

# Teenager's guide to getting on with life after death.

Helping teenagers through the death of their Mum, Dad, Sister or Brother.



# For most teenagers it can feel like your life has turned up-side down

**NOTHING** is the same after the death of a parent, brother or sister, but young people are often expected to go back to school and behave as if nothing much has happened. After a few weeks, others around are getting on with their lives, but most bereaved young feel their lives have been turned upside down, blown apart, changed forever... but people have forgotten to ask how you are and you often don't know if you want the attention anyway. It takes time to take on board what's happened. This guide is to introduce you to some ideas, to Grief Encounter and to other things that may help.

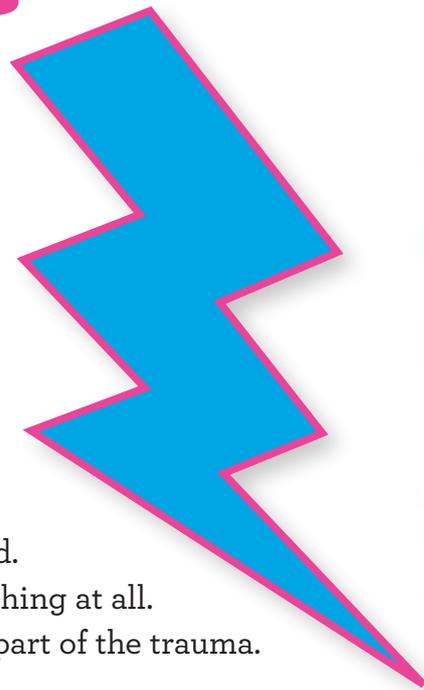
[www.griefencounter.org.uk](http://www.griefencounter.org.uk)

We aim to help you feel less alone, acknowledge what you are going through and help you feel back in control. In short, get back and stay on the right road.

“I can't explain how much losing a parent affects you.”

Penny, 12 when Dad died from cancer.

# Just happened? Just happening?



At first, it may feel like a storm.  
You may feel overwhelmingly sad.  
Or, want to fall apart. Or, feel nothing at all.  
These emotions are normal and part of the trauma.  
**Welcome to Planet Grief.**

This is when you and your family may benefit from  
“First Aid”.

See Grief Encounter website and carry on reading.

[www.griefencounter.org.uk](http://www.griefencounter.org.uk)

“I just shut down at the time.” Melinda, 11 when Dad died.

# Home

**How can  
my world feel  
safe again?**

**Home may be different too now. You may not want to go out or can't wait to leave.**

Nowhere may feel safe, except school where there are no parents (or siblings). You may be picked on, bullied, have lost friends or feel different after the death. Maybe school is no longer safe either.

**"I felt trapped like there is no way out at all. All I could see was blackness and fear."**

Jennifer, 14 whose Dad died from a heart attack.

