

# TEEN GUIDE

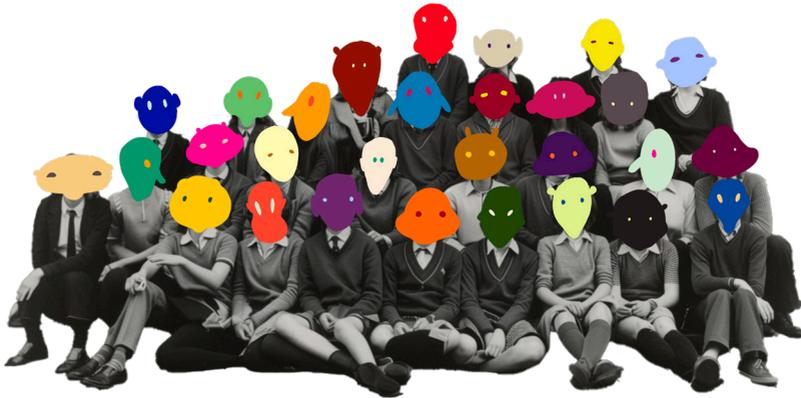
TO GETTING ON WITH LIFE AFTER DEATH.



By Dr. Shelley Gilbert MBE

I wrote this guide because I never had this guide when my mum and dad died too young. I 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.

Shelley 



This Teen Guide is a result of my doctoral research into the lived experience of bereaved adolescents. Total thanks to these amazing young people. (All names changed).  
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[www.thegriefdoctor.co.uk](http://www.thegriefdoctor.co.uk)  
[www.griefcounter.org.uk](http://www.griefcounter.org.uk)



Teenager's Guide to Getting On with Life After Death  
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Creative Technology Integration : Enhanced with AI-driven design tools

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**Grieve** Forever.  
**Love** Forever.  
Love **Life**.  
Live **Life**.

**Shelley** 

# TEEN GUIDE

This guide is to introduce you to some ideas, to Grief Doctor Shelley, Grief Encounter and to other things that may help.

NOTHING is the same after the death of a parent, brother or sister, but young people are often expected to go back to school/college/work 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.

*"Grief lasts forever. It is the raw, acute pain that doesn't."*

Ben, 15 when Dad died.

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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.

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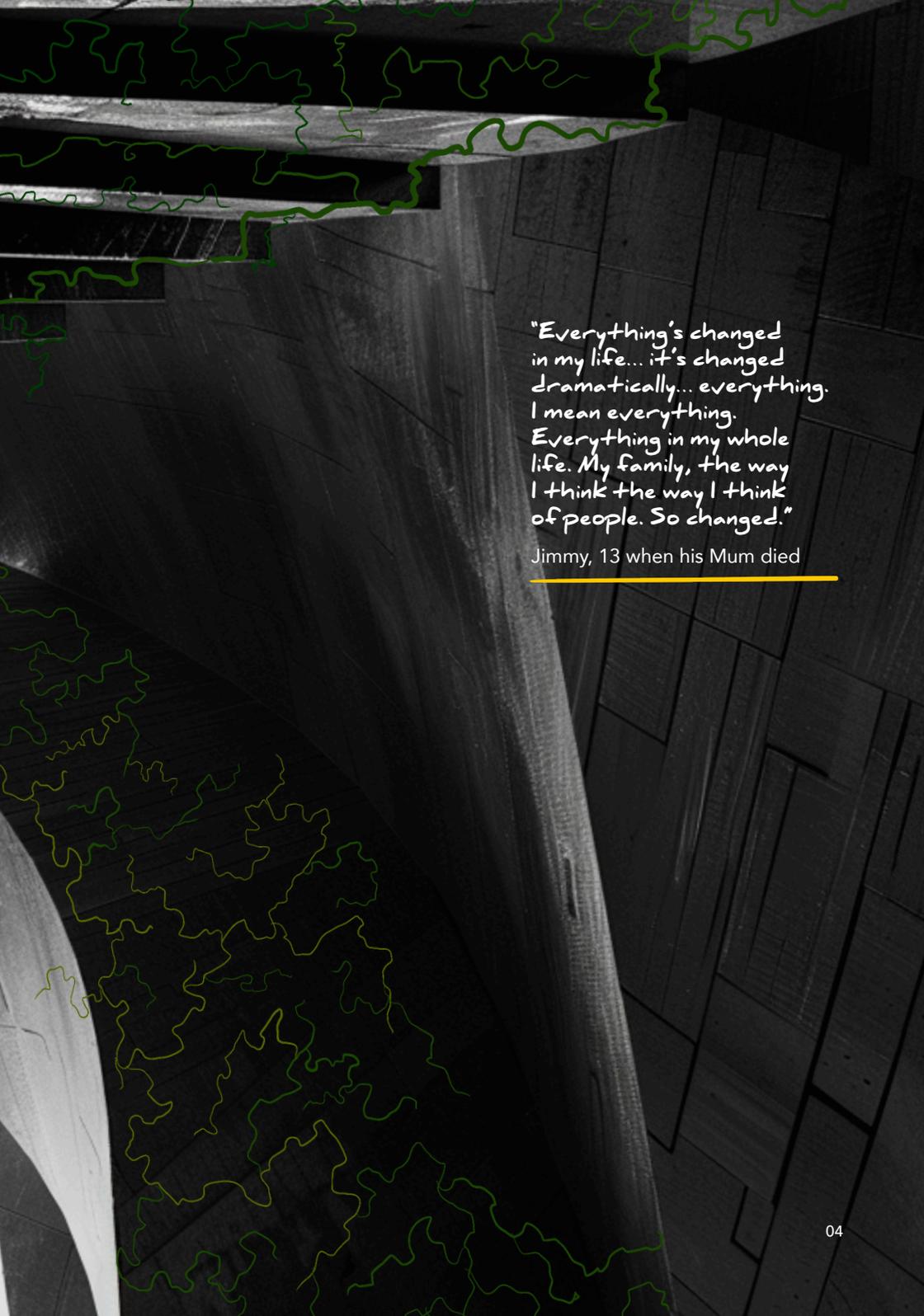
# FOR MOST TEENAGERS IT CAN FEEL LIKE YOUR LIFE HAS TURNED UPSIDOWN

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".

