

Managing Bereavement

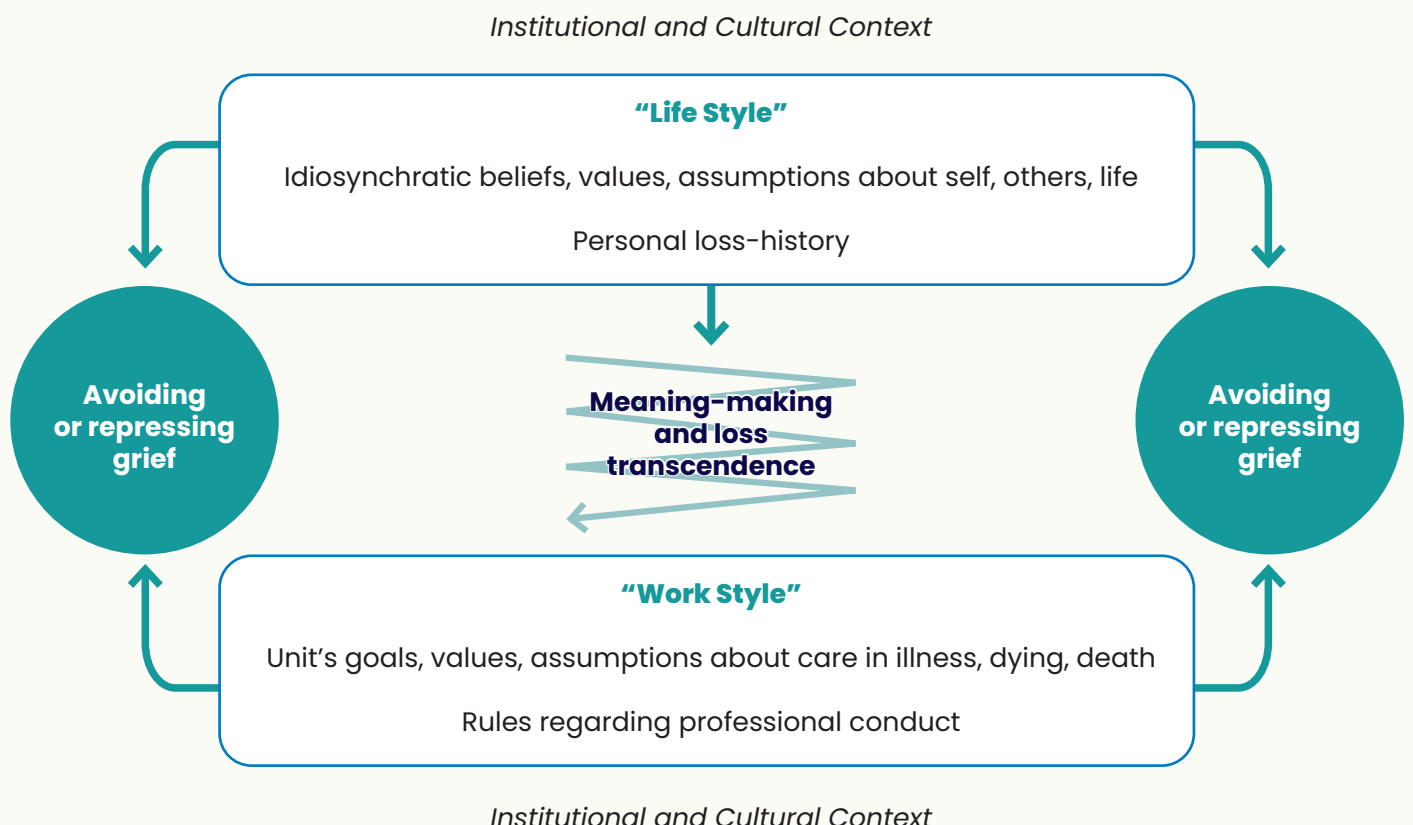
In Critical Care staff are exposed to a lot of death, and some staff have learnt ways of “shelving” their feelings and reactions to this. When staff have a personal bereavement, it can be very hard as staff sometimes do not know how to respond and can sometimes be hard on themselves for having difficult feelings.

These are some of the common feelings in bereavement

- You may feel no-one understands what you are going through.
- You may feel a range of emotions: sadness, anger, confusion, hopelessness. All of these are normal and may come and go.
- It may feel hard to believe, as though the person who died is going to walk in the room.
- You may feel overwhelmed and unable to move much, concentrate or communicate well.
- You may find you get stressed or panicky about things that normally you could cope with.

- You may feel jumpy, tense, or restless. You may struggle with sleep and eating.

You may fluctuate between feeling okay and getting on with life and feeling very upset. How you express this at work is influenced by your own personal style, and the context of work. Papadatou (2004) has a useful model to explain how this works in healthcare staff, through the diagram below:



Taking Care of Yourself:

- **Take time out to process:** NHS workers can utilise their local compassionate leave policies to take the time they need to make sense of what happened.
- **Reach out to friends and family:** Someone who can offer support and listen can offer great comfort. Staying connected to others is important.
- **Be kind to yourself:** Beware unhelpful self-critical thoughts such as “I should be better at this”, and be kind to yourself
- **Feelings Fluctuate:** Most people struggle to stay in “Grief” the whole time. You will find you may fluctuate between feeling the loss of your loved one (and looking at photos, crying, talking about them) and more “restorative” activities (such as spending time on hobbies, talking about other things). This can be helpful, and is a natural part of grieving.
- **Get the basics right:** Try to eat a little and often, and eat what you want, when you feel like it. Remember to stay hydrated. Sleep when you can, even if only for a few hours at a time.
- **Think about what your loved one would say to you, if they could.** Imagining a conversation with the person who has died can sometimes be helpful, and it helps you to think of ways of coping that they would encourage. This exercise may not work for everyone, so only do it if it appeals to you.

Grief will often follow a natural course and heal over time. However for some staff who have learnt to halt their emotions, it can help to engage in active ways to remember the person who passed away.

Ways of remembering: You may want to do things that help you remember the person who has died. Some people find it helpful to create memory boxes, or frame photographs, or writing a letter.

Do something that mattered to you both: reading their favourite book, listening to music they loved, or watching their favourite film. Cook the food you liked to eat together, take a walk to your favourite place. Plant your favourite flower or bush and have a place to remember them.

The pain of loss may not go, but over time you will feel more able to manage it.

Below are some really useful support phone numbers and contacts if you wish to talk to someone during this time

- **Cruse Bereavement Care:** National Free phone Helpline **0800 808 1677**.
- **Mind: Infoline:** **0300 123 3393**.
Email: **info@mind.org.uk**.
Text: **86463**.
- **Bereavement Advice Centre:**
Telephone: **08006 349 494**. Free phone offering advice on all aspects of bereavement from registering the death and finding a funeral director through to probate, tax and benefit queries.