

# **Coping with a death**

## **A guide to the days following a bereavement**

***The staff at Overtoun Medical Practice wish to express their sincere sympathy to you and your family at this sad time***

We have produced this guide to help you through the immediate practical matters, and also to provide you with other information which you may find useful in the coming weeks.

The first section addresses the practical elements.

The second section provides some emotional support and information.

The third section lists organisations which you may find helpful.

We hope this guide will be of use to you, and if you have any feedback or questions, please speak to our Practice Manager, Sarah McDade on 0141 531 6025.

We have done our best to ensure this guide is up to date, but please notify us if you find any out of date information, errors or omissions.

## **Section 1 – The Practical Arrangements**

In the first few days after a death it is often the responsibility of the person who is most distressed to make the necessary practical arrangements. It is therefore wise to have a friend or relative to help you with these arrangements.

Throughout this booklet, the term 'your relative' is used to refer to the member of the family, significant other or friend who has died.

### **Contact a Funeral Director**

Funeral directors can manage funeral arrangements and give advice and support. Most people choose to use a professional Funeral Director but some people prefer to make their own arrangements as they consider this to be more personal and less expensive.

Factors that may affect your choice of funeral director include:

- The wishes of the person who has passed away
- Location of the firm's premises
- Do they belong to a trade association?
- The range of services provided
- Cost
- Recommendation of those who have used the service and trusted advisers
- The way you are treated by the staff
- Ownership – are they a large or small firm, a family business or company?
- Advice or recommendation of family or friends

Friends, family, clergy or your doctor's surgery may be able to recommend local funeral directors. Most local companies are also listed in the telephone directory and online search engines.

### **Obtain the Medical Certificate**

The Medical Certificate (often called the death certificate) is an important legal document showing the cause of death, which has to be signed by the doctor who was responsible for your relative when they died. Once the surgery has been notified about the death, the Doctor will prepare the medical certificate. This can take up to 2-3 working days, but we always try to issue the certificate as soon as practically possible.

This may seem a long time when you are grieving, and planning a funeral, but the doctor has strict legal obligations to fulfil before they can issue the certificate. These obligations depend on the circumstances of the death, the location, and whether it was anticipated, but generally a doctor needs to physically verify the death, review the medical records and carefully complete the official paperwork.

In some cases there may be a delay in issuing the certificate should the death need to be referred to the Coroner, or the Doctor responsible for your relative is not immediately available. Any delay in receiving the certificate will not prevent you from making provisional funeral arrangements with a funeral director, although it is important to stress these are provisional until the death has been registered.

Reasons for a death being referred to the Coroner include if no doctor saw the person within the 14 days prior to their death, if there is a sudden or unexpected death, if there is an unnatural death, or if the cause of death cannot be identified. If the death is referred to the Coroner, please notify your funeral director and follow their advice.

Once the certificate has been completed, the surgery will telephone you to let you know you can collect the certificate. We do not routinely post certificates due to the risk of them being lost or delayed in the post.

Please carefully read both sides of the detachable slip on the certificate when you receive it.

## **Registering a death** (The following information has been taken from South Lanarkshire Website)

[http://www.southlanarkshire.gov.uk/info/200209/deaths/394/registering\\_a\\_death](http://www.southlanarkshire.gov.uk/info/200209/deaths/394/registering_a_death)

Our registrars will help you register a death as simply and easily as possible. Please read all of this page, as well as the [Death Certification Review Service](#) and the [Tell Us Once](#) pages before you book an appointment.

## **Where and when to register a death**

By law, a death must be registered within eight days. A death which takes place in Scotland can be registered at any registration office in Scotland. We cannot register a death which did not take place in Scotland.

There are five Registration Offices in South Lanarkshire. You can make an appointment online and your confirmation email will give you more information about the registration process and list the documents you need to bring.

You can make an appointment online by using the email address above. You will then be given the choice of an appointment at one of the following locations:

- Clydesdale, Council Office, South Vennel, Lanark, ML11 7JT
- East Kilbride, Civic Centre, Andrew Street, East Kilbride, G74 1AB
- Hamilton, Town House, 102 Cadzow Street, Hamilton, ML3 6HH
- Hamilton HQ, Council Office, Almada Street, Hamilton, ML3 0AA (Card Payments Only)
- Rutherglen Registration Office, Town Hall, 139 Main Street, Rutherglen, G73 2JJ

If you do not have access to the internet, you can call 0303 123 1015 to make an appointment.

If you need to contact the registrars in an emergency outwith office hours, for example over a holiday weekend, phone the emergency out-of-hours number 0800 242024.