*"I just shut down at the time."*

Melinda, 11 when Dad died.

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"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

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# HOME

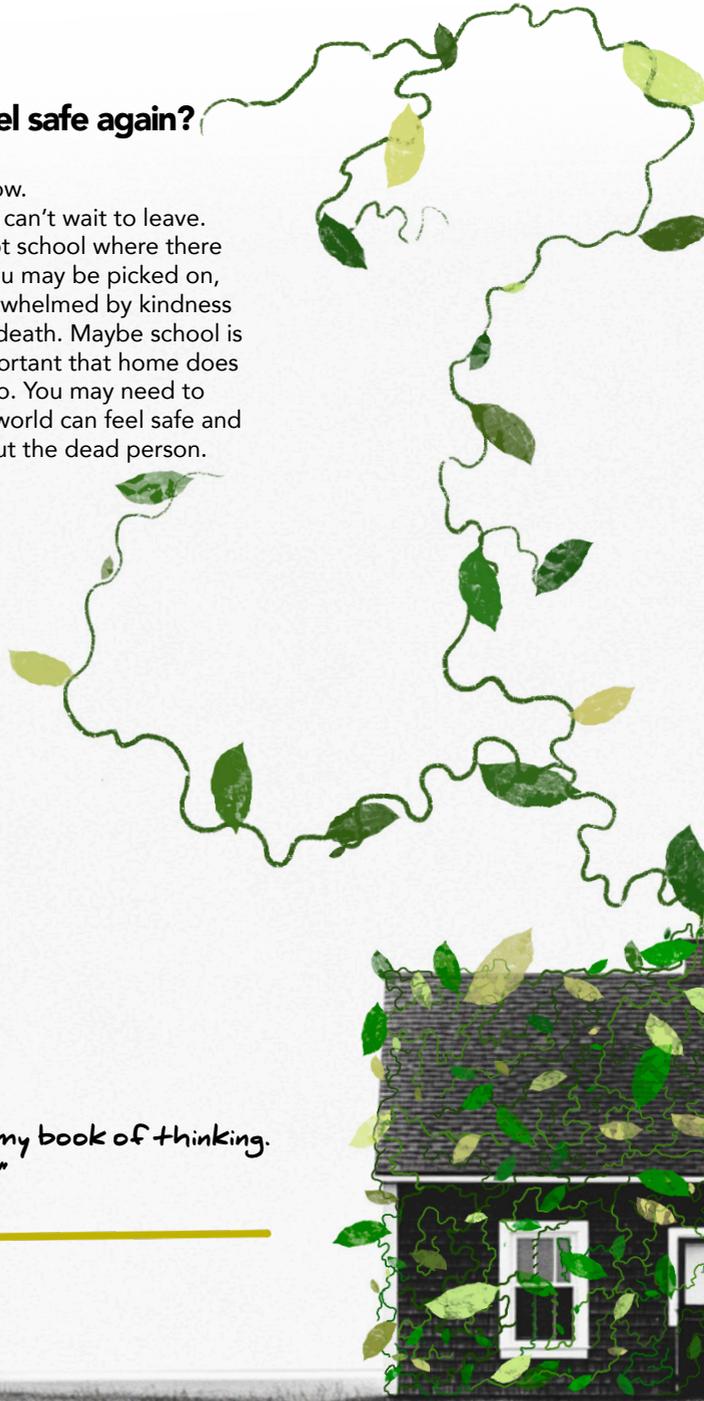
## How can my world feel safe again?

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, overwhelmed by kindness or just feel different after the death. Maybe school is no longer safe either. 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.

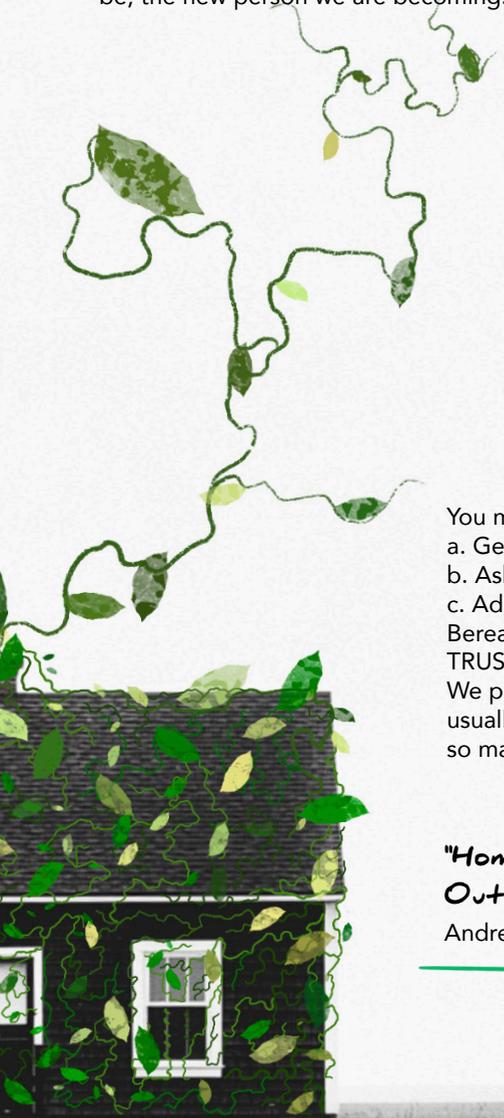
*"I didn't have death in my book of thinking.  
My childhood was over."*

Colin , 17 when his Dad died.

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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.

*"Home doesn't feel safe anymore.  
Outside doesn't feel safe either."*

Andrew, 11 whose Dad had a stroke.

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# GOING BACK TO SCHOOL / COLLEGE / WORK

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 nothing's 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.