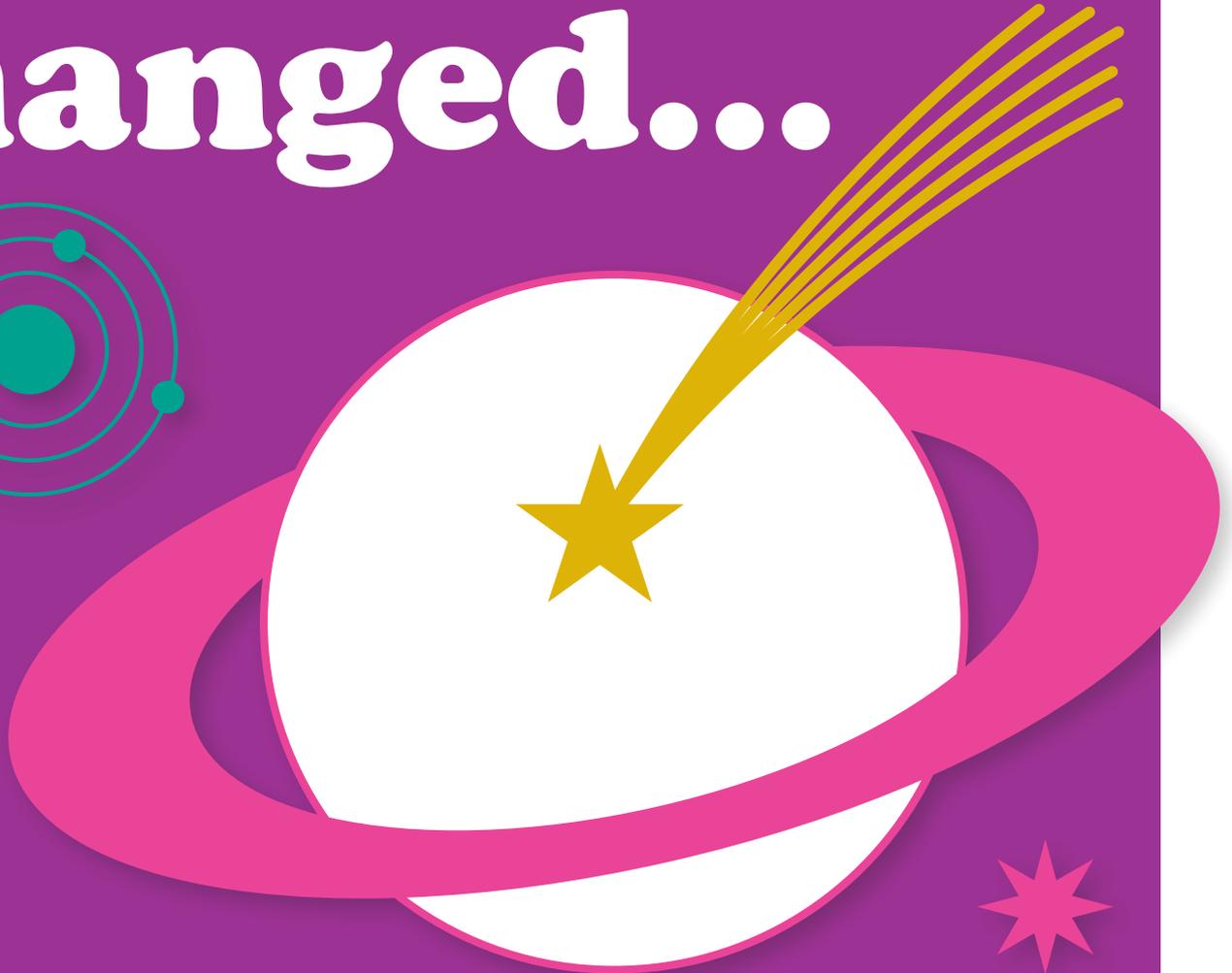
**"I didn't have death in my book of thinking."**

Colin, 1 when his Dad died.

**It is important that home does feel safe... and the outside too.**

**You may need to think deeply about how your world can feel safe and normal again, especially without the dead person.**

# Everything's changed...



If your world has been blown apart, you may be left climbing out of the rubble. It may not be as dramatic as this, but it still can be a very frightening place to be. Especially, if you feel alone, ill-equipped and confused... like living on another planet for a while. You can't get back to where you were, so we have to find a new place to be, the new person we are becoming. Get help.

- You may find it hard to
- a. get help
  - b. ask for help
  - c. admit you need help

Bereavement has this effect on most of us; trusting others becomes a BIG ISSUE.

We promise that connecting with the right people, usually your family, helps you feel less alone without so many tears.

**"Normal had changed forever."**

Andrew, 11 whose Dad had a stroke.

**"Everything's changed in my life... it's changed dramatically... everything. I mean everything. Everything in my whole life. My family, the way I think the way I think of people. So changed."**

Jimmy, 13 when his Mum died

# Going back to

# SCHOOL

**“At school I just don’t focus, its not happening for me. Every time I try to stay focused there’s just distractions...”**

**Penny, 12 when her parent died of cancer.**

**School can be a difficult place if people around don’t give you some leeway and lots of understanding.**

The death needs to be acknowledged by all those around you – teachers, friends and other trusted staff. You are different now and you need time to become that new person. And help to find the way again. It’s very easy to find escape routes: pretend nothings happened, drink, drugs, self harm, working hard, not working hard.