## **What documents do you need?**

A death is normally registered by a relative or close friend of the deceased but anyone can register a death as long as they know details about the death and have the necessary documents. You will need to bring along the death certificate, birth certificate, marriage certificate (where applicable) and, if possible, the deceased person's medical card.

The registrar keeps the death certificate from the doctor.

## **How much does it cost?**

There is no charge for registering a death. As part of the process the registrar will provide three certificates free of charge:

- a white form (Form 14) for the undertaker
- a form for social security purposes
- an abbreviated death certificate which shows the deceased's name, sex, date of birth, date and place of death

If you want a full death certificate which also shows the cause of death, parent and partner's details, this costs £10 at the time of registration. Any request for a full or abbreviated death certificate made after one month of the date of registration will cost £15 (a £5 search fee is included in this).

If you have the abbreviated certificate, a full death certificate will cost £10, however, this can only be requested in person at our offices as the certificate requires to be seen and a form needs to be completed.

## **Arrange the funeral**

Before going ahead with any arrangements, it is advisable to check whether the deceased left a will and any instructions for the funeral. If you are not the Next of Kin (Nearest Relative) or Executor, you should check with them that you have the authority to proceed.

Most funeral directors are members of one of two trade associations:

- National Association of Funeral Directors (NAFD)
- Society of Allied and Independent Funeral Directors (SAIF)

Member firms must provide you with a price list on request and cannot exceed any written estimate they give you without your permission.

Most people would probably require the funeral director to provide the following services as a minimum:

- make all necessary arrangements;
- provide appropriate staff;
- provide a suitable coffin;
- transfer the deceased from the place of death to the funeral director's premises;
- care for the deceased prior to the funeral;
- provide a hearse to the nearest cemetery or crematorium;
- arrange for burial or crematorium as appropriate.

Embalming, viewing of the deceased, or providing a limousine for mourners are optional extras. Discuss these fully with your funeral director and make sure you receive an itemised written quotation.

Funeral costs for the same services may vary considerably from one funeral director to another. It is advisable to get more than one quote to compare costs and services. Funeral directors should provide detailed price lists for you to take away.

Disbursements are fees paid to others, i.e. for doctor's certificates, a minister, newspaper announcements, flowers, and crematorium. Ask the funeral director for a written quotation detailing all these fees.

In addition, it should be remembered:

- when you arrange a funeral, you are responsible for paying the bill;
- funeral payments are normally recoverable from the deceased's estate;
- check that the price includes what you require and whether there are any additional costs that will be added on.

### **Away from the funeral**

There will be a number of people and organisations who will need to be notified about the death to ensure the persons estate is dealt with appropriately. Banks in particular should be told quickly to prevent against fraud. The Registrar will be able to advise you who you need to speak to if you are unsure.

Telling people about a death is often difficult, and you may want to ask trusted family and/or friends to help you. Some organisations however may insist on speaking to the next of kin or executor of the estate. It is useful to record the date, time, and name of the person you speak to when making calls. Additionally, if you send of any important documents, it is advisable to keep a copy of them and a note of when you sent them.

If you are using a professional (such as a solicitor) to deal with the estate, they will be able to help you with any legal requirements and advice you on benefits or other financial matters.

## **Section 2 – The Emotional Factors**

In this section we offer some support which we hope will help you come to terms with the emotions of losing a loved one.

### **Grief and other difficult feelings**

Whoever has died, your loss is unique to you, and you will cope with it in your own way. But although bereavement is a highly personal and often traumatic event, many people go through a range of recognisable reactions and emotions when someone they are close to dies.

Sometimes people are shocked and upset by their changing and violent emotions when they are bereaved. Realising that these feelings are quite normal may help.

### **Grief**

Grief knocks you off balance emotionally, physically and mentally.

If the death had been expected, you tell yourself you should be able to cope, but you can't. You think you're over it, and you're not. You think you should feel all right because you have family and friends looking out for you – but you don't feel all right because no one can replace the person who has died.

When you are bereaved you have to cope with a world which seems to have fallen apart. In practical terms, your life may have changed dramatically. You may have much less money, or you may be better off financially. You may be eating and sleeping alone for the first time, or be faced with household jobs which you used to share with the person who died. Losing a close family member or an old friend can mean that you have no one who shares your childhood memories and family jokes.

Yet the biggest changes are probably inside you. When someone close to you dies it can seem as though everything you took for granted has gone, that you have lost your sense of identity and self-worth. You may feel you have lost almost everything and haven't much left to fall back on or look forward to. And you may feel like this even if you have loving friends and family around you.

### **Your feelings**

At first you may be too shocked to feel anything much, even if the death had been expected. Many bereaved people say that, in their initial shock, they felt a sense of numbness and disbelief.

