



Sands

Introduction to Befriending

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Section 1:

The role of a Sands befriender

Introduction to Sands

Our vision is for a world where fewer babies die and when a baby does die, anyone affected receives the best possible care and support for as long as it is needed.

Sands' mission:



Help save babies' lives



Ensure excellent bereavement care for all those who need it



Provide the right bereavement support for as long as it is needed

What is a Sands befriender?

Sands Befriending Service is a network of fully trained volunteers across the UK who offer bereavement support and information to anyone affected by pregnancy loss or the death of a baby.

Sands Befrienders have personal or professional experience of seeking support following the death of a baby. This gives them unique insight into how other bereaved families might be feeling.

What is a Sands befriender

A Sands befriender is someone who...

- ▶ Actively listens
- ▶ Enables people to explore their own feelings and make their own decisions
- ▶ Recognises other people's perspective as their individual experience
- ▶ Respects all religious, cultural and family beliefs, traditions and rituals
- ▶ Maintains healthy boundaries
- ▶ Maintains confidentiality & data protection regulations
- ▶ Knows their own support needs
- ▶ Shares only as much of their own experience as is necessary

A Sands befriender does not...

- ▶ Look for solutions
- ▶ Assume how others might feel or actions they might want to undertake
- ▶ Make judgement on other people's actions or opinions
- ▶ Impose any beliefs or non beliefs
- ▶ Become personally involved in the story of others
- ▶ Provide practical help or personal opinion
- ▶ Befriend at the expense of their own wellbeing
- ▶ Seek mutual support from those being supported

Skills & abilities needed for befriending



- ▶ Sensitive communication
- ▶ Commitment to continued learning and development
- ▶ Self awareness
- ▶ Empathy
- ▶ Confidentiality
- ▶ Active Listening
- ▶ Self care
- ▶ Non judgemental
- ▶ Cultural awareness
- ▶ Diplomacy
- ▶ Teamwork
- ▶ Capacity to put aside one's own story

Role Description

- ▶ Respond to phone and online contact from bereaved people
- ▶ Facilitate support group support meetings or sports teams
- ▶ Provide emotional support to anyone effected by the death of a baby
- ▶ Signpost bereaved people to local and national services such as counselling, funeral directors, memorials, keepsakes etc.
- ▶ Have a good working knowledge of the local and national work of Sands and can delegate to Sands staff when needed
- ▶ Understand personal responsibility in relation to safeguarding and sharing information with the Designated Safeguarding Lead
- ▶ Participates fully in self reflection, supervision and training opportunities



Section 2:

Understanding and supporting the perspective of others

Pregnancy loss and death of a baby

Sands is here to support anyone affected by the death of a baby. Therefore as a befriender you will support people who may have had very different experiences to yourself, these include

- Miscarriage
- Termination of pregnancy due to fetal anomaly
- Stillbirth
- Neonatal death
- Sudden and unexpected death of an infant

The circumstances of each bereavement, will be unique, even when they may seem to share many similarities. Sands are committed to supporting those who see us as the place where they want to share their experience and we will provide additional training, support and information to Befrienders to facilitate this as needed.

Everyone who experiences the death of their baby has a very unique experience which is influenced by:

- Their experience of pregnancy, birth and medical care - this could be positive or negative
- Their physical and mental health before and after the death of their baby
- Individual personality and coping strategies
- Personal or religious beliefs around birth and death
- The support available at home, from family friends, in their community, from health care staff etc.

