

Sources of help

A range of organisations offer emotional and practical support, and information to help people through their grief. Some of these are listed below.

National Association of Bereavement Services

Phone: 020 7709 9090 (Referral line)

This refers people to their nearest bereavement support service.

Compassionate Friends

Helpline: 08451 23 23 04

Bereaved parents offer friendship and understanding to other bereaved parents.

Child Death Helpline

Freephone: 0800 282 986

This is run by bereaved parents.

Child Bereavement Trust

Phone: 0845 357 1000

This provides resources for bereaved families and professionals.

Support in Bereavement for Brothers and Sisters (SIBBS)

Helpline: 08451 23 23 04

This provides support for bereaved brothers and sisters.

Samaritans

Phone: 08457 90 90 90

This provides 24-hour emotional support to people who are distressed.

We, the Meningitis Trust, provide practical, emotional and financial support to people whose lives have been affected by meningitis.

We are committed to increasing understanding of the disease, how it is treated and the after-effects through our awareness campaigns, education programmes, learning resources, research projects and international work.

Our range of professional support services, developed over many years, is designed to help people across the UK to rebuild their lives after meningitis.

This support is available for life, whenever it is needed, and includes the following.

24-hour nurse-led helpline

A free phone service, providing information and support seven days a week.

Professional counselling

Confidential counselling for people who have had meningitis and their families.

Financial support grants

We can provide grants to help fund specialist training, equipment, activities, respite care (to give carers a break from caring) and funeral costs.

Home visits

Trained staff offer information and support in people's homes.

One-to-one contacts

Putting people affected by meningitis in touch with volunteers who have also experienced the disease.

We rely almost entirely on donations to continue our work.

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Meningitis bereavement information

Explaining the pain and trauma of experiencing sudden loss following meningitis and meningococcal septicaemia



Bereavement

Bereavement is a distressing but common experience, and the death of someone you love following meningitis or meningococcal septicaemia is always traumatic and painful.

This leaflet aims to provide help, information, understanding and support for people who, tragically, have had this experience.

For many, the suddenness of the disease and the speed with which it develops is both shocking and overwhelming. Families are left feeling stunned and traumatised, sometimes within a matter of hours. For many people, the idea that an infectious disease can have such a devastating effect in the 21st century is hard to understand.

Most people know very little about meningitis and septicaemia until they are affected by it. Many unanswered questions about the disease, and the emotional reactions to grief, are likely to cause confusion for individuals and families.

Grieving

Grieving takes place after any experience of loss, but particularly after the death of someone you love. You can experience grief through physical symptoms, such as headaches, a hollow feeling in your stomach, breathlessness or a dry mouth.

Experiencing loss can cause your mind to react in unexpected or disturbing ways, such as disbelief, confusion, and sensing the presence of the person who has died. These are quite natural to someone grieving, and are temporary reactions to loss which will disappear in time.

Grief can also influence your behaviour, for example, disturbed sleep, crying, changes in appetite and withdrawing from society. Many people also find that their relationships with others around them can change after a bereavement.

Children also experience grief, and you need to listen to their thoughts and feelings. If you do not tell them what has happened, they may become confused and anxious. Talking to them in words they will understand is important. Sometimes children may need professional help.

Crying is natural and beneficial. It is a way of releasing emotion. Above all, grief takes time – it cannot be hurried or avoided. For example, being told that you have to get on with the rest of your life may prevent you from confronting your loss or managing its symptoms.

“There are no right or wrong ways to grieve. Each individual expresses and experiences grief in a different and unique way.”

Dr Phillip Rees, Meningitis Trust Counsellor

Feelings

There is no ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ way to feel following the death of someone close to you. It is natural to feel some or all of the following emotions, and it is important to recognise that these are part of the grieving process – guilt, anger, numbness, resentment, the need to blame, utter despair and physical pain, total disbelief, shock, intense sadness, loneliness and isolation.

It is important to recognise that these emotions are part of the grieving process. These emotions may also lead to depression.

What you can do

It is important to acknowledge that grief is a natural response to loss. It is also vital that you do not try to hide or deny your feelings. Being aware of these feelings and the way you are responding will help you through the process of grieving.

Getting support from friends and family, and talking about your loss, can be very beneficial. This can be difficult and at times painful, but it is important to talk about the person you have lost and share memories of them with other people close to you.

Family members and friends may also be grieving and finding it difficult to help. Sometimes, talking to someone unrelated and removed from the situation can be helpful. This may be face to face, over the phone or by e-mail. It may also help to talk to someone who has shared a similar experience.

How we can help you

We, the Meningitis Trust, recognise that you may find it difficult to ask for help after someone close to you has died. We can offer support in many ways, including providing a professional counselling service. Counselling is an opportunity to talk in confidence to someone experienced in listening to people in distress. It focuses on the emotional crisis and the life changes that you may be experiencing. Our counselling team and our trained staff provide a listening and support service for as long as you need it.

Please phone our helpline to find out more about our free counselling service in the UK.

