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Bereavement leaflet

Many condolences to yourself and your family and friends at this difficult time; we hope that this leaflet can make this time a little easier for you.

What do you need to do when a loved one dies?

Contact the place your loved one died, or your GP if your loved one died at home or in a care home. You may need to collect belongings and valuables.

A medical certificate of the cause of death will need to be completed by the doctor and sent to the registrar.

The doctor may in some cases need to discuss things with the coroner first but will let you know if this is the case. This is usually necessary only the doctor is not sure of the cause of your loved ones death or the death has been unexpected, and in these cases sometimes a post-mortem may be required before a death certificate can be issued, but not always.

Contact the Register Office on line or by telephone to make a telephone appointment to register the death of your loved one. This usually needs to be done within 5 working days.

In Sheffield it is in the Town Hall. Tel: 0114 2039427

Arrange your loved ones funeral, usually via the Funeral Director of your choice. You can contact them as soon as a professional has confirmed your loved one's death. You will be asked to consider if you prefer burial or cremation for your loved one and whether you wish to see them again before this happens.

You might want to consider who else you would like to tell about the death and also which authorities you may need to inform (the registrar will help with this). The DWP publication 'What to do after someone dies' is helpful and you can read this on line (www.gov.uk) or the registrar will give you a copy.

What the registrar needs to know

They will need to know the date and place of birth and of death, full name and address and any maiden names, last occupation, any spouse details and whether they were in receipt of any benefit or public pension.

Take the death certificate and if possible your loved ones birth certificate/marriage certificate when you go for your appointment

The Registrar will give you the certificate required for burial/cremation; you may need multiple copies of this for various paperwork later on.

Who else to inform (checklist)

- ☐ Benefits agency (pension etc)
- ☐ Bank/building society
- ☐ Work/school/college
- ☐ Executor of estate
- ☐ Solicitor
- ☐ Insurance company
- ☐ Library
- ☐ HM Revenue and Customs
- ☐ Landlord or housing agency
- ☐ Electric/gas/telephone/water
- ☐ Post office
- ☐ DVLA
- ☐ Cancel any appointments

Coping with bereavement and grief

The death of someone close can be devastating. There is no 'right' or 'wrong' way to grieve and your experience of grief will be different to other peoples. Your reactions may be influenced

by a number of things including your previous experiences of bereavement, your age and personality, your religious and spiritual beliefs, cultural background, your actual life circumstances and how you cope with loss.

The following information aims to help you understand some of the emotions which you may face during your bereavement and to make some practical suggestions to help you through this difficult time.

Understanding grief

You may initially feel shocked, numb, angry, guilty and scared. These feelings can change to feelings of sadness, pining, loneliness