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*"At school I just don't focus, it's not happening for me. Every time I try to stay focused there's just distractions..."*

Penny, 12 when her parent died of cancer.

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*"It takes time to take on board what's happened. But people have forgotten to ask how you are and you often don't know if you want the attention anyway."*

Ben, 15 when Dad died.

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# NIGHT, SLEEP & THE DARK

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. Social Media 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, ghosts, monsters and burglars.

*"Night time was the only time I'd be openly sad."*

Belinda, lost both parents by 7 years old.

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

Vicky, 10 when her Dad was murdered.

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## 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.

*"Normal had changed forever."*

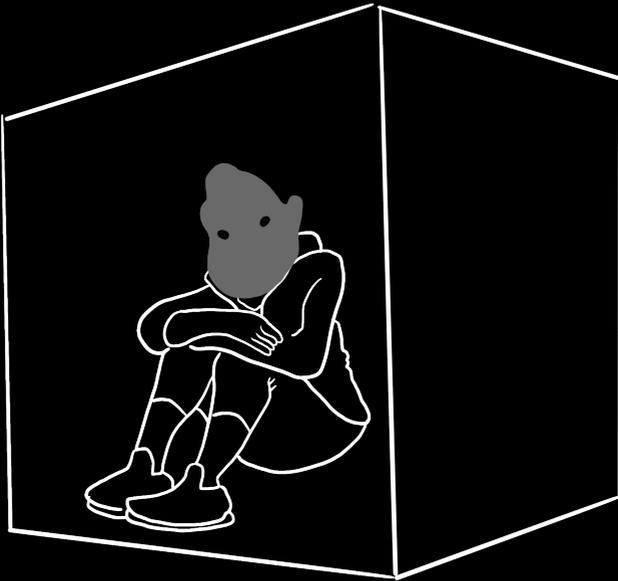
Ben, 15 whose Dad Died.

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

Matt, 15 when Mum died.



"Grief can take you to the deepest darkest scariest places - with no parent, no language, no light, no way out...trapped."

Jen, 14 when her Dad died suddenly.

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# FEELING DIFFERENT

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

*"I can't explain how much losing a parent affects you. You can't avoid being sad sometimes."*

Penny, 12 when her parent died of cancer.

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# DRUGS & ALCOHOL, ETC.

You may just want to shut off.

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

Using escape stuff will not make the pain go away:

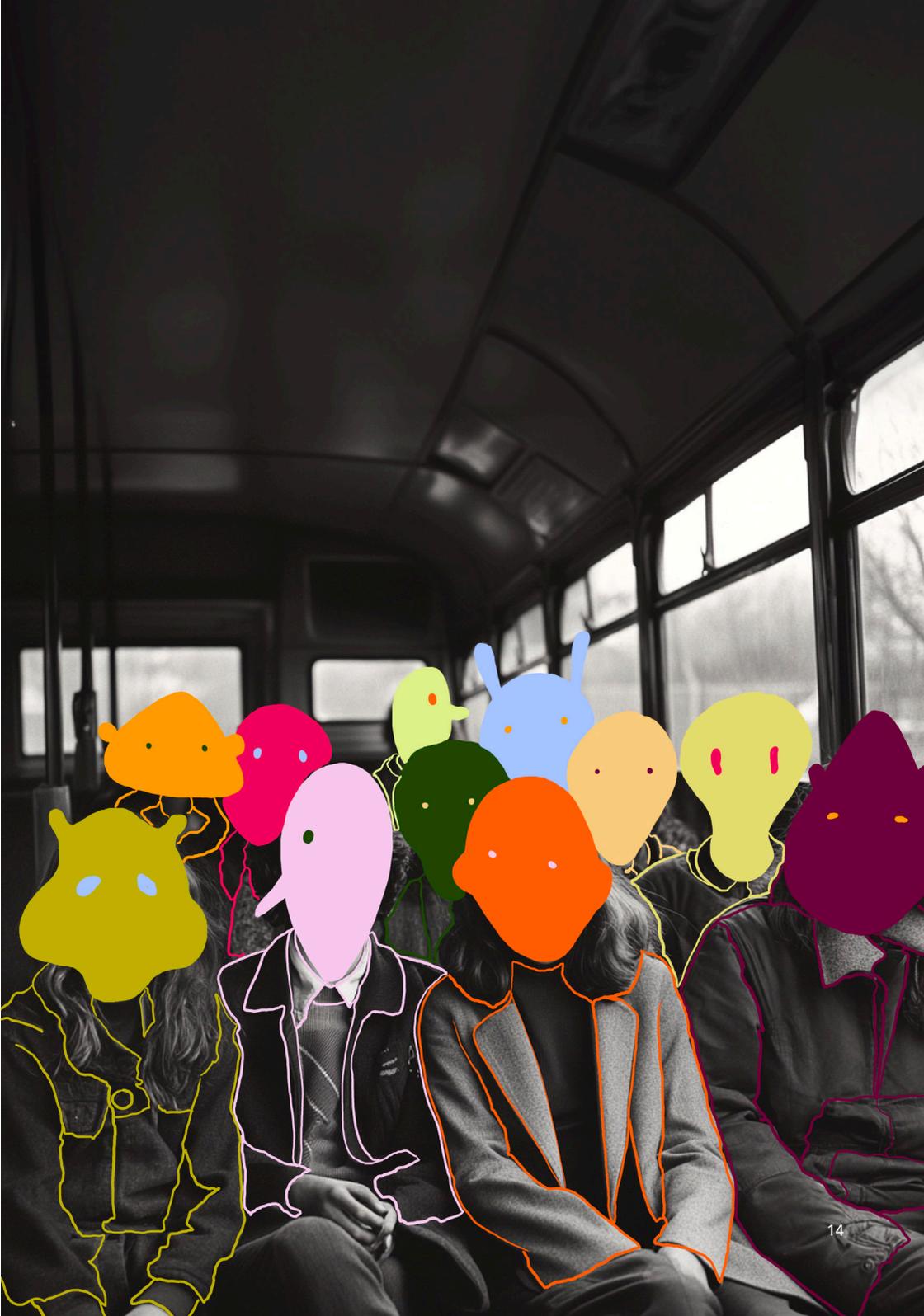
It will only mask the pain and make it worse in the long run.

