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GRIEF & LOSS RESOURCES

IN THIS BOOKLET

Bereavement is the experience of losing someone important to us. It is characterised by grief, which is the process and the range of emotions we go through as we gradually adjust to the loss.

Losing someone important to us can be emotionally devastating - whether that be a colleague, partner, family member, friend or pet. It is natural to go through a range of physical and emotional processes as we gradually come to terms with the loss.

https://www.mind.org.uk/

2 TYPES OF GRIEF

ARE THERE DIFFERENT TYPES OF GRIEF?

In addition to the feelings of grief that you will experience following a loss, there are also other types of grief that you may experience at different times during bereavement.

Anticipatory grief

Anticipatory grief is a sense of loss that we feel when we are expecting a death or ending. It features many of the same symptoms as those experienced after a death has occurred, including depression, extreme sadness or concern for the person or relationship. It does not necessarily replace, reduce or make grief after the loss any easier or shorter, but for some people it can provide the opportunity to prepare for the loss and for what the future might look like.

Secondary loss

After any loss you may also feel what is known as 'secondary loss'. After the initial shock of losing the loved one, you will start to feel the loss of this person in other ways. Ways you can feel secondary loss can be complex at times depending on who that person was to you. Secondary loss is most easily described as the way that loss affects you and how you live your life without them. At its core. you miss their presence at important stages in your life.

WHEN MIGHT WE GRIEVE?

Bereavement affects everyone in different ways, and it's possible to experience any range of emotions. There is no right or wrong way to feel. Feelings of grief can also happen because of other types of loss or changes in circumstances, for example:

END OF RELATIONSHIP

LEAVING SEX WORK

MOVING TO A NEW PLACE OR HAVING TO RELOCATE

WHEN A LOVED ONE'S HEALTH DETERIORATES

WHEN MIGHT SEX WORKERS GRIEVE?

Sometimes grief and loss can be specific to our job. You may feel these symptoms of grief or loss when certain events happen throughout your life or career. Some of these can include:

Family Rejection Because of Your Job

Not everyone is in a position where friends and family will be accepting of their job. Some people may be heavily against Sex Work or may not understand exactly what you do, resulting in abandonment. Depending on that person's stance against Sex Work, they may even be feeling the symptoms of grief themselves - shock, anger, disbelief etc. While this isn't a license to abandon you, it may still happen.

Being Outed as a Sex Worker Before You're Ready

To live as a sex worker openly and without reservation is a luxury that most sex workers are rarely afforded. When we are outed before we're ready, we run the risk of losing friends, family, our children if we have any, and also partners. When the autonomy of coming out is taken from us, we will feel betrayal and loss, grieving whatever consequences we may have to face as a result.

The Death of a Colleague

Whilst it is sad to mention it's unfortunately true. Sex workers are far more likely to experience violence while working and sex workers depending on which area of the industry they are in are much more likely to be in life threatening situations. If you lose a colleague, you may be grieving and feel a lot of fear for yourself and others in the industry. We have dedicated a part of this booklet specifically to this type of grief, that tends to hit harder than others.

Losing Children to the System

One of the many issues sex workers face for their work systemically is their children being taken from their care after authorities being alerted about their occupation. This is a desperately heartbreaking event and the grief of losing a child is potent. Whilst there is not a tangible death involved in some cases, the feelings of loss are still prevalent. Your feelings are valid.

Employers Terminating Contracts

Our reputations in our 'civilian' jobs may be affected and we might even be fired for being involved in Sex Work. As unfortunate as this is, there is no shortage of press coverage where sex workers who are working alongside their usual jobs are fired or discipliined for working in the industry. Those who aren't fired may face stigma and this stigma can rile up all kinds of complicated and painful emotions.

The Deterioration of a Long Term Client

You may feel secondary loss when dealing with the deteriorating health of a long term client. Especially if you are in full service sex work, you will feel secondary loss through that clients absence. This can be the loss of a friendship developed throughout your companionship, the financial influence of the arrangement, and you may grieve positive memories and experiences you had with that client.

The End of a Relationship

Sex workers who have partners whilst working may end up losing their relationships if their partner becomes uncomfortable with their job. No one should have to choose between their career and their love life, but unfortunately sex work and relationships is a complicated topic for a lot of people in the industry. You may grieve the loss of a relationship if it ends because of your work or that person's perception of your job.

The common denominator of all of these events, is that the circumstances were beyond our control but the consequences of them are very much felt by us, through the circumstances that happen after or the feelings we get surrounding those events.

THE 7 STAGES OF GRIEF

Shock & Disbelief

When you first hear, you may not believe it. This is a defence mechanism that is designed to protect from pain.