As you get over the shock and begin to grasp the reality of what has happened you may go through some of the most powerful feelings you have ever had, feeling high or excitable one minute, in despair the next. You may think you are going mad because you can't control your emotions, can't concentrate, can't organise yourself to make a phone call or make a cup of tea. It may seem as though everything you knew has gone and that nothing will ever make sense again.

You may feel that you don't care whether you live or die because the person who died was so important to you that you cannot imagine existing without them. Your loss may feel overwhelming and you are likely to be reminded of it constantly. You are likely to miss the person who died in all sorts of ways, physically as well as emotionally.

## **Your thoughts**

You are likely to find it hard to concentrate, and may feel confused and forgetful. Your thoughts may constantly return to the person who died, with painful questions and fears running through your mind. Alongside this, you may have a sense of relief if they died at what seemed the right time for them.

As you think more about the person and your relationship with them, as you talk about them and listen to what relatives, friends and acquaintances say, you are likely to start building a fuller picture of them than you had before. As it grows, you will probably find this picture becomes a part of your life, a source of comfort which is more than just a memory.

## **Your body**

You will probably notice physical changes. You may have difficulty getting to sleep, and your sleep may be disturbed by vivid dreams and long periods of wakefulness. You may lose your appetite.

People react physically in many different ways – some feel tense and short of breath, others feel edgy and restless, others feel very slow and lethargic.

You are likely to feel exhausted, especially if you had been providing care for the person who died, or had been through an anxious time before they died. Strong emotions and dealing with all the things that need to be done after a death can also make you feel tired and drained.

The stress of grief makes enormous physical demands upon you. You may be more susceptible to colds or other infections, or become more accident-prone. It is very important to take extra care of yourself – try to eat well and take extra rest even if you can't sleep. Take some gentle exercise if you can. Be kind to yourself – don't try to do too much while you are grieving.

## **Getting used to the death**

Getting used to a death seems to happen in fits and starts and is often not as simple as it sounds, especially if you had shared your life with the person who died or had known them since childhood. Or you may have lost a younger relative, perhaps your daughter or son, or grandchild. When a young person dies it reverses the natural order of life and death and can seem particularly unjust.

You may switch between talking rationally about the death, the illness, the will, then have a surge of hope as you think you see the person who has died in the street or hear them whistling their favourite song.

Allowing your feelings to come out can help you to get used to your loss. Talking about the death and about the person who died, dealing with the practicalities of your new situation and trying to think of the present as well as the past can all help you get used to the reality of the death and get through some of the anguish you may feel.

As you do this you will probably, slowly, begin to find a way of living without the person alongside you but very much with you in your thoughts and memories.

## **Emptiness and depression**

Feelings of depression and meaninglessness can hit you when the reality of the death begins to bite and you realise that the person who has died will not come back. And just when you think you have started to move on and are feeling better, you may hit rock bottom and life can seem endlessly bleak and empty. Surprisingly, although it may feel almost unbearable at the time, this seems to be a period when some inner healing takes place. Afterwards, people generally say they feel lighter, more in control of their lives and better able to look forward.

Depression is a natural response to a bereavement, and usually lifts of its own accord. But if it doesn't, and life seems an endless, pointless struggle, you could be clinically depressed. Clinical depression can be treated and there are different ways of getting through periods of depression, both with and without antidepressant medication. Ask your doctor for help and advice.

If you have any thoughts of suicide, do talk to your doctor or someone you trust. Remember you can phone the Samaritans, day or night, on 0845 790 9090.

## **Anger**

Some people don't feel angry after a bereavement, but if you do it can be the hardest feeling to cope with. You may feel anger at the injustice of your loss; anger at the lack of understanding in others; anger at the person who died because of what they are putting you through.

Bereaved people are usually angry because they feel hurt and unhappy. You probably feel angry at yourself and at the person who died – the person you need most, who has left you to feel abandoned, frightened and alone.

These feelings are normal and you can probably get rid of your anger in a way which doesn't hurt you or someone else. Some people have a shouting session, dig the garden or write their thoughts on paper and then destroy the pages.

Don't bottle up your feelings – try to think about the reasons for your anger. If you don't do this, whatever is upsetting you will almost certainly continue to trouble you; it won't disappear. It can help to talk about your feelings with someone who isn't emotionally involved in your own loss.

## **Fear**

You are likely to feel fearful and anxious. This is very natural – your familiar world has been turned upside down and you are likely to feel you have little control over your life or over the thoughts and feelings churning inside you. Feeling out of control is likely to leave you feeling vulnerable and afraid. But you will probably notice that as you get used to coping, and start to get on top of life again, you will become more confident and less afraid.

You may also have fears about important practical issues. How will you cope with less money coming in? How will you manage household tasks? If you have worries like this it usually helps to get some practical advice. The organisations listed at the end of this leaflet may be able to help you.