**Just try and make that dead person proud.**

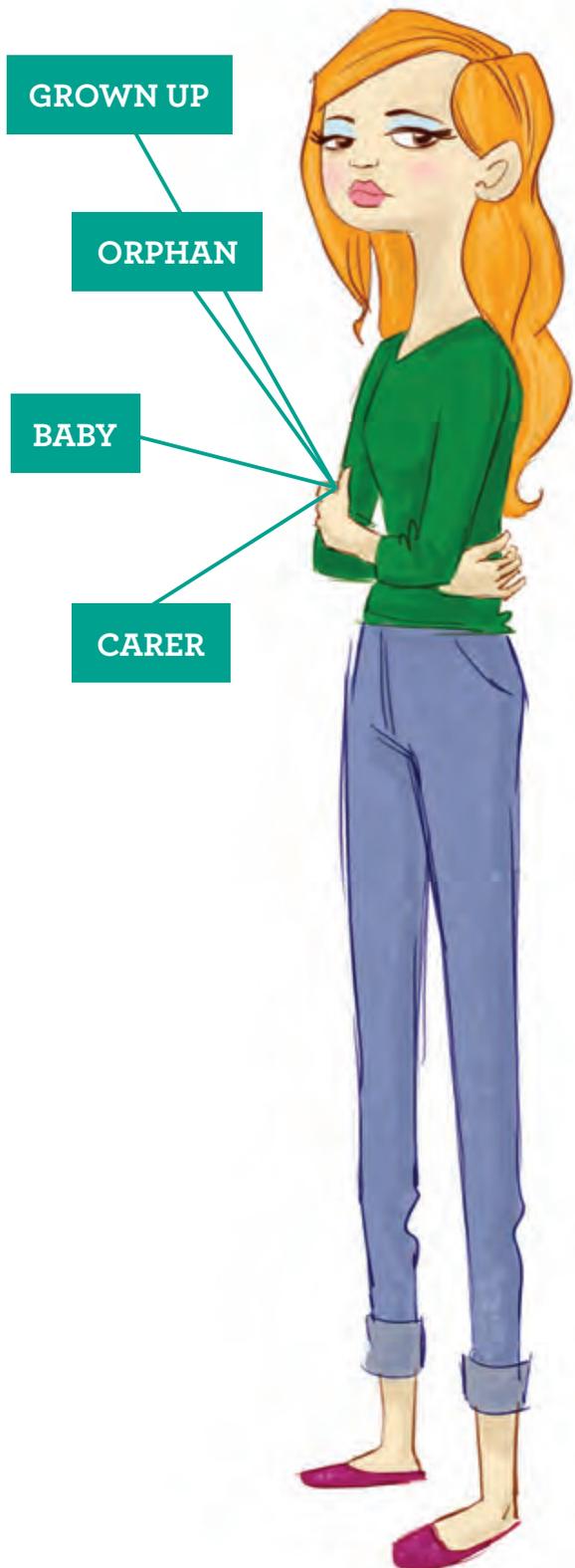
**“I think you should treat people like someone’s just died because that’s what’s happened.”**

**Belle, 14 when Dad died from cancer.**

**The death needs to be acknowledged by all those around you – teachers, friends and other trusted staff.**



# Feeling different



Wish we had a sign that explained everything without having to explain, especially on vulnerable days.

“I knew what it meant that he was dead and I knew it was such a bad thing in my mind but I didn’t show those emotions.”

Belinda, 7 when Dad died.

“I don’t want to be an outcast..I just want to be normal” Jennifer

“I feel as if Im being pointed out as being different”  
Melinda

# Having fun\*



**Are you FEELING as if the fun has gone out of your life?** Some people say they feel as if the fun has gone out of their lives. There's so much adult stuff to deal with and home is full of sadness and memories. It is easier to be out of home, yet the family is one thing you need the most at the moment... the family needs to learn how to be together... in different ways without the dead person... and without the tears and anger.

**\*A good laugh can help.** At GE, we have a bit of a dark sense of humour. Tell us your jokes...

**"I try and be happy and have fun, but I'm sad and miss Mum at times."**

Matt, 15 when Mum died.

**"We don't get visitors a lot now..it's so boring.. and theres nothing to do."**

Vicky

# Nights & the dark★

04:00AM

can't sleep :(

Many young people can't sleep when they go to bed at night. It is often the only time in our busy days that we slow down or stop. Facebook and texts are so tempting, especially in the lonely dark hours. If sleep is too difficult because of traumatic thoughts or nightmares, feeling good in the morning is a challenge. Many teens long for the good nights sleep they had before the person died; now all they see are skeletons, monsters and burglars.

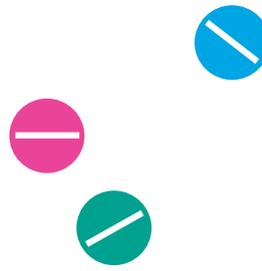
**“Night time was the only time I'd be openly sad.”** Belinda

**“Sometimes I wake up in the middle of the night and I just feel on the edge or something.”** Vicky

## SLEEPING TIPS:

- ★ Switch off all phones and computers
- ★ Relax before you go to bed and avoid stimulants
- ★ Try not to go to bed with your worries and burdens: share them.

