DAY 14: Bereavement and social prescribing

Hi there,

You're almost at the halfway point today…amazing. Is your action feeling less new and more like a healthy habit yet? We hope you're feeling the benefits of any small changes you've managed to make over the past two weeks, whether it's sleeping better or having more energy – you might even be feeling that your overall fitness has improved.

As always, if you're struggling with motivation, don't be disheartened. It's natural to have a dip every so often and we have some great tips to share with you today that might just make the difference.

Day 14 and today we want to consider some of the key challenges around bereavement. Losing a loved one is one of the cruel inevitabilities in life and can be all consuming. Grief can change our eating habits and appetite, it can cause us to turn to alcohol as an escape or even stop us getting out of bed, wishing to shut out the world. These are all normal reactions to grief, however, these behaviours can cause our health to decline and mood to worsen still. This email contains some information for those times of pain, to try and find a piece of light and start moving towards it.

Summary:

- Grief can affect appetite in many ways, from not wanting to eat to seeking comfort in food. Small, familiar meals can build back routine. There are also local free **cookery classes and lunch clubs** listed in the eat section below that can help reduce isolation and rebuild enjoyment in mealtimes.
- **Alcohol** may feel like a short-term coping tool, but it is a natural depressant and can worsen mood, sleep and long-term health. If you need support cutting down, the NHS has some practical guidance.
- Gentle activities such as **walking in nature** (see the council webpage for local walks in nature) or visiting meaningful places can calm the mind and improve sleep. Watch Bob's story to find out how he came through losing his wife by joining a local walk-and-talk group.
- It's important to talk in times of bereavement. **Local groups for peer support** are listed below in the connect and engage section.
- This self help guide from NHS inform contains lots of valuable information on dealing with grief.
- Social prescribing and the Joy App can both help residents access **community-based activities that support health and wellbeing.** More details in the tip of the day section below.

For more information...

Eat

It's quite common to not want to eat after someone dies - it can feel difficult to swallow or food can taste different. Another reaction to grief can be eating a lot or particularly eating food that you find comforting. This is all very normal and don't be hard on yourself.

Some practical tips include - if you don't want to eat, maybe try some small, manageable portions of something you know you like. Slowly getting back to a routine can help, however, if you are still struggling after several weeks, consider talking to your GP.

Another aspect of bereavement can be living alone - this can mean we are less motivated to cook or we might not know how to cook and eating alone may feel less enjoyable. Hillingdon offers free cookery classes for adults which are enjoyable and a good reason to get out of the house. There are also dining clubs and lunch clubs in the area - Bell Farm have a lunch club on a Tuesday and the Royal Voluntary Service run lunch clubs in the area - search on their website with your postcode.

Drink

So far, we've focused on the importance of hydration but our actions also include reducing alcohol consumption and this can be particularly relevant for people that have suffered a bereavement. We know alcohol is not good for us – it is a natural depressant, while it may feel like it helps in the moment, it can lower mood, worsen sleep, and make coping with grief or stress even harder over time. It can also increase our risk of many chronic diseases including cancer and dementia.

If you are trying to cut down your alcohol intake, check out tips for cutting down on the NHS website. Further information can be found on the Alcohol Change website which includes the option of joining their WhatsApp community to receive weekly tips. Tips include knowing your triggers, writing down why you are keen to reduce and recruiting a friend or family member to support you in your cut down.

Move

We all know that being active is good for our mental health, but that doesn't mean it's easy for everyone and it can be particularly difficult in times of grief. One recommendation from Cruse, a charity that supports people that have been bereaved, is walking in nature. Nature and greenery are calming and can help you feel more connected and in the moment. There are plenty of options for nature walks in Hillingdon - have a look at the council webpage for inspiration. You might even want to visit places that were special to the lost loved one or walk with a friend.

Not feeling motivated - read through Mind's guide to overcoming barriers to physical activity because the advice is realistic, compassionate and achievable. Remember that any physical activity is an achievement and try not to compare yourself to others – focus on your own goals. Watch Bob's story to find out how he came through losing his wife by joining a local walk-and-talk group.

Connect and engage

It can be very difficult to connect and engage with others in times of grief but the research suggests that social disconnection leads to greater psychological distress. It's important to talk about grief, share it and seek support. There are local bereavement support groups in the area and Cruse offers support. However, if you are struggling and worried about your mental health, get in touch with your GP who can help signpost you to more support.

Think

One thing that can help people after a bereavement is to do a hobby - this is part of the process of carrying on with life and finding new enjoyment. This self help guide from NHS inform contains lots of information about dealing with grief. If you are looking for a new activity, just a reminder that U3A Hillingdon have plenty of options.

Tip of the Day!

Social prescribing is a service that runs at GP surgeries across the country and offers non-medical treatments for health and wellbeing problems. The Royal Society of Medicine have helpfully produced a good video on social prescribing to tell you the details.

Social prescribing link workers explore a person's symptoms and issues and then look at how to help address the root causes through community services - for instance, prescribing a choir to help with stress. And for Hillingdon residents, social prescribing is getting easier to access with the Joy App - a new NHS approved mobile phone app that allows people to view local NHS and associated services and refer themselves into them. The idea is that it helps GPs and social prescribers efficiently refer people to an activity that might benefit them. So, if you have concerns about your health or wellbeing that might be helped by a local activity or group referral, download the app to have a look.

We'll be back in a couple of days. Meanwhile, thank you for taking this challenge with us.Until next time,

Team Take 5

Reminder: This information is general guidance and if you have any concerns over your own health please speak to your medical professional.