Physically, you need your strength to deal with the emotional side of grieving.

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

Jimmy, lost his mom aged 13.

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# 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 feelings... I laughed when they told me he'd died."*

Belinda, lost dad at 7 years old.

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## 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.

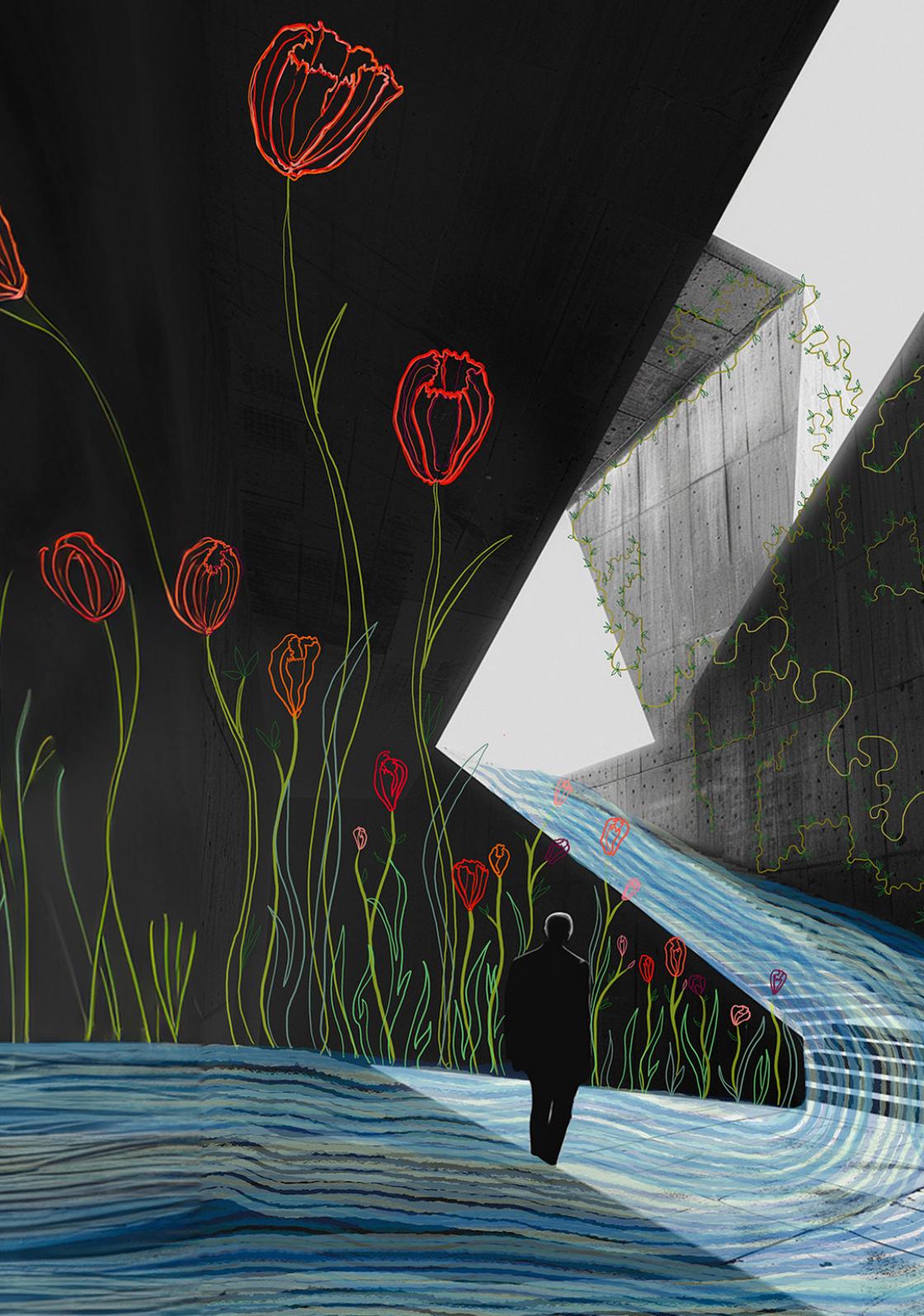
A good laugh can really help. Grief people usually have a bit of a dark sense of humour. Tell us your jokes...

"I heard someone laugh and I realised it was me."

Ben, 15 whose dad died.

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# FEAR & WORRY

Bereaved young people usually have extreme fearfulness and anxiety. Loads of worries, especially about death, dying and the future. Death's an unwelcome visitor in your house and everyday life becomes hyper-vigilant and fraught. Like grief getting into every gap. Remember, you control the fear; it doesn't control you. Name fears to tame them.

"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.

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"Sometimes, death holds no fear as it means you'll see your person again."

Penny, 12 when her parent died.

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"You never know what's going to happen..."

Jennifer, 14 when Dad died.

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# 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.

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*"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.

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*"I can't bear the thought of never, ever, cuddling, touching, smelling or hearing my dad again."*

Ben, lost his dad at 15.

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*"I'm deeply affected & damaged by the death of my mum"*

Jimmy, lost his mum aged 13.

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# RELATIONSHIPS

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.

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



# 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.

*"I don't want no-one else to be there, I just want him."*

Penny, 12 when her parent died.

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

Melinda whose Dad died when she was 11.

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# THE END?



Bereaved young people have stories with endings at the beginning and chapters in the wrong order. Writing or Journalling your stories can be a useful way of making sense of things and moving on without letting go.



# HOLIDAYS

Teens often tell us that their best memories are of family holidays. Holidays that will never be the same now. Now there are huge empty spaces and everything is 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 nonevents or worse sad days.

We won't mention CHRISTMAS holidays...

Try and make these remembering days and still have fun.