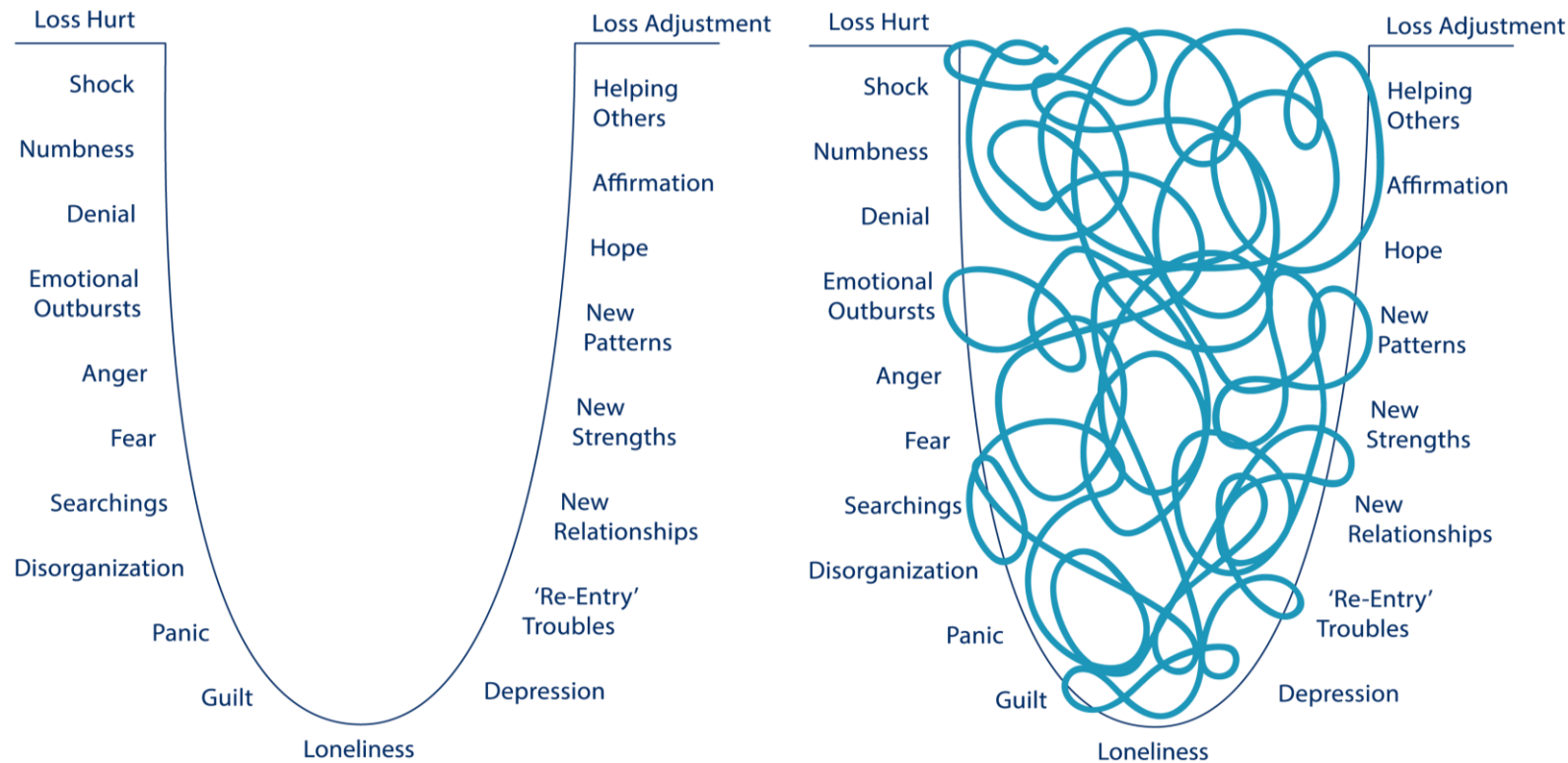
Don't assume to know how someone else feels or thinks