# Drugs & alcohol

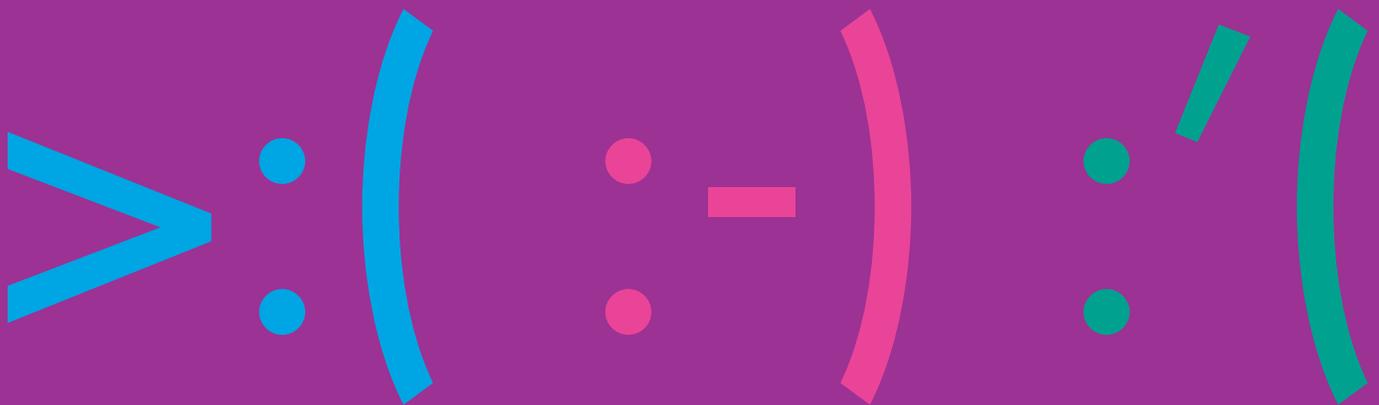


## What can an adult say to a teen that will impact?

Using escape stuff will not make the pain go away:

It will only mask the pain and make it worse in the long run. Physically, you need your strength to deal with the emotional side of grieving.

# Everyone does grief differently



Grieving over someone special dying is not all about crying, although it usually helps. Some think crying is a weakness or stupid. Laughing is also about grief's work and lots of other reactions too. It is different for everyone, but there's also lots of times where we have things in common and you don't have to be isolated or alone. (((hugs)))

"I knew what it meant that he was dead, but I didn't show those emotions. I separated my actions from my thoughts and feelings..I laughed when they told me he'd died....

"It didn't really affect me until a few months later..: ( :- ) ; - /  
:P > : ( :O :((( :'( :D :-S :{ :]

# Fear (and worry)



“After losing my dad I didn’t know what was happening next so I was just worried and a lot of things were going on in my head like what is going to happen next.”

Melinda, 11 when her Dad died.

Bereaved young people usually have loads of worries, especially about death, dying and the future. Death’s an unwelcome visitor in your house and grief’s like darkness getting into every gap. Remember, you control the fear; it doesn’t control you.

“You never know what’s going to happen...”

Jennifer, 14 when Dad died.

“I was afraid... I was afraid of the future without him.”

Belinda, lost both parents by 7 years old

# Who am I now?



Now you're no longer someone's son/daughter/brother/sister, who are you? An orphan? How do you find the new you? Especially having to deal with your grief and everyone else's too. Most young people hate their new life for a while.

**"I'm still myself but from a different point of view."**

Jimmy, lost Mum aged 13.

**"I'll never be the same person as I was had he not died. It impacts your life forever."**

Belinda, lost both parents by 7 years old.

# Relationships



Trusting the right people is difficult now. You may look to the wrong person for the love you have lost.

**Many teens now find close relationships more difficult to manage.** You may look to the wrong person for the love that you have lost or cling to the wrong person as you are scared to trust any one new. If your parent has died and if Dad was the one who told you that you looked pretty or Mum the one who helped you choose your clothes ,then who can you look to for trusted advice? Or, was Dad was the one giving ‘parental guidance’ on the way to play football? You may have laughed at him at the time but miss it now.