*"Life has changed for me. I see it in a different way."*

Jennifer, 14 when Dad died

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*"I get jealous when I see a complete family that are all happy together."*

Penny, 12 when her parent died of cancer.

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*"We used to have family holidays and now we don't"*

Jennifer, 14 when her Dad died.

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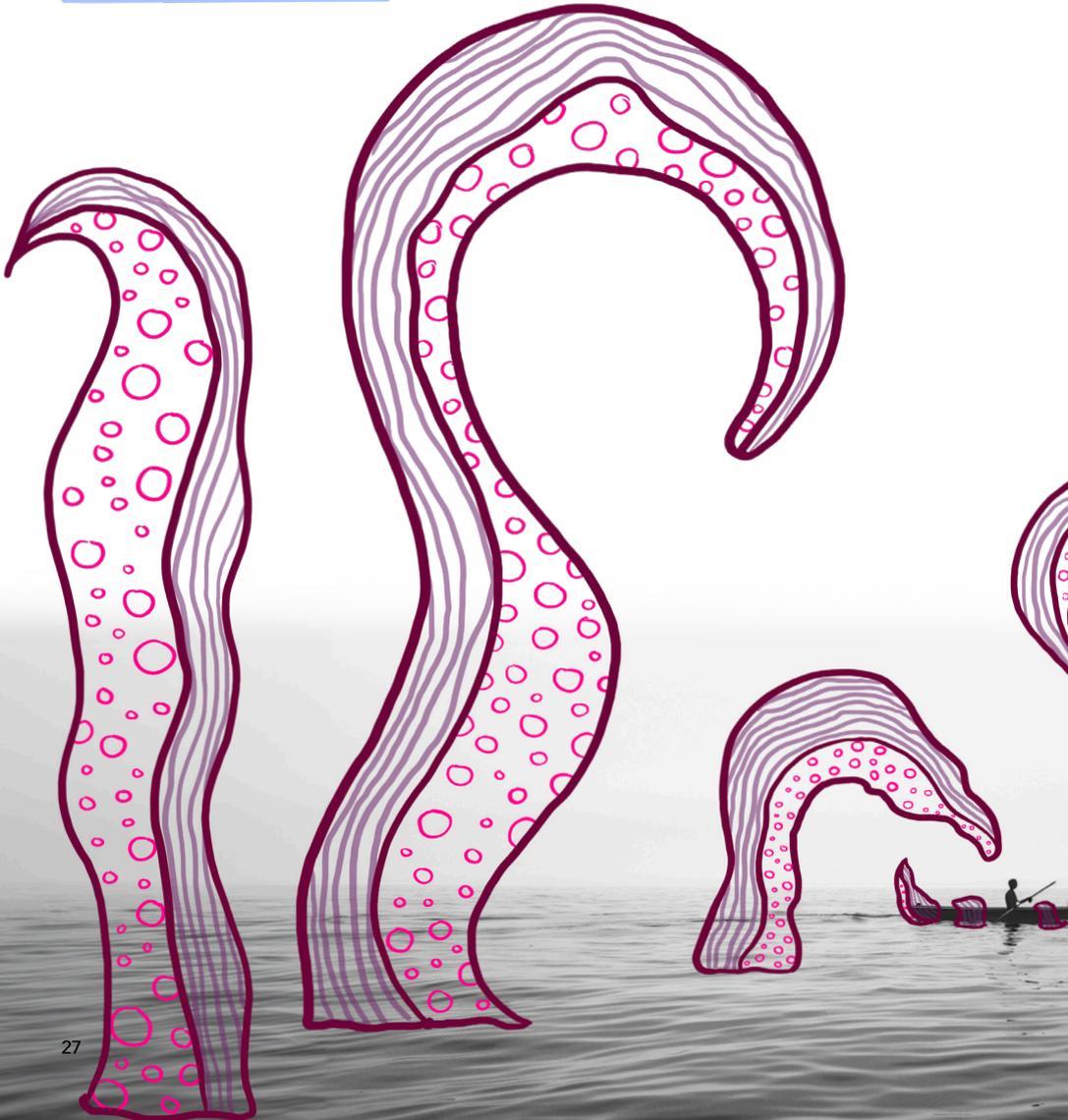