Grief is as unique as a finger print



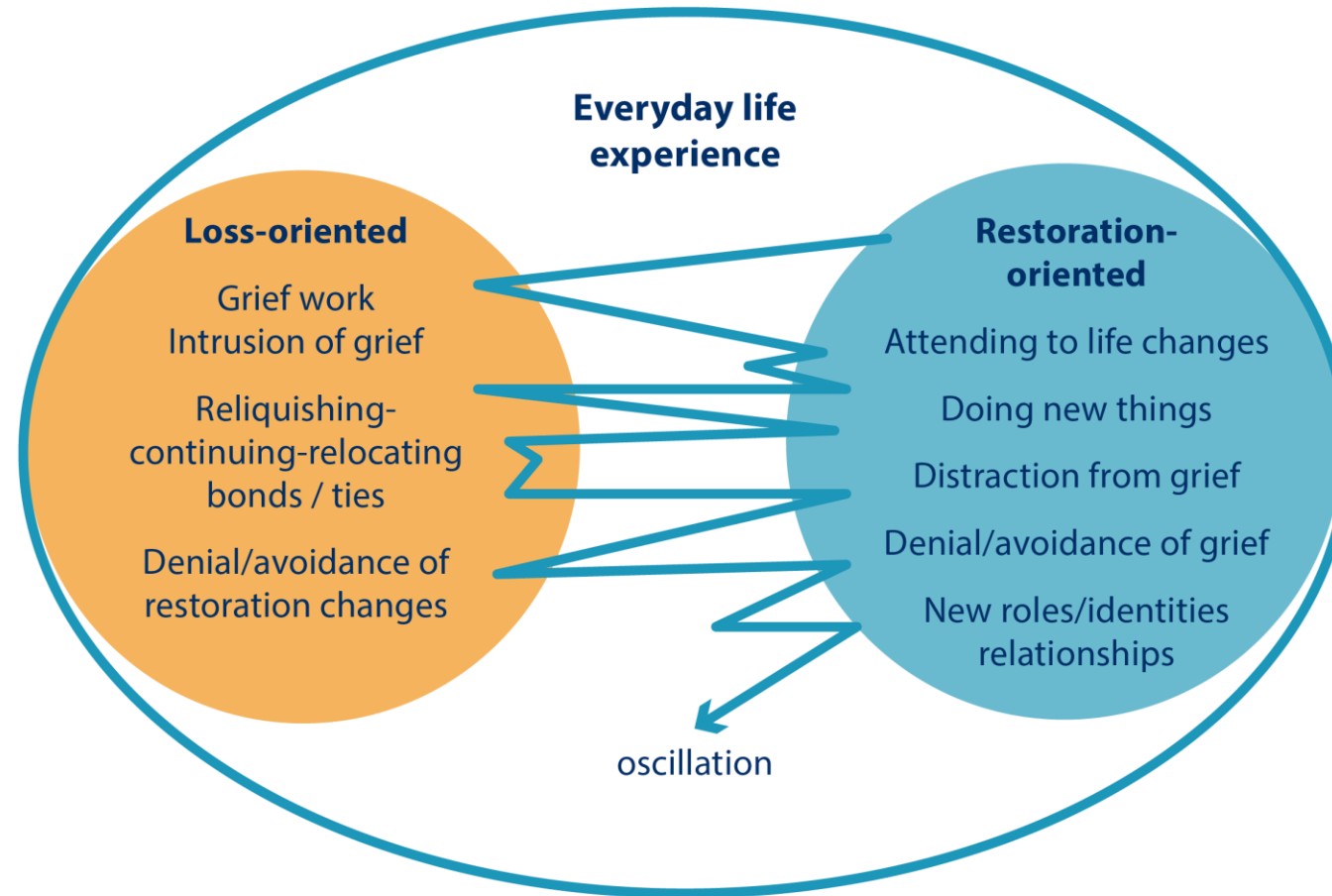
- Grief is the emotional, physical, mental and behavioural response to death
- Everyone expresses grief differently
- An understanding of grief can be helpful when supporting bereaved families

Grief does not come in stages it is more a jumbled mix of powerful feelings and experiences...



Kubler Ross (1969)

When grieving, people often jump between feeling ok and able to do tasks to feeling upset. This is normal. It's like constant puddle jumping from one puddle to the other, with each puddle being a different task or thought.



Some bereaved people identify with the idea of growing around grief, grief stays the same but over time life grows into a new normal.



Tonkin (1996)

Some bereaved people feel a Continuing Bond with their baby and carry their baby with them throughout their lives. Traditions and rituals on birthdays and special days can bring comfort.

Yes this is normal



Klass, Silverman and Nickman (1996)

With the right care and support bereaved parents and families can find their own way to live with grief

As you grieve and live life in a new normal it is the little things that matter, a positive interaction can bring comfort

My grief will always be with me because it is an expression of my love for my daughter

We always remember his birthday with a birthday cake at his graveside

Slowly the fog and confusion lifted and as time went on (with good support), I realised I could still 'live' and enjoy my life

Grief is painful and overwhelming. I couldn't live without my daughter so I had to create a new life with her in my heart

Sharing your story

It is likely that people you support will ask about your story.

