

## Sibling grief in young adults



### Emotional reactions

If your brother or sister dies when you're a teenager or young adult, you will be able to understand your loss, but you may not grieve in the same way as older people in your family, or as other people around you. Grief can be different for everyone so there's no right or wrong way to grieve. After your sibling has died you might be in shock, be numb, be in denial and be struggling to believe or understand what has happened.



### Physical reactions

You might feel restless, tired, or exhausted by trying to appear 'normal'. You might struggle to concentrate on things that seem so 'unimportant' in comparison to what has just happened. All of these feelings are 'natural' and you should try not to suppress them or allow them to make you feel guilty, but this isn't always easy to do. It's important not to try to block out the pain, help and support is available to deal with your grief instead of going through it alone.



### Communicating how you feel

Because death is a major event, it can change relationships within your family; for instance, you may now have become the oldest, youngest or only child. You may also be looking for and needing your friends and those around you to accept that you may be struggling or changing because of what's happened. By explaining your feelings, you can help them to understand more.



### The grieving process

For some, it can be very hard to carry on with what seem like 'pointless' everyday tasks such as going to school, college or work. Others may welcome the routine that this commitment offers. There may be times when you go through periods when you feel you've taken a step back in your grieving process. When you feel that you've been coping and then something happens to make you doubt it, it can feel scary; but this is very normal. You can choose and learn to accept your feelings as they are.



### Making choices

Experience with death can teach us about life. We can learn to care about the things that are really important to us and the things that matter in our lives. We grow up thinking we are learning about all the things we might have to deal with in our life, but we learn nothing about what we might have to face if a sibling dies. This experience can force us to evaluate the choices we have to make and, maybe, choose different options from those that our friends would select.



### **School, college and work places**

When you move on from school to college or on to work, you will undoubtedly be faced with the question “how many brothers and sisters do you have?”. It’s not an easy question to answer, it sometimes feels inappropriate to go into your whole family story but it can also feel horrible to answer questions without mentioning that the person you love has died. You can choose how you answer the question and it can be different depending upon the circumstances.



### **The legacy**

As a bereaved sibling the loss you feel can be overwhelming at times, but with the support of others you can work through your grief and even think of the person that has died and smile at the good times you shared. Some bereaved siblings experience a fear of forgetting their brother or sister. There are different ways to help keep the memory alive, such as keeping treasured keepsakes, writing letters, creating a memory box or even fundraising for a charity.



### **Continuing support**

Certain occasions (i.e. Christmas, anniversaries or birthdays) are likely to be more difficult for bereaved families and this is when you may feel the need to connect with other young people who are experiencing similar challenges. We hold a number of events for bereaved siblings each year. Contact with other bereaved siblings can reassure you that your experiences are natural and a normal part of grieving when your brother or sister has died.



### **Psychological support**

There is no date or time by which any person, adult or child should have finished grieving. However, if you are still experiencing the same intensity of feelings a while after the death of your brother or sister this may indicate extra help and support is needed. If you would like to discuss any issues which have been raised by this leaflet or you would like to make an appointment to see one of our Creative Therapists or Bereavement Counsellors at Shooting Star Children’s Hospices, please use the Family Support contact details below.

### **These organisations might be able to offer further information and support:**

<https://www.hopeagain.org.uk/>

<https://www.winstonswish.org/>

<http://www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk/>

If you would like further advice or to hear about other organisations that can help you, please call our Family Support Line on 01483 230974 or email: [familysupport@shootingstar.org.uk](mailto:familysupport@shootingstar.org.uk)