# CONFUSED.COM

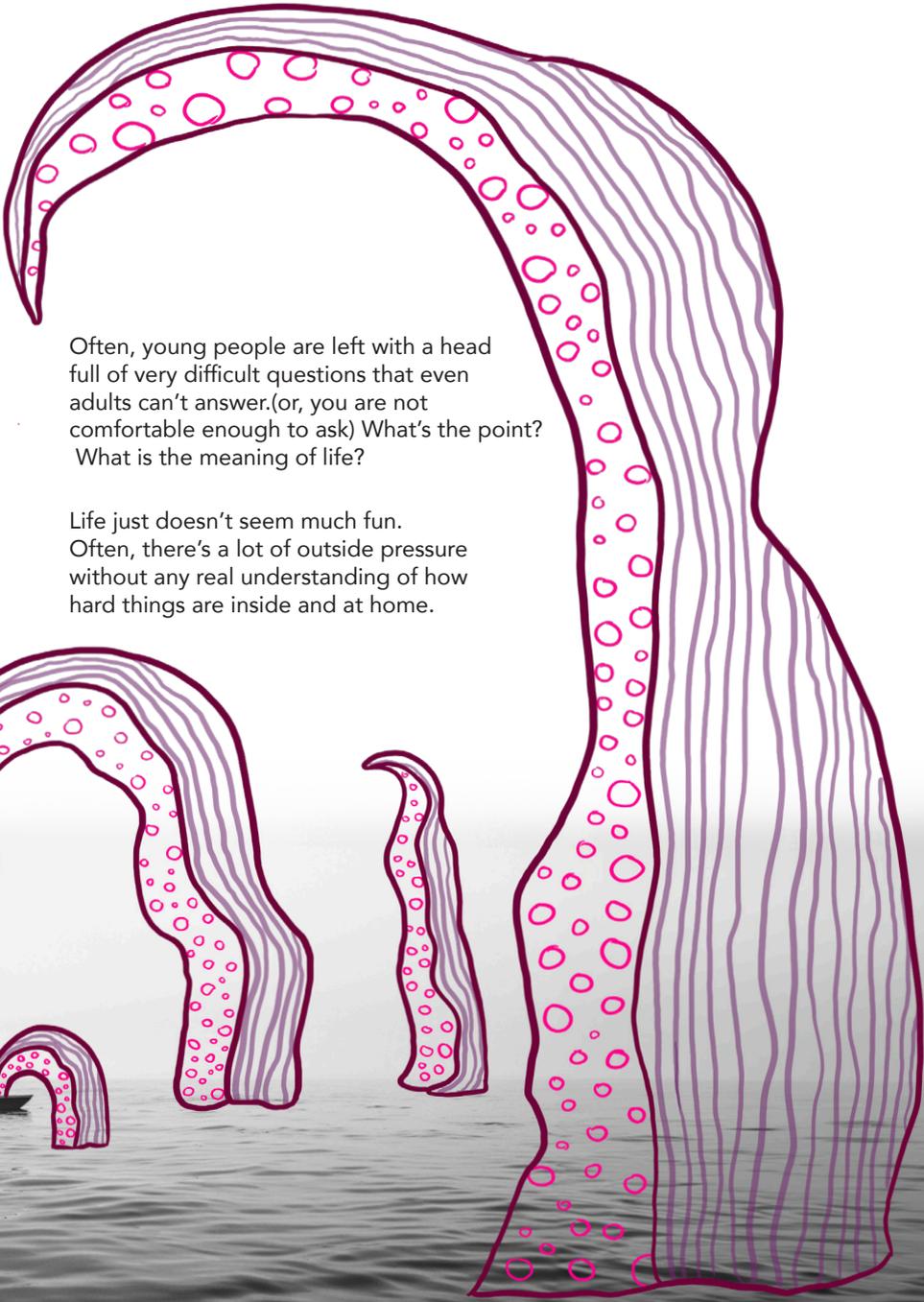
The gone forever and not coming back is pretty hard to cope with. Lots of young people tell us they have regrets that they argued or didn't love their parent enough. Hey ho, its not too late...

*"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, 11 whose dad died.



# GROWING UP TOO QUICKLY



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.

# INSIDE HURTS

The actual experience of the loss is very different from actually understanding it inside. And, 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 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.

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*"Just like the whys and ifs and all the  
questions you can ask. I kept it all inside."*

Pippa, 11 when Dad died.

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*"I felt so alone as I watched the world go  
by through my window. Time..."*

Melinda, 11 when her Dad died.

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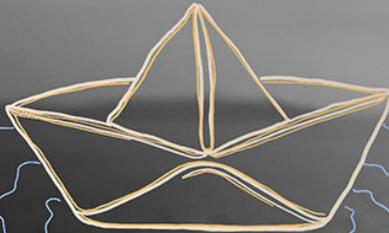


# DAMAGE LIMITATION

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.

*"There's days when I feel I'm drowning and others  
when I'm speeding through the current. I learnt  
to swim quicker than others, but we are all  
in the same water."*

Jodie, dad died young.



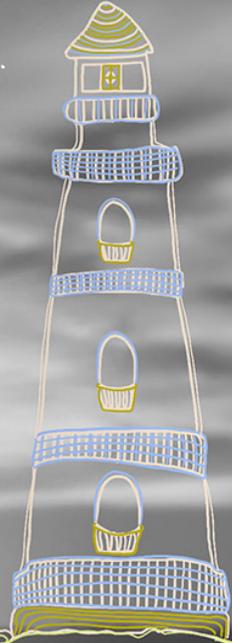
# KNOWLEDGE

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.

*"Having survived this, I know I can face anything.  
I'm going to make my life better now."*

Vicky, 10 when Dad died.



# NOWHERE TO TURN? KNOW WHERE TO TURN

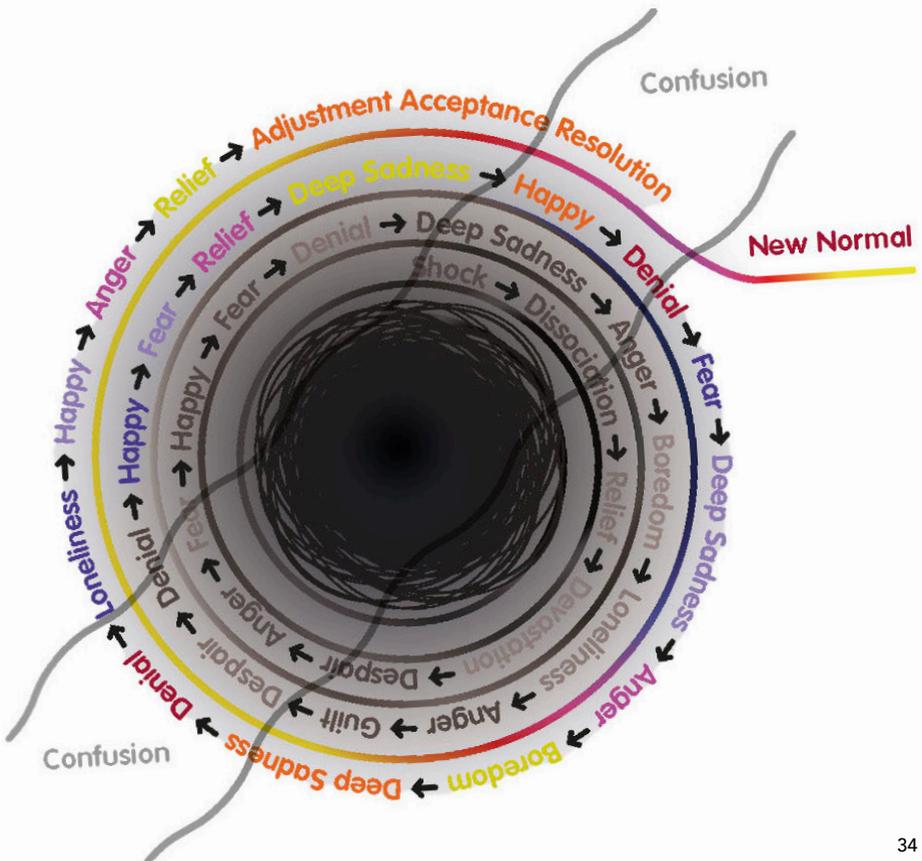
It's hard to face the fear and pain of loss, especially when you can be out there having fun. This can mean you end up lost, angry and lonely. Bored, even worse. Finding some space to grieve will help. Meeting bereaved others will ease the isolation and feelings of being different, not for pity or sympathy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