You will need to be comfortable telling a version of your story that does not shift attention away from the person you are supporting. Therefore it is helpful to have a “befriender version” of your story which is short and simple but with enough detail so that people know you can empathise with what they are going through.

To do this you may find it helpful to write down your full story and then shorten it to a befriender version of a few lines.

For example:

“my son, [name] was stillborn at 28 weeks, he had a heart condition, he would have been 8 this year”



Section 3:

Listening and communication

What is empathy and why is it important?



[Click here to view video: Why empathy is important](#)

Active listening

Active listening gives the other person time to explore their thoughts and feelings. It involves actively showing verbal and non-verbal signs of listening so that they feel heard and know that you care about them, their baby and their experience.

1. Consider your surroundings, ensure privacy and comfort
2. Ask open questions
3. Reflect back a key word or emotions
4. Use appropriate non verbal communication such as a smile, eye contact, open posture and appropriate touch
5. Allow silence or tears

Open Questions

An open question requires more than a yes no answer so provides an opportunity for others to share their thoughts and feelings

Tell me about
your baby [use baby's
name if known]?

When
did things start to
become difficult for you?

What
other support do you have?

Who
else is in your family?

How
are you feeling now?

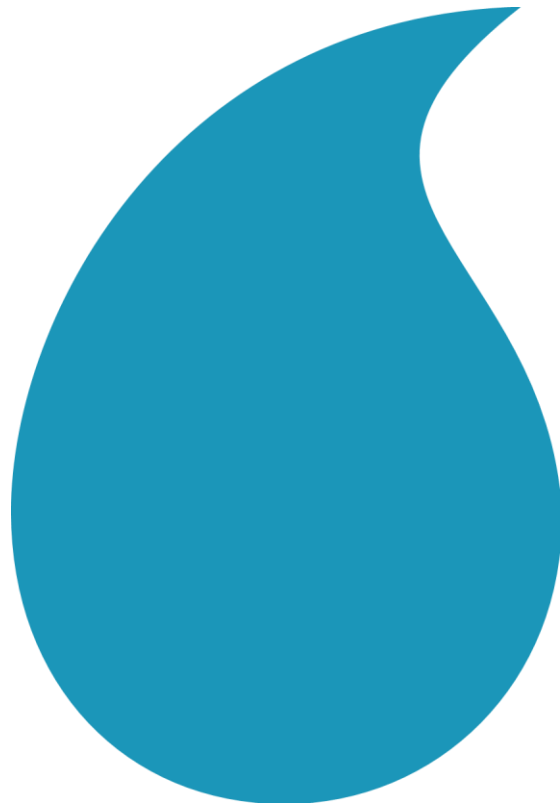
Where
was your baby born?

Responding with empathy

A bereaved person might say...	Sympathetic response (x not ideal)	Empathetic response (✓ best practice)
"I feel like my heart is broken"	"Oh no that's awful, I feel so sorry for you"	<div>"I am so sorry to hear how devastating and heart breaking it's been for you"</div> <div>✓ Reflecting back their feeling of heartbroken</div>
"It's all my fault; I just feel so guilty"	"It's not your fault you mustn't blame yourself"	<div>'It's not unusual to feel this way. Can you say a bit more about what it is like feeling so guilty?'</div> <div>✓ Recognising their feeling of guilt and enabling expression</div>
"I just can't do it, I can't go there/do that"	"It is difficult but you can do it"	<div>"Take one step at a time, do what's right for you"</div> <div>✓ Avoiding reassurance and providing comfort</div>

Silence and tears

Sometimes there will be silence, the other person may not speak or will cry, this is normal. Be patient and gentle



1 Offer a reassuring statement

- ▶ "Just take your time"
- ▶ "I can hear/see how upset you are"
- ▶ "We've got plenty of time"

2 Pause

3 Use a gentle closed question:

- ▶ "Is it something that's happened today?"
- ▶ "Have things been difficult for a while?"
- ▶ "Is it hard to know where to begin?"

