

Help & Advice



Sian Williams, anchor for 5 News and qualified therapist and counsellor, is also in her final year of a Professional Doctorate in Counselling Psychology. She's been counselling individuals and families for the past few years, has an MSc in Psychology and has written a book, [Rise: A first-aid kit for getting through tough times](#) on recovery after trauma. Sian says:

"When you work with people through crisis, you see the long-term effects it can have on their view of themselves and their place in the world. And coronavirus has certainly shifted our perceptions of how we live our lives. But throw an unexpected bereavement in there and you're suddenly in a painful, disorientating place that makes you question whether anything will ever feel meaningful again. It can be lonely and alienating. You may not have had the time to say the things you wanted to say, be by the bedside, even attend the funeral. Shock, bewilderment and anger are common reactions to loss, even without the complications of coronavirus. You may stop engaging with people; withdraw and question friendships, work, family relationships or all of them at once. All of this is a normal, very human response. Accept that:

1. Shock is your brain's way of protecting you and beginning to process what's just happened, but this may mean things feel unreal and disorientating for a time.
2. Your body may react to the sudden rush of the stress hormone cortisol by producing a physiological response, you may cry without realizing, feel sweaty, nauseous, and/or have an increased heart rate.
3. Your sleep patterns are likely to be disrupted – you may be sleeping much more or less, your appetite may be similarly affected.
4. You may have alternating and seemingly contradictory emotions. One minute low and flat,

the next, rage, the moment after, hope or acceptance.

If this continues, and you find yourself falling into a low, flat space then you may need more support but it's important to remember that recovery after loss is not a linear process. The Five Stages of Grief (Kübler-Ross) used to be quoted a lot. The stages were denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. Truth is, even Elizabeth Kübler-Ross thought that was too simplistic. We don't go from one emotional stage to the next.

I remember counselling one lovely gentleman whose wife had died suddenly and who kept asking himself why he wasn't over it yet, when others expected him to have 'moved on'. The thing is, there's no right or wrong in how you deal with it, but there are ways of coping. For example:

1. Find a way to incorporate the person you've lost into your life, in a meaningful way.
2. Accept the validity of your experience and your reactions to bereavement. There's no correct way to cope and everyone will do it differently.
3. Reach out to those who are wanting to help you and be honest about what that help should look like. I need you to cook supper/put a wash on/look after the kids/go through Mum's things with me.
4. Think about which relationships are nourishing for you and which you want to invest in but don't feel you need to see everyone and anyone. Give yourself the space and permission to heal."