# THE SPIRAL OF GRIEF

You may hear about the stages of grief; that's not really how grief happens. It may help to think about a "spiral of grief".

Feelings come and go and come back and go and go and go and come back, like spiralling through. 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. The trick is to manage your feelings; they don't control you.



# FOREVER

The gone forever and not coming back is pretty hard to cope with. Lots of young people tell us they have regrets, like that they argued or didn't tell their parent they loved them enough.

There are big empty spaces to fill. Somehow or other, you need a new space for the dead person. 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. For example, making a Mum/Dad/Sister/Brother journal, Facebook Timeline, a Tribute Site or Remembrance Days. Forever.

At Grief Doctor & Grief Encounter, we help people to keep remembering not to forget.

*"I wanted to do things over, but it was too late."*

Andrew, 11 when Dad died.

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# LIVE LIFE LOVE 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!

*"You can't change the past but you can change the future."*

Melinda, Dad died when she was 11.

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*"If you suffer something like this, you'll become stronger."*

Vicky, 10 when Dad died.

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*"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 worry about forgetting her.  
I should try and remember."*

Jimmy, 13 when mum died.



*"My world is painful and if you don't  
approach me i will feel even more lonley."*

Melinda, Dad died when she was 11.

*"If you suffer something like this, you'll become stronger."*

Vicky, 10 when Dad died

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*"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