**“I don’t want no-one else to be there, I just want him.”**

**Penny, 12 when her parent died.**

# Lots of other losses too...



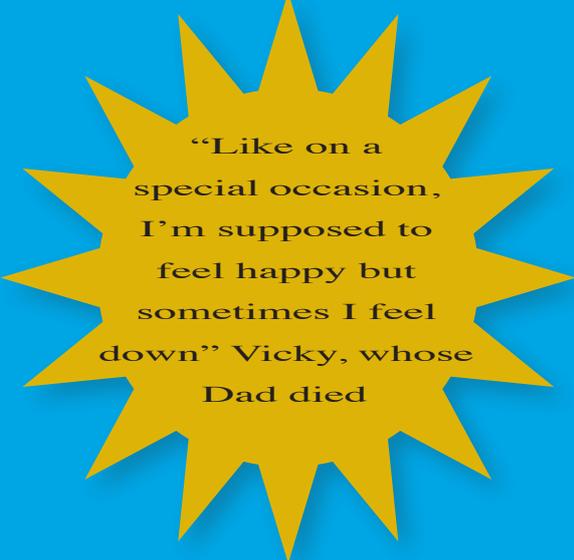
It's not only about the death of your parent/sibling, but also about losing loads of other things. Like losing family, money, friends who haven't been helpful, a happy home life...

Taking risks is harder as your experience of change is not great.

"It's lost me a lot of connection with my Dad's side of the family."

Melinda whose Dad died when she was 11.

# Holidays



“Like on a special occasion, I’m supposed to feel happy but sometimes I feel down” Vicky, whose Dad died



“We used to have family holidays and now we don’t”

Jennifer, 14 when her Dad died.

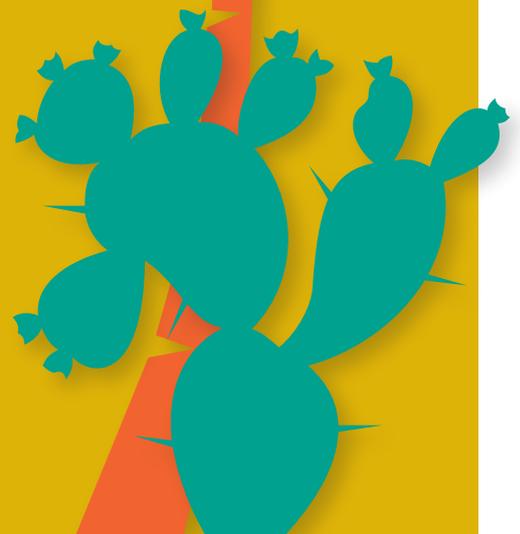


Teens often tell us that their best memories are of family holidays that will never be the same. There are huge empty spaces and just not fun any more. Some prefer not to be with their family, not only just because they are teenagers but because the reminders are too painful. You may feel guilty leaving Mum/Dad on their own now and

have to go on a holiday you don’t like.

**Events become non-events or worse sad days. Try and make these remembering days and still have fun.**

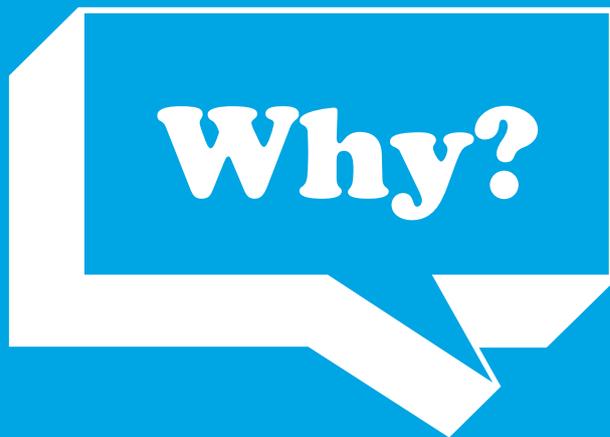
We won’t mention CHRISTMAS holidays...



# Growing up too quickly

“Life has so changed for me. I see it in a different way.”

Jennifer, 14 when Dad died.



Often, young people are left with a head full of very difficult questions that even adults can't answer.

(or, you are not comfortable enough to ask)

