

Death in a Family

Whether a death is expected or not, we can never predict how we will react. So when a person dies, reactions within a family may well differ. While we may expect a person to be sad for a while, this is just one of a variety of feelings which may be experienced.

The first feelings will come with the news of the death. They may be feelings of disbelief, panic or complete numbness. Whatever they are, they tend to give way to a sense of being somewhat in control, and it is often observed at funerals that the people most close to the person who has died conduct themselves with dignity and are considered to have been very brave.

Some people may hope or expect the bereaved person to get back to normal within a relatively short space of time e.g. to return to work, to plan another baby, to look for another marital partner, etc. Most often, though the period of mourning has only just begun.

For the person who was close to the person who died the months which follow may be filled with unfamiliar feelings of considerable intensity: rage, misery, worry or perhaps an unreal sense of having no feelings at all. At times they may feel fine; at others they may feel that the whole process is beginning again. Gradually the difficult times will lessen, the feelings will be more shallow, and the patches of relief and respite will lengthen, until at last the person feels something of their true self again.



Death in a Family ...continued

Death of a close family member impacts on the family as a whole and on individual members. Individuals within the family may react in very different ways and at different times. This can increase anxiety and may be a source of conflict.

Responses and reactions can be as variable as the personalities within a family. Therefore the ways in which individuals grieve within the family may differ. It is important to recognise these differences and allow people to grieve in their own way.

Particularly challenging for all concerned can be sudden and unexpected deaths, deaths for which there seem to be no reason, the death of a young child perhaps, or a suicide.

Death is a natural part of life. Somehow in our society this fact tends to be forgotten, and we may hope and pretend that it won't happen in our family. When it does whilst we may never forget the person who has died, we will in time be able to find a way to live with what has happened and enjoy positive experiences once again.

