Looking after yourself when you are grieving

Coping with the loss of a loved one is always difficult. There is no correct way to act or feel when you experience loss – you feel the way you feel. Everyone is different and feels differently about the loss of a loved one.

Grief can be painful, exhausting and overwhelming but most people find that in time things become easier. As you grieve there are things that you can do to help yourself cope. These include:

- learning and understanding more about the process of grief
- learning strategies to help you stay active
- making good choices about how you use your time
- exploring positive lifestyle changes.

Grief knocks you off balance. You may find yourself having to cope with a world which feels very different as you go through a process of mourning. Intense feelings including sadness, anger, fear and shame are common; as well as memory and concentration difficulties, exhaustion and lack of motivation. Whatever your thoughts and feelings it is important to know that powerful feelings are a natural part of the grieving process. Knowing that they are common may help them to seem more normal and not to be feared. It is also important to know that they will pass.

You may have been dealing with at least some of these difficulties for a while already. Think about what you’ve done so far to cope, and how effective these strategies have been. What is going well currently and what you are doing to achieve that? Having support from friends can be really helpful. Could you be making better use of this support?

In grief you will experience different kinds of coping and shift back and forth between these two approaches. At times you will face your loss head-on and at others you'll focus on fulfilling practical needs and life tasks.

For many, healing is not a case of 'moving on' from grief, but instead growing around it.
By using a diary to plan your week in advance, you will take an active role in managing your wellbeing and lifting your mood. This will help you to do more of the things you want to, in addition to the things that you have to do. This section aims to give you advice that will help you to plan your weeks well.

**There are practical things you can do to get through a time of bereavement or loss.**

Express yourself - *Talking is often a good way to soothe painful emotions.* Talking to a friend, family member, trusted work colleague, health professional or counsellor can aid the healing process.

Allow yourself to feel sad - *It’s a healthy part of the grieving process.*

Maintain a routine - *Keeping up simple things like doing the housework can help.*

Sleep - *Emotional strain can make you very tired.*

Eat healthily – *A well balanced diet will help you cope.*

Looking after yourself – *Make sure that you have some time to yourself and do things that you enjoy e.g. meet a friend, go for a walk, visit a nature reserve, have a relaxing bath, etc.*

Avoid ‘numbing’ the pain – *Things like alcohol and other substances will make you feel worse once the numbness wears off.*

**5 Areas of Wellbeing**

The ‘Five ways to wellbeing ’ have been identified through extensive reviews of research and expert opinion as simple actions that anyone can take that will have a positive impact on their day to day wellbeing.

Small changes can make a big difference. Building just five actions into our daily lives can increase wellbeing. This is all about taking action to make change – the more you put in, the more you are likely to get out. Planning and preparation is key, so remember to use a diary to schedule planned activities and involve your friends and family.

Positive mental wellbeing does not mean that you never experience feelings or situations that you find difficult but it does mean that you feel you have the resilience to cope when times are tougher than usual.
Finally, know that you will not always feel as bad as you do now. Getting through each day after a death may feel like a challenge, but by focusing more and more on today and less on yesterday you will make progress. The landscape of your life may have changed dramatically but the changes will slowly start to feel more bearable.

If these things last for a period that you feel is too long or your family and friends say they're worried, that's the time to seek help. Your GP has a list of local support that they can refer you to, and they can monitor your general health and wellbeing.

Further information can be found at:

https://lets-get.com/ - Supporting you to make healthy lifestyle changes. Excellent website with lots of information and resources on local services for everyone, young and old.

https://www.dudleyci.co.uk/kb5/dudley/asch/home.page - Link to local information

https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/ - Advice, tips and tools to help you make the best choices about your health and wellbeing.