**What's the point?**

**What is the meaning of life?**

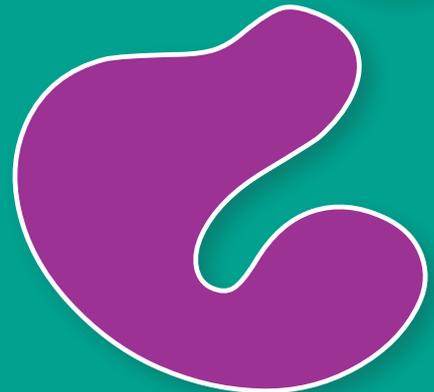
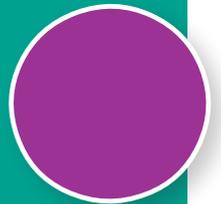
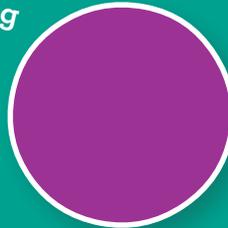
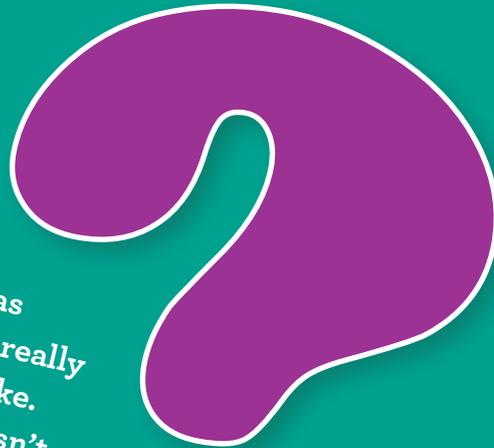
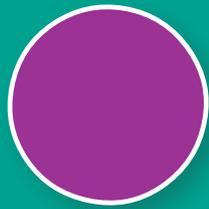
Life just doesn't seem much fun. Often, there's a lot of outside pressure without any real understanding of how hard things are inside and at home.

## Why bother?

# confused. com

"I don't know. I was confused. I didn't really know what to do like. I was just like, I wasn't too sure about anything back then."

Andrew



The gone forever and not coming back is pretty hard to cope with. Lots of young people tell us they have regrets that they argued or didn't love their parent enough. "I wanted to do things over, but it was too late." Andrew, age 11, when his Dad died. Hey ho, its not too late...

Vicky  
"I was confused like everything in my head felt confused... I didn't know where I was because I was so tired."

Pippa, 11 when Dad died.

"Just like the whys and ifs and all the questions you can ask. It's so confusing." I couldn't really comprehend.....

# Inside hurts



**“People say they understand but they don’t.”**

Penny,”

**“I felt sad in my heart because I... I’d lost my dad but I didn’t show it in my face.”**

Melinda, 11 when her Dad died.

**“I’m so sad I could die”**

Jennifer

**It can be hard to trust others when the world feels unsafe. It may feel easier to pretend, hide the hurts and keep it all inside.** Adults often don’t know how to help with the pain and often you don’t know either. You may be playing the “mutual pretence” game of ‘I’m alright’, so not to upset those around you.

**Meeting bereaved others may help.**

**“I don’t want everyone’s sympathy, pity, bring anyone down or the sorry but I do want to be understood.”**

Penny, 12 when Dad died.

