time to make major changes in your life - what seems right now may not seem right in several months. If you have to make important decisions, it can help to talk them over with an experienced person who you can trust and who can help you to consider the various options.

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Why me?...

Many people have strong feelings of anger, which can be difficult to understand. You may feel anger at the fact of the death, at being left alone, or at God and the world for such a painful and pointless loss. You may also feel angry with the people close to you, who may not seem as upset as you are, or with those who were involved with the medical and nursing care during the illness or at the time of death. Sometimes there is reasonable cause for this anger and at other times the anger is just there. This is a normal reaction and it will diminish in time.

If only...

It is very natural to wish you could have done some things differently. You may have regrets for things that were said, or things that you did or did not do. Everyone has misunderstandings and disagreements with those close to them; it is a normal part of human relationships. When someone dies we lose the opportunity to change things with them and you may feel guilty about all sorts of things. Guilty feelings are very common but are rarely justified and should pass with time. If they persist it can be helpful to talk them through with someone in order to try and understand better why you continue to feel as you do.





“Many people have strong feelings of anger, which can be difficult to understand.”

I always seem to want to talk about it...

Many people find themselves needing to talk about the dead person, their illness and death. The best way in which family and friends can help is to listen and to share this remembering. Sometimes they may find this hard to do, or painful and embarrassing, because they do not know what to say. You may find that family and friends are available early on in your bereavement and less so later. It is important to remember that people may not always know how you are feeling and you may have to tell them. If you find it hard to talk to them you may find it easier to speak to someone from outside of your family and friends.

Sometimes I can't remember...

You may find yourself not being able to recall your past, the things you did together, the good times or the bad times. Perhaps your mind is full of the more recent pictures of illness and death. It can help to talk about these whilst also recalling some of your shared life together. You can also preserve their memory more fully if you remember their faults as well as their strengths, their smile, their laughter. As time goes on, the memories will trickle back. In the meantime, if you find your memory has gaps, try talking with someone who can help you to explore these spaces and fill them in. This can help you with your grief.

I don't think I'll ever be happy again...

You may feel so bad that you cannot see any prospect of feeling better, of things changing. In some ways things can't change... the person you love has died, but much of the pain does lessen and change over time. One day, in the midst of your sadness, you may find yourself laughing at something that is happening now. These feelings of pleasure do not mean that you do not care about the dead person. It is helpful to renew old interests and in time seek new ones. However, being both sad and happy can be confusing and difficult to cope with. Special anniversaries, birthdays and Christmas can be particularly difficult. You may need to take extra care of yourself at these times and to ask for support.



No one seems to understand how I feel and they tell me I should have got over it by now...

People who tell you not to get so upset mean well, but perhaps do not realise that your distress, which may continue for a very long time, is natural and right when someone close to you dies. Try to speak to someone who will understand your need to be upset and grieve. Many people find it helpful to talk to someone outside of their family and friends; someone who has time to listen, who will understand and whose feelings you don't have to worry about. Our Bereavement Service offers a safe, confidential space for you to explore your thoughts and feelings.

“You may need to take extra care of yourself at these times and to ask for support.”



What about children?...

Children also grieve but, unlike adults, they sometimes do not have the understanding or words to describe the feelings they are experiencing. It helps to talk with children about how they are feeling and about the feelings people often have when someone important in their lives dies. With very young children it can be easier to do this through play.

Children will show their feelings in lots of different ways. If they are feeling upset and cannot talk about something they might show this by acting younger than they are, not sleeping or in physical symptoms, such as a tummy ache. They can become clingy and perhaps worry that you will also die. They might not be able to say this. Obvious behaviours like being rude,

getting into fights, having outbursts or temper tantrums are all natural responses in bereavement, but so is being very good, very 'grown up' and very quiet. Just because the behaviour is not loud does not mean a child is not feeling deeply. When you are also grieving it can be difficult to see things through a child's eyes.

Children perceive the world more literally than adults and depend on adults for much of their information about a family death. Many adults try, understandably, to protect children from death and the pain of loss by not discussing the death and hiding their feelings. As a result many children facing a significant loss feel bewildered, abandoned and isolated. It is normal for children and young people to re-visit and re-experience their grief as they develop and grow into adulthood. If you are at all worried about any children in your family then please feel free to ask us at St Barnabas for help.

How can I help bereaved children?...

Be honest, simple and direct. Explain carefully what has happened. Use words you know they will understand. Avoid going into long explanations, which can confuse children. Don't be afraid to use the word death, as saying that somebody has 'gone to sleep' can create sleep problems in the future.

Encourage your child to express their feelings openly. Listen to what your child is trying to tell you verbally or through their behaviour, and respond according to your child's needs.

Try to avoid telling your child how he/she should feel, and accept the emotions and reactions the child expresses.

Your child may cry and at times this may be for a long time. You may find this difficult but it is normal and helpful to the child.

Sharing your feelings, both sad and happy, with your child allows your child to share and comfort you too. This helps them feel included and gives them permission to talk about their difficult feelings.

Don't forget to hug, cuddle and be affectionate towards your child. Children experience things literally so lack of contact can feel like real abandonment. However some children may prefer to distance themselves for a while.



Children's questioning can get tedious but this is their way of gaining understanding of a very difficult situation. Please be patient with them and take their questioning seriously.

Children need reassurance about any myths and fantasies they may have. They may not be able to express these, so need reassurance that death is not contagious and the death of one person does not mean that everyone else is going to die soon. They also need reassurance that there is nothing they have said, thought or done that could have caused the death.

Keep up your children's usual routines. This gives them much needed stability in a huge time of change. There is a temptation to compensate and give special treats, or give in when they are continually asking, especially when you are having a low day. It will help your child if you continue to be consistent and fair in their day-to-day care.

Children often feel excluded from the ritual after a death. Allowing them to be involved and take part in some of the decisions avoids this and helps with their grieving process. It is important to prepare children and explain carefully what is happening on a day-to-day basis.

Remember to talk about the person who has died. Children may not take the lead and often take their cues from adults. They may need help keeping memories of the person. Simple collections of personal things, photo albums and an item of clothing to cuddle can be very reassuring.

Children often use school as a distraction in their grief so staff there may not be aware of their pain and struggles. It can be helpful to talk to your child's teachers so they can also help your child in their bereavement.

If you are finding it hard to cope, getting support for yourself can help you support your child.



Bereavement support and advice are always available at St Barnabas. Please contact the Family Services Team directly on 01903 706341 if you would like to find out more about support.

Many people find books helpful. There are a number of books, both fiction and non-fiction, suitable for both adults and children on the market. You are very welcome to telephone or email the Bereavement Service if you would like a booklist.

familyservices@stbh.org.uk

Comments about your care

We are always pleased to receive feedback on our service. Please contact the Bereavement Service with any comments.

If you wish to make a complaint or pass on a compliment about the service please write to:

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Registered charity no 256789

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