## **Mixed feelings**

It is usual to have mixed feelings when someone dies. You may find yourself thinking of times you wish had been different, or wondering what might have happened if you, or the person who died, had made different decisions. Mixed feelings of regret, guilt or anger are not easy to deal with.

The important thing is to try to reach a point where you are realistic about the past and can accept it for what it was. This can be hard if the relationship had turned sour or was always a mixture of good and bad.

When a difficult relationship ends with death the problem is that any chance of mutual understanding or reconciliation has gone. But if you try to avoid dealing with upsetting thoughts and feelings you run the risk of becoming angry, bitter or depressed. In a situation like this it usually helps to get a better understanding of the relationship you had with the person who died, of what was good about it and what was not, to work out what each of you contributed to it.

Don't be too hard on yourself or anyone else. No one is perfect and most people try to do the best they can with the situation they are in. Eventually you are likely to reach some acceptance of the past and move towards a more fruitful present.

## **Memories of other losses**

A bereavement may trigger memories of earlier losses which you thought you had got over. Perhaps you did not realise at the time how much you were affected, or circumstances made it difficult for you to talk about your feelings. You may now remember these unhappy times with great clarity and this can be extremely distressing.

For example, some people are only now beginning to grieve for losses that happened in the war years. Similarly, people who had a stillborn baby or a miscarriage, or a child who died, or whose brother or sister died young, may only now start to grieve openly.

In years past, it was often customary not to talk much about such deaths and children's feelings were often overlooked, so you may have gone through life with an unspoken burden of sorrow. You may feel that you need to mourn for these losses, and talk about your experiences, before you can come to terms with your more recent loss.

## **Grief in children and adolescents**

Generally children do not understand the meaning of death until they are three or four years old. Even with this being the case, they feel the loss of a close friend or relative in much the same way as adults. Even in infancy it is clear that children grieve and feel great distress.

Children experience the passage of time differently to adults and can therefore appear to overcome grief quite quickly. It is important that the grief of a young person is not overlooked

## Section 3 – Sources of help and support

We have done our best to ensure all these details are correct, but if you find any errors or you know of other non-profit organisations which may be useful to include, please do let us know.

### **Cruse Bereavement Care**

Helpline: 0845 600 2227

Web: [www.crusescotland.org.uk](http://www.crusescotland.org.uk)

### **Bereavement Charity**

Helpline: Adults 07827 491 902

Children 07827 492 158

Web: [www.bereavementcharity.org.uk](http://www.bereavementcharity.org.uk)

### **Child Bereavement**

<http://childbereavementuk.org/>

Helpline: 0800 0288 840

### **Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide**

<http://uk-sobs.org.uk/>

Helpline: 0300 111 5065

### **The Compassionate Friends**

Helpline: 0845 123 2304

Web: [www.tcf.org.uk](http://www.tcf.org.uk)

The Compassionate Friends is a charitable self-help organisation. Parents who have been bereaved themselves offer friendship and support to other bereaved parents, grandparents, and their families.

### **Institute of Civil Funerals**

Tel: 01480 861411

Web: [www.iocf.org.uk](http://www.iocf.org.uk)

The Institute of Civil Funerals can help you find someone to conduct a non-religious funeral.

### **Natural Death Centre**

Tel: 01962 712 690

Web: [www.naturaldeath.org.uk](http://www.naturaldeath.org.uk)

The Natural Death Centre offers advice on arranging a funeral with or without using a funeral director.

### **Probate and Inheritance Tax Helpline**

Tel: 0300 123 1072

Web: [www.hmrc.gov.uk/cto/iht.htm](http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/cto/iht.htm)

**Samaritans**

General Helpline: 0141 248 4488 or freephone 116 123

Email: [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org)

Bereavement number and minicom line: 0800 169 3458

Web: [www.samaritans.org.uk](http://www.samaritans.org.uk)

Samaritans are ordinary people from all walks of life who offer a sympathetic listening ear to despairing and suicidal people of all ages. Lines are open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year; all calls are charged at the local rate.

**Service Personnel and Veterans Agency**

General Helpline: 0808 1914 218

Bereavement number and minicom line: 0800 169 3458

Web: [www.veterans-uk.info](http://www.veterans-uk.info)

The Service Personnel and Veterans Agency can offer support and advice to war pensioners, war widows, their dependants and carers.

**War Widows Association of Great Britain**

Tel: 0845 241 2189

Web: [www.warwidows.org.uk](http://www.warwidows.org.uk)

The War Widows Association gives advice, help and support to war widows and dependants.

Other local and national organisations can be found by looking on the internet, contacting the local council or by visiting your local library.