STAGE 01

STAGE 02

Denial

You might simply deny that your loved one is gone, or push the thoughts out of your head.

Guilt

It's completely normal to wonder what you could have done to prevent the loss from happening.

STAGE 03

Anger & Bargaining

You might start to feel angry at the doctors, or another party, and perhaps even at the deceased themselves. Bargaining sounds like "I'd give x to have them back"

STAGE 04

Depression Loneliness & Reflection

Now that you have fully acknowledged the loss, it is common to experience depression and/or deep sadness.

STAGE 05

THE 7 STAGES OF GRIEF

Reconstruction

STAGE 06

This is when you will work up and down the grief ladder as you try to figure out what 'the new normal' is.

STAGE 07

Acceptance

You have worked through the most painful and difficult work of grieving, and you accept that your loved one is gone and that you need to continue living your life.

As time passes, you may find that you occasionally regress to one of the early stages, especially around holidays or anniversaries. However, over time it does become easier, and your pain will subside. It never goes away completely, but you can live with your loss. It's also worth nothing that sometimes these stages can come in a different order, and the stages can even repeat themselves.

HOW LONG DOES IT LAST?

"There is no time limit on grief and this varies hugely person to person. The time spent in a period of bereavement will be different for everybody and depends on factors such as the type of relationship, the strength of attachment or intimacy to the person who died, the situation surrounding their death, and the amount of time spent anticipating the death."

- Mind.org.uk

Similarly, it's important to remember that just because there is a grief model that exists to explain what you may go through, doesn't necessarily mean you will experience those stages in that order or only once. Grief comes in waves, and it can creep up on us when we least expect it. We feel it's important to tell you that everyone's experience of grief is different. The thing you must remember is that you're not alone in any feelings of denial, confusion or anger. These are entirely natural although very painful.

SELF CARE WHEN GRIEVING

SELF CARE WHEN GRIEVING IS ESSENTIAL. HERE ARE SOME WAYS YOU CAN HELP MAKE IT EASIER ON YOURSELF TO PROCESS YOUR GRIEF.

BE KIND TO YOURSELF

Treat yourself as you would treat a beloved friend, in word, thought and deed.

GET THE RIGHT AMOUNT OF SLEEP

It's normal, but if you are sleeping more or less than usual, contact your local GP for medical advice.

Source: https://mindfulnessandgrief.com/

PHYSICAL HEALTH

When you are grieving, your risk for illness increases due to stress. If you find yourself getting ill physically, don't neglect it.

EAT HEALTHY, DRINK WATER.

Drink plenty of water, as it will help your physical and mental state.

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BREATHE MINDFULLY

It focuses your mind on the present moment, which can stimulate your mental well-being.

CONNECT WITH OTHERS

Go for a walk with a trusted friend, or schedule lunch with a family member with whom you can share mutual support. Reach out to other sex workers for advice if you can.

EXPRESS & CREATE

You do not need to be a professional to benefit from creative expression. Putting your thoughts and feelings into word and pictures can help you make sense out of seemingly senseless feelings.

MEDITATE

Start with two to five minutes a day. If you can, work up to 10 to 20 minutes a day.

Source: https://mindfulnessandgrief.com/

Working While Grieving

The most desirable course of action when you've just lost someone is to take time off to take care of yourself. Not everyone has savings set aside for this, especially when they may have arrangements to make. It's also important to understand that even if you do take this time off, there isn't a time frame for every person where grief disappears. With this in mind here is some advice for those of you who need to continue working when you feel like you just can't. This applies to sex work mostly but can be applied to civilian jobs if you have one.

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1. Tell Your Co-Workers

If you have a network of fellow workers that you trust, then tell them that you have lost someone. This not only allows them to be compassionate with you but it also means if they notice any out of character behaviour they can check up on you or let you know what they see. Grief can manifest itself in complicated ways and if you're an online sex worker especially, this is where 'it takes a village to raise a child' comes in. Peer support for yourself right now is essential and if you don't have a network of friends in the industry you can rely on, now is a really good time to try and find some. You may not want your clients or peers to know that you're grieving - you don't owe this information to anyone after all. This is purely a safety measure and another sex worker may have gone through the same thing who can offer you their personal advice too.

2. Tell Clients (or don't)

This is entirely up to you. If you are taking a break, you can let clients know you won't be taking any bookings until further notice, or you could tell clients you have established a long term relationship with that you've lost someone recently so you'll be taking extra care or establishing some temporary boundaries, such as shorter sessions. If you work online, you might post on your channels that you're taking a break but will still have content scheduled. Again, this is totally up to you - if you think you can continue working without stating this information then you may want to avoid that for your own reasons.