4 Pause

5 Repeat if no response

“Accept and Connect” not “Protect and Direct”

When offering emotional support you may feel protective and your instinct could be to try to help, however the role of a befriender is not to “fix” but to allow parents to find their own way. To do this, awareness of your own thoughts and feelings is needed:

- ▶ When thoughts and emotions arise in you, recognise that these are yours and not theirs
- ▶ Allow other people to express their own pain and accept that this is their experience not yours
- ▶ Understand that it’s your job to accompany people on their grief journey, remain alongside them without protecting or directing them as they struggle
- ▶ Encourage people to ask questions, express themselves, and explore options at their own pace, trust that they will find their own way

Supporting someone experiencing suicidal feelings

Sands has policies and procedures in place and support is available for you if you are befriending someone who feels like taking their life. You don't have to deal with this alone.



Talking about suicidal feelings does not increase the risk of a person taking their own life. Everyone has their own personal response to the idea of someone taking their own life or thinking about it as an option.

You may have experienced this feelings yourself or someone sharing these feelings may make you feel scared, angry, powerless or confused.

Reflect on how you feel about it and what it might be like to support someone who is feeling this way. Familiarise yourself with the Sands policy “Supporting those that express suicidal feelings” which can be found on MySands.

Safeguarding

Sands is committed to enabling people to live their lives free from harm, abuse and neglect, and to have their health, wellbeing and human rights protected. Familiarise yourself with the Sands safeguarding policy which can be found on MySands.

Call if you are worried about yourself or anyone you support

Sands Safeguarding

 07798 710193 (dedicated mobile)

 safeguarding@sands.org.uk

Samaritans contact details

 All calls free 116 123 (UK) and 116 123 (ROI)

 jo@Samaritans.org

Section 4:


Recognising your own needs & how to access support

Looking after yourself

- ▶ Be realistic about how much time you are able to give and about the support you can offer.
- ▶ Make sure you have allowed enough time for calls and/or meetings.
- ▶ Think about what's happening for you in your own life - if there is something stopping you from being able to befriend effectively, and you are unable to put it aside, you may need to take a break.
- ▶ Practice self care, make time to exercise and do the things you enjoy.
- ▶ Access regular support for yourself

Support from the Sands Bereavement Support Team can be accessed via

- Befriender Facebook Group
- Fortnightly befriender zoom calls
- Email BSSmanager@sands.org.uk



**Remember to take
care of yourself.
You can't pour from
an empty cup**

Boundaries

Healthy boundaries are important for the wellbeing of befrienders and those they support

Do	Don't
Know your own triggers and ask for help when needed	Become emotionally or personally involved in the other persons story
Think carefully before you say Yes to any requests for help	Take on more responsibility than you are ready for
Remember that the main focus is the needs of the other person, get your own support outside of befriending	Take anyone to your own home
Take a break from befriending if needed	Get involved in a sexual or intimate relationship
Set limits to the time you can commit to being a befriender	Give or take gifts or money
Practice self care	Give out personal contact details

Looking after yourself



It is important for befrienders to have access to support and supervision.

Supervision provides a confidential, safe space where you can talk through areas of concern with a qualified supervisor. A supervisor is a counsellor who will usually have an additional qualification in supervision. A supervisor should hold a counselling qualification and be registered with one of the overseeing bodies that regulate the profession. Use the links below to find a supervisor in your area:

