

Traumatic Bereavement

Death from COVID-19 may present additional challenges and be unusually traumatic in its effect. This may impact the grieving process during what is already a very difficult and distressing time. With traumatic bereavement, there may be the common reactions to loss such as shock, sadness, anger or guilt, but there can also be additional issues.



The following situations may lead to grieving complicated by trauma:

- Sudden illness and/or death
- A loved one dying in isolation
- Not having the opportunity to spend time with a loved one or say goodbye during their final illness
- Not being able to follow cultural or religious rites and rituals
- Multiple bereavements within a short space of time
- Triggering of memories of other bereavements or traumatic experiences in the past
- NHS workers having to deal with multiple Covid-19 deaths and associated decisions
- Other key workers and key workers' family members dealing with loss

Additional reactions following a traumatic bereavement can include intense distress, nightmares, and self-destructive behaviour. For most, these symptoms gradually begin to fade over 3-4 weeks. For some this is not the case, and for others, these trauma-related symptoms may not be experienced immediately, but become an increasing problem over time.

Helpful ways to look after yourself

Anxiety management techniques may be useful for some of the symptoms of traumatic bereavement:

	Focus on your breathing by breathing in for the count of 3, hold, and breathe out for 3.		Touch something solid, like a wall, and focus on how it feels, its colour, its texture. This helps bring you back to the present.
	Comfort yourself: listen to soothing music; watch a favourite film; read a favourite book; cuddle a pet; wrap yourself in a cosy blanket.		Try a grounding exercise: Identify 5 things you can see; 4 things you can touch; 3 things you can hear; 2 things you can smell; 1 thing you can taste.
	Avoid using excessive alcohol or other drugs. Whilst it may feel like they help in the short term, they can lead to physical and mental health issues.		Physical exercise is important so try and factor it into your daily routine.

Where can I get help?

If the symptoms persist beyond 3-4 weeks, speak to your GP. Issues with continuing Post-Traumatic Stress symptoms are known to require specialist trauma therapy and your GP will be able to look at NHS referral options.

You may also want to speak to a counsellor via the EAP helpline. The helpline counsellors are able to provide support with the impact of your loss, and with ways of managing any symptoms, in addition to information on the practical issues you may be experiencing.

In the longer term, your GP may suggest medication if your symptoms become severe or prolonged.

Useful Websites

Cruse: England, Wales, Northern Ireland

This includes links to other sources of support for all grieving in the family, and also covers funerals.

www.cruse.org.uk/get-help/coronavirus-dealing-bereavement-and-grief

Cruse Bereavement Care Scotland

This includes links to other sources of support for all grieving in the family and also covers funerals.

www.crusescotland.org.uk/2-uncategorised/84-covid-19.html

Mind: England and Wales

www.mind.org.uk/information-support/coronavirus/coronavirus-and-your-wellbeing/

Support in Mind Scotland

www.supportinmindscotland.org.uk/Listing/Category/coronavirus-support-guidance

MindWise Northern Ireland

www.mindwisenv.org/info-support/covid-19/

Care for the Family

Useful information on how others can help the bereaved

www.careforthefamily.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/bereavement-how-other-people-can-help.pdf

The Inter Faith Network for the United Kingdom

<https://www.interfaith.org.uk/news/faith-communities-and-coronavirus>

Stonewall LGBT support: England, Scotland, Wales

www.stonewall.org.uk/about-us/news/covid-19-%E2%80%93-how-lgbt-inclusive-organisations-can-help