# Damage limitation

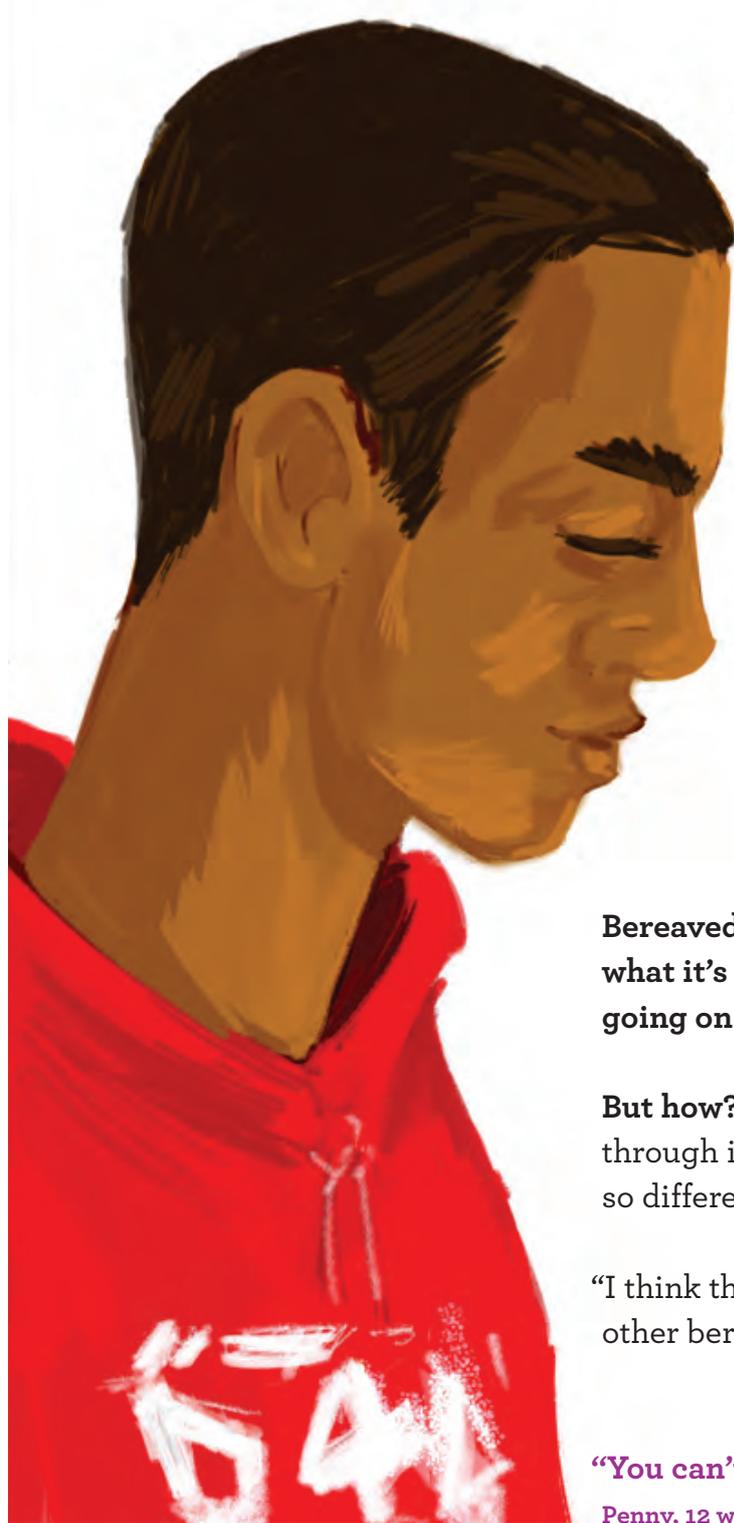
**Piecing back together your life after the bad news can take a long time.** Longer than those around you can allow sometimes. Words to explain are hard to find and the fear and sadness just hidden away.

“I didn’t cope well I just didn’t show it.”

**“It will hurt..sometimes you just have to tell someone”**



# Knowledge



**Sharing with the right people can be enormously helpful.**

Bereaved young people need to be able to tell others what it's like. This can help you understand what's going on in your head (you are not going mad).

**But how?** Get info from us or others who have been through it. And, help to explain to others why things are so different now and not all doom and gloom.

"I think the main thing that helped was to meet with other bereaved young people.." Belinda.

**"You can't avoid being sad sometimes."**

Penny, 12 when her parent died of cancer.

# Know where to turn?

**“You can’t avoid being sad sometimes.”**

Penny, 12 when her parent died of cancer.

**I don’t know how I would like to have been treated... but not like nothing’s happened.**

**It’s hard to face the fear and pain of loss, especially when you can be out there having fun.** This can mean you end up lost, angry and lonely. Finding some space to grieve will help. Meeting bereaved others will ease the isolation and feelings of being different, not for pity or sympathy but shared understanding in your own way, in your own time. It should help you to put some of the puzzle pieces back together.