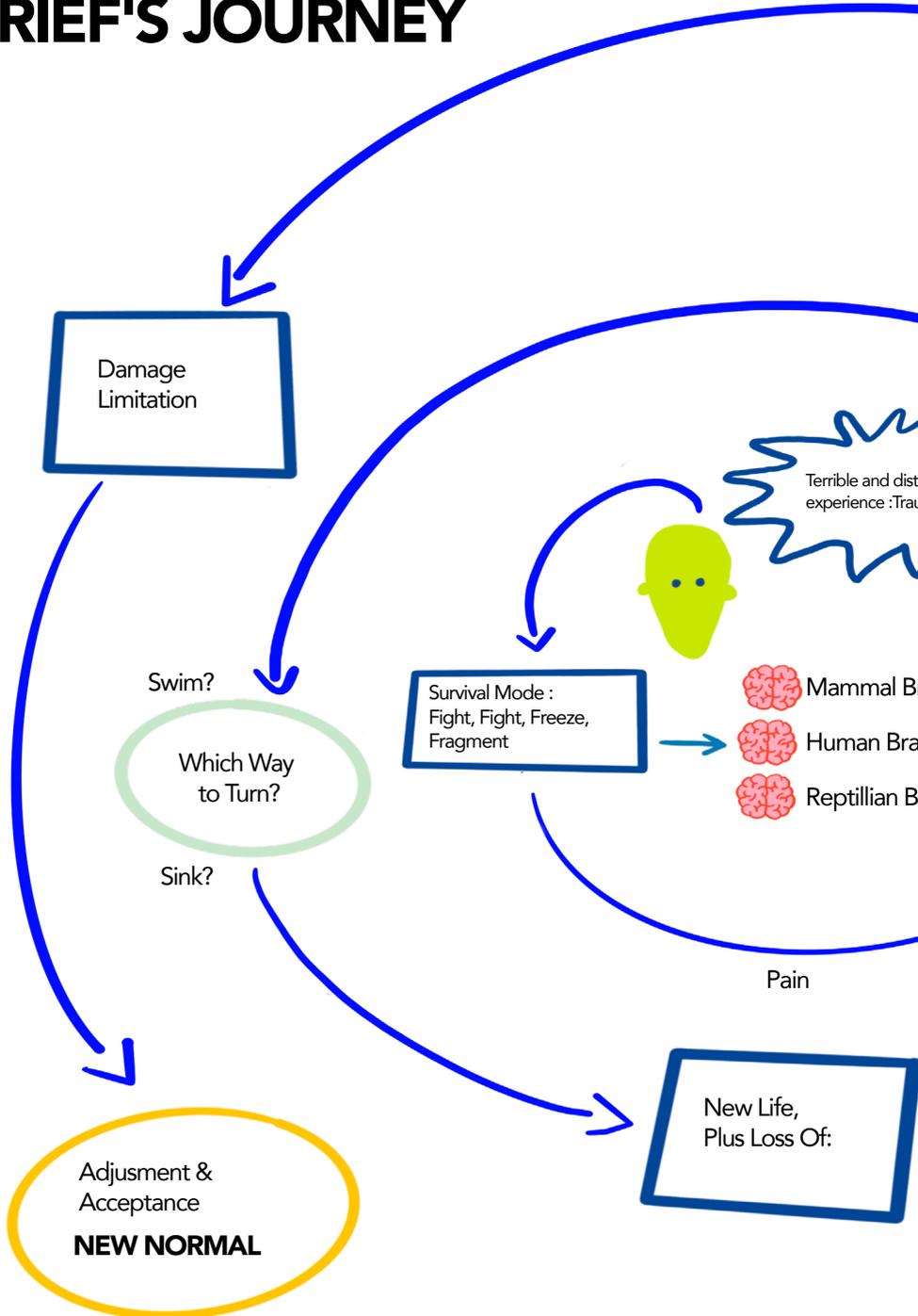
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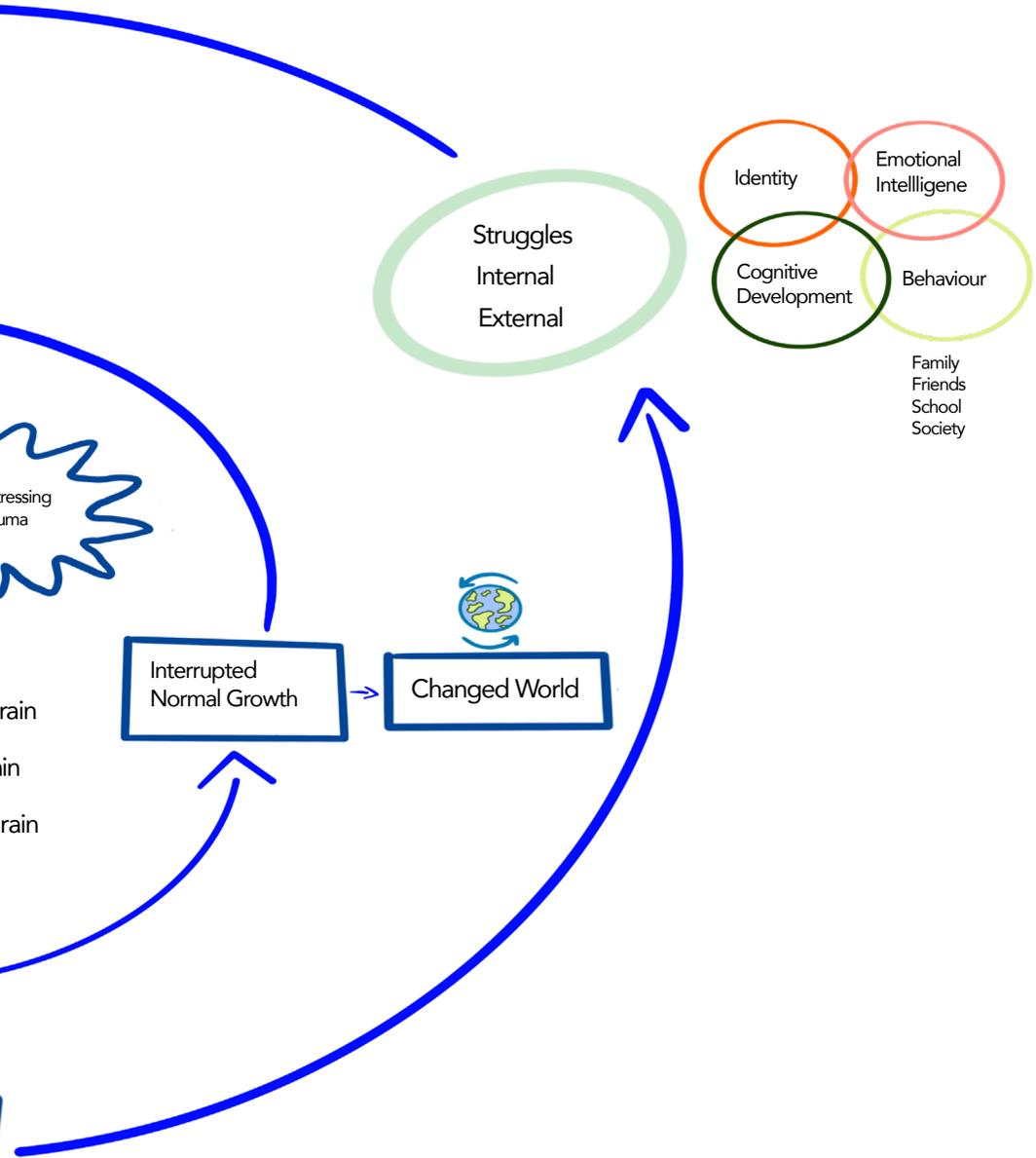
*"You can't change the past but you can change the future."*

Melinda, Dad died when she was 11.

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# GRIEF'S JOURNEY





ressing  
uma

rain

in

rain

Control  
Safety  
Childhood  
Trust  
Love  
Identity  
Compounded Losses

# ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Dr Shelley Gilbert MBE

Shelley Gilbert has worked as both an adult and a child and adolescent psychotherapist, for over 25 years. She received her Doctorate on young people's trauma and grief in 2016. She was awarded the Metanoia Institute of Psychotherapy/Middlesex University's prize for outstanding achievement of bridging research with practice, with this Teen Guide.

In 2004, she founded Grief Encounter, UK's leading bereaved child and family, not-for-profit, to help bereaved children have conversations about traumatic death following the premature death of her own parents. Her Grief Encounter Team developed free and accessible psychotherapeutically based support services for grieving children and their families. Her specialist bereavement resources, such as her award-winning interactive Grief Book for children, and accredited trainings have been ground-breaking and thought leading.

Shelley has been a thought leader in the world of grief and trauma, notably with the model of the "Upward Spiral of Grief", widely adopted across the bereavement world.

Her other credentials and achievements in the world of trauma and grief counselling and psychotherapy are too numerous to mention in this short bio, but include extensive media appearances, press articles, TEDx talk and awards. She is married with four children and lives and works in London.

She continues sharing her grief learning as Life President at Grief Encounter ([www.griefencounter.org.uk](http://www.griefencounter.org.uk)) and offers consultations, supervises and mentors through her persona as Grief Doctor. ([hello@thegriefdoctor.co.uk](mailto:hello@thegriefdoctor.co.uk)) [www.thegriefdoctor.co.uk](http://www.thegriefdoctor.co.uk)

# **TO SHELLEY @ GRIEF ENCOUNTER FROM FAMILIES**

You gave us hope when all felt hopeless.  
You seemed to know what's needed before we did.  
You warned us of the possible dangers ahead.  
You protected us from more harm, where you could.  
You held our hands when we were drowning.  
You helped us rebuild our new lives without losing the past.