3. Knowing Your Escape Routes

This isn't as drastic as it sounds. Grief doesn't discriminate and there will be times where you will feel emotionally overwhelmed. In the event this happens, what's your plan? If you start to feel sad during an appointment, do you have regular breaks scheduled that day between clients? Knowing that there will be a break between sessions can help calm us down when triggers hit. If not, where is the nearest bathroom, or quiet place where you can compose yourself for a moment? Is there an excuse you might have to get rid of a client quickly if you feel too overwhelmed? Is there another worker you can text who can give you an 'important call' to get you out of the session?

4. Getting Enough Space to Grieve

This leads on from our last point. Everyone needs space to grieve. For us that space can be time, either away from people or offline. Whether you feel fine right now or not, it's useful to establish time frames between clients, camshows or sessions. When grieving our energy levels are not what they'd usually be and even the simplest tasks can overwhelm us. It can seem ridiculous to "schedule grieving time", or giving yourself dedicated spaces to grieve but in the worst moments it can be a lifeline.

5. Asking for Help or Receiving Help

If you have let those closest to you know that you're grieving, many may have offered to help. Sometimes we think this is just a pleasantry but if you're feeling tense and everything is getting on top of you, maybe other people can actually help. If you're a domme you may get subs to run errands for you. Some online workers post online to let others know what they're going through and that they need time off and tributes can offer breathing room for time off work.

6. Decision Making

This is something that isn't often discussed within the context of sex work, but it's important to understand that our brains are working differently when we're grieving. Decisions are emotion led at times instead of logically led. You may be compelled to make rash decisions like quitting the industry, or moving home, or changing which type of sex work you do. During your grieving period it's safest to not make any important decisions for the first few months. Try to be open with others about big life decisions you might be making as a second opinion can shed a new light on how you manage your life while grieving.

Unfortunately there isn't any 'one size fits all' advice anyone can give you, but there are qualified professionals out there who can guide you through this time .

WHERE CAN I GET SUPPORT?

You can click the following images to access the websites of these support services. Alternatively, search their titles online.

Cruse Bereavement Care provides face-to-face, telephone, email and online support for anyone who has experienced a loss.

Child Bereavement UK provides support for anyone who has lost a child, and for children themselves who are bereaved.

Stillbirth and Neonatal Death Charity (SANDS) provides information and support for anybody affected by the death of a baby.

BEAD (Bereaved through Alcohol and Drugs) provides information and support for anyone bereaved through drug or alcohol use.

WHERE CAN I GET SUPPORT?

You can click the following images to access the websites of these support services.

The Compassionate Friends
Supporting bereaved parents and their families

The Compassionate Friends offers a range of services supporting bereaved parents and their families.

Sudden

Sudden helps people who have experienced a sudden bereavement to access specialist information and advice.

WAY Widowed & Young

Widowed and Young offers support to people under 50 who have lost a partner.

mind
for better mental health

If you have lost someone to suicide specifically, you can find targeted advice on this by clicking the Mind logo here to see the specific resources available to you.

Finding a Therapist

You can click me

You may be concerned that if you enter the mental health system via the NHS that whatever therapist you end up seeing might judge you or not understand what you do. You might even not feel comfortable disclosing what you work as at all through fear of repercussions. NUM has saved you a few steps by going through some therapists and asking them some questions to narrow down your search.

This list of therapists, drawn from all parts of the UK, is an exciting new development in our programme to support the mental health of sex workers. Over time, we intend to expand and modify this list, to allow sex workers access to the very best of appropriate support. All therapists on this list have made the following declarations:-

I support the following statement: *"NUM supports a decriminalisation model as a means to advance the health, safety and human rights of sex workers. We believe that sex workers are entitled to the following: the right to self determination; the right to live free from violence; the right to live free from intimidation, coercion or exploitation; the right to work as safely as possible; and the right to police protection. I support the Core Values that underpin NUM's service delivery, namely integrity, inclusion, compassion and contribution."*

To access the list, click the image below or visit:
https://uglymugs.org/um/mental-health-resources-page/

We will be updating and developing things regularly, so please do check back. We would also appreciate and encourage your feedback and suggestions. You can give us feedback via the website, or send an email to MentalHealthSupport@uglymugs.org

BEREAVEMENT DURING COVID-19

At a Loss.org
Signposting the bereaved to support

If you're wondering how to deal with bereveament during the pandemic, then At a Loss has compiled lots of resources to make this more manageable for you, including:

- What to do if you are bereaved during the Coronavirus pandemic
- How to help someone who is bereaved during the Coronavirus pandemic
- Arranging a funeral in the UK during the pandemic
- What you can do if you can't attend a funeral
- Holding your own memorial
- Helplines and useful contacts
- Supporting children through the pandemic

Click the At a Loss logo if you'd like to take a look at what support they have on offer.

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