

Building resilience

following a bereavement



Treetops
Hospice

What is resilience?

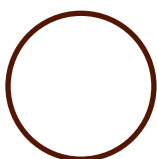
The term resilience is used to describe how we cope, adapt and recover from difficult times and challenges. We are all unique in how we do this.

Resilience and grief

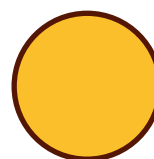
Dr Lois Tonkin describes the process of adjusting to the death of someone close as growing new life around your grief. Her model is often referred to as the 'fried egg' model where the white of the egg represents the new growth:

'Fried Egg' Model By Dr Lois Tonkin

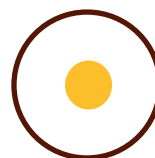
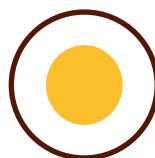
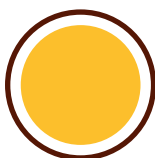
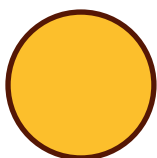
1. This circle represents you, your life and your experiences



2. When your loved one died, your circle probably became overwhelmed with grief

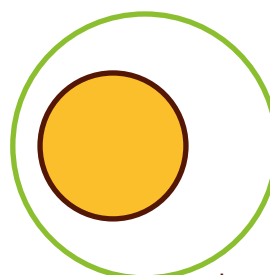
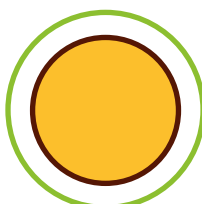
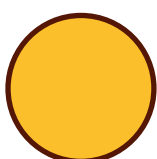


3. Some people suggest that over time your grief will reduce:



Time

4. In reality, many people find their grief stays the same...



...but their life grows around it

Looks a bit like a fried egg



The 'new life' that grows around the grief will look different for everyone, but it is likely it will involve all the changes and adaptations a person has made following their bereavement and will often contain some expression of ongoing connection with their loved one.

In order to build this 'new life' a person must first accept the reality of their loss and process the pain of their grief. Resilience is a key factor in facilitating these aspects of the grief process and in developing this 'new life' and so helping a child or young person to build resilience is key to them learning to live alongside their grief.

Supporting a child who is grieving

When a child is bereaved, it is impossible to take away the sadness and painful feelings they are experiencing; this is a natural part of the grieving process. However, there are ways that you can support them with their worries, talk about their grief and gently nurture them to build their resilience.

- **Boost your child's self-esteem**

Feeling good about yourself - self-esteem - is an important part of building resilience. Letting your child know that they are loved by you and the people around them, and how proud you are of them, are great ways to do this. Offering plenty of praise will also really help.

- **Involve your child**

Following a bereavement there are often lots of decisions that need to be made including when to return to school, whether or not to attend the funeral and how your child would like to remember their loved one on the day. Encouraging your child/young person to be an appropriate part of these and have their thoughts and ideas heard can help them feel more in control and able to cope.

• Uphold the usual routines and rules

When someone close to your child dies, holding the usual boundaries, routines and rules can sometimes be difficult. You may sense they are struggling and want to relax things a little to be kind and not upset them further. If you are grieving too, you might notice your capacity to enforce a boundary is reduced. Alternatively, you may worry that you are adding pressure to an already difficult situation and opt to 'pick your battles' instead.

However, keeping to your usual boundaries, rules and routines where possible can increase your child/young person's feeling of security and offer some consistency in an otherwise turbulent time.

• Offer reassurance

Following a bereavement, children and young people often worry about something happening to other people in their lives, especially those caring for them. Telling them when you go out, when you will be back and striving to keep to these assurances can be really helpful. Talk through, clearly and concisely who is around for them, who they can rely on, and who will be able to help answer any questions. This will help ease some of these worries and concerns.

• Listen and communicate back

Listening to your child and communicating back your understanding is a great way to validate what they are thinking and feeling. Sometimes children and young people can blame themselves following a bereavement and wonder if they did something wrong or could have done anything differently. Their logic does not always make sense but can often remain hidden, so they could be secretly worrying about something that isn't true.

Listening to your child and giving them the chance to talk about this, will create an opportunity to highlight any confusion and offer reassurance.

• **Normalise their emotions**

Like adults, children and young people all grieve uniquely. You may notice that your child's emotions can fluctuate quickly from being really sad and upset one moment and then being OK and asking if they can go out to play the next. This is often described as 'puddle jumping' and can be alarming to adults who can often tolerate their sadness for longer periods of time before needing a distraction.

Acknowledge the many different emotions your child/young person will be feeling, and how these can change very quickly, talk together to find ways that may help to manage these. You can use phrases like: "I can see that you are angry" to help put words to the feelings.

Letting your child know it is still alright to feel happy, have fun and think about their hopes and goals is important and doesn't mean they have forgotten about the person that has died or they are not still sad.

• **Involve other people**

Consider keeping other people in your child's life involved and informed about how they are coping, and what has been helpful to them. These could be particular relatives, friends of the family, or a staff member at school. Not only will this support you so you don't feel so alone it can also help your child with the feeling of consistency and security.

• **Find time to look after you too**

Don't forget to be kind to yourself too, this is not easy when you are also grieving and feel like you have to keep going for everyone else. Remember it is not possible to get everything right and taking time out for 'you' is a great way to show your child that it is OK to take a break too, especially at difficult times.

Further support

This leaflet is written to support our two primary publications in the Little Gem series:

- Supporting a child when someone they love has died / Someone I love has died
- Someone significant has died – handling grief as a young person

Our other specialist leaflets include:

- Talking about and understanding death
- Supporting a child bereaved by murder
- Supporting a child bereaved by suicide
- Telling a child a friend has died
- Funerals and cremations
- Viewing a body with a child

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