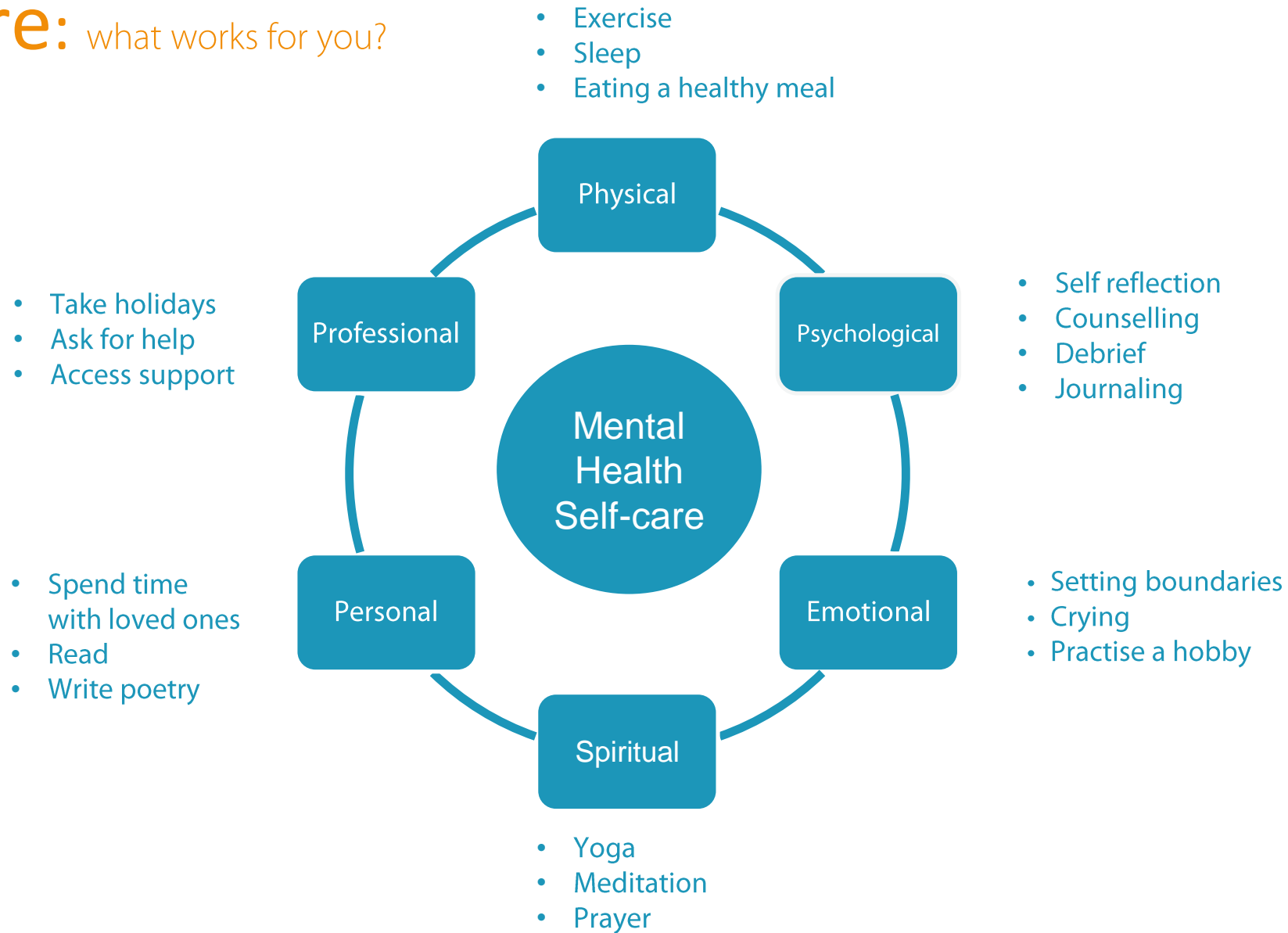
www.bacp.co.uk

www.counselling-directory.org.uk

www.psychotherapy.org.uk

As a Sands Befriender, the cost of supervision is covered, speak with your local group or the Bereavement Support Services Manager for details.

Self Care: what works for you?



Resources and Contacts

- ▶ To find out more about becoming a Sands befriender contact BSSManager@sands.org.uk
- ▶ Support for existing befrienders is available from BSSManager@sands.org.uk
- ▶ Bereavement training is available as part of the National Bereavement Care Pathway and can be found at www.e-lfh.org.uk/programmes/national-bereavement-care-pathway/

Next Steps

Befriender training is currently postponed due to COVID19, when training resumes it will be a modular programme with topics including

- ✓ How to facilitate a support group/sports team/event
- ✓ Signposting for bereaved families
- ✓ Communication and listening skills
- ✓ Cultural competency
- ✓ Self care and supervision
- ✓ The work of Sands locally and nationally

Follow this link to share your feedback and to register your interest in Sands befriender training: [Sands Befriender Training](#)

Final thought...

The weight of loss never goes away, but we can learn how to live with it.

Bereaved Mother

With good support around me I learnt there was no rush to grieve.

Bereaved Mother

Many people think that mentioning your baby will make you sad but actually I really appreciate it when people talk about her. If no one mentions her name it feels like she never existed.

Bereaved Father