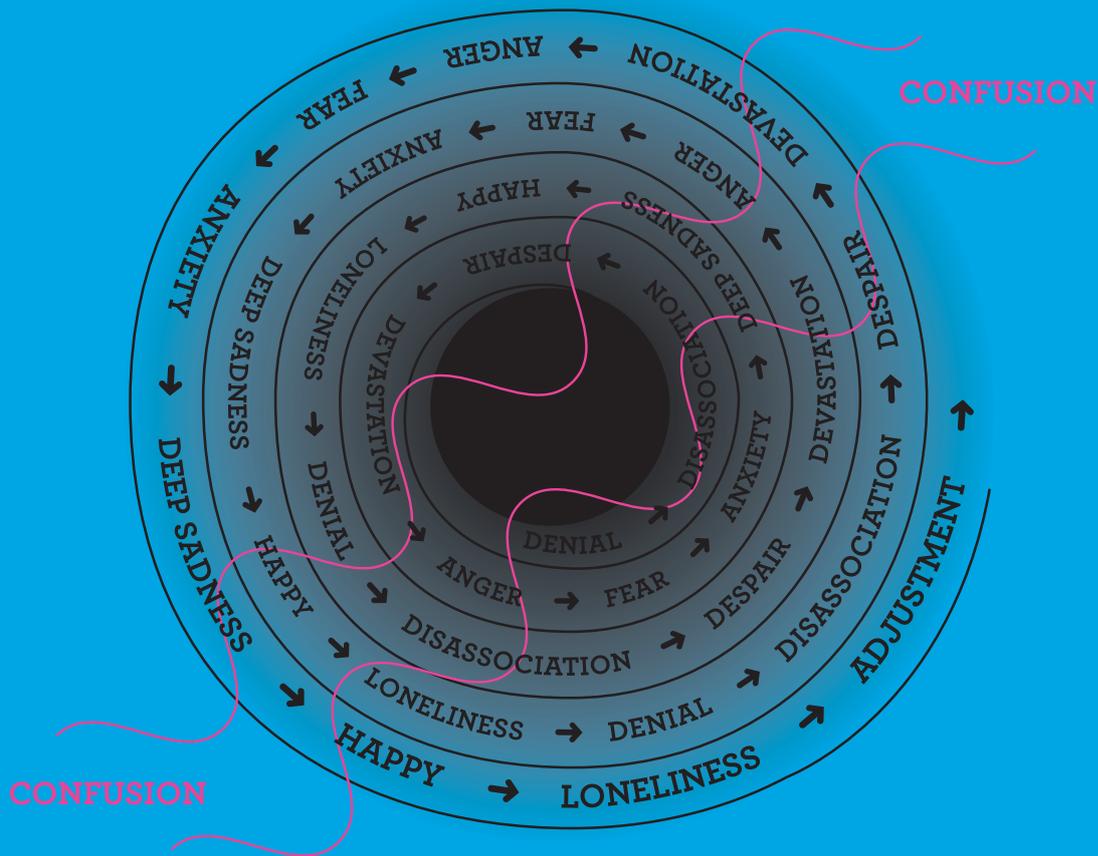
**“I remember being really angry with everyone because I didn’t understand it at the time... I wanted to punch something, but I knew this wasn’t right. I just didn’t know which way to turn.”**

Vicky, 10 when her Dad died.

**“I don’t know why I’m feeling so sad”**

# The spiral of grief

The traumatic emotional impact of the premature loss of someone special.  
The Upward Spiral of Grief



“If you suffer something like this, you’ll become stronger.”

Vicky, 10 when her Dad died.

“It would be like I’d be having a good day and then suddenly my feelings would just drop.”

“I had no feelings, no emotions....”

Feelings come and go and come back and go and go and go and come back, like a spiral.

Feelings should get less intense and you can adjust in time, but you can always come back to them if you need to. Just don’t get stuck. Anytime, any place and often when you least expect it. The trick is to manage your feelings; they don’t control you.

# Forever

Memories

“I don’t  
want to let  
anyone  
else take  
his place.”

Pippa, 11 when  
Dad died.



**Tell us about  
your ideas on  
the website.**

[griefencounter.org.uk](http://griefencounter.org.uk)

The gone forever and not coming back is pretty hard to cope with. “Questions I’d like to ask, and so many things to say to him, if I had one more day...”

Lots of young people tell us they have regrets that they argued or didn’t love their parent enough. “I wanted to do things over, but it was too late.” Andrew, 11 when Dad died  
There are big empty spaces to fill. Somehow or other, you need a new space for the dead person. “There’s a space in my heart for him” and my love is still alive.” Pippa  
And, to keep remembering them as they were and what they mean to you now. Finding somewhere to “put” the memories so you can be comfortable thinking about them.

**At Grief Encounter, we help people to keep remembering not to forget. For instance, making journals, memory boxes, Facebook timelines, remembrance times and days... and our new “Name a Star” in memory:**  
[nameastar.org.uk](http://nameastar.org.uk)



LIVE  
LIFE

**Death: What good can there be?**

As bereaved people, the worst has happened so we know we can survive anything. This experience will have made us more understanding of other's pain and maybe more able to help others. Maybe, we know now we only have one life-its not a rehearsal – so we have to go out and LIVE life-make it meaningful and enjoy!

**“Death makes you realise what’s important in life.”**

Belinda

**“You can’t change the past but you can change the future.”**

Melinda, Dad died when she was 11.



# Doodle pages

For your thoughts, feelings and scribbles.

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin blue border, intended for doodling or drawing. It occupies the central and lower portion of the page.

# Helping teenagers through bereavement

## 020 8371 8455

Written by Shelley Gilbert, CEO of Grief Encounter, helping bereaved children.

This is based on her Doctorate research with some amazing young people – thanks are with them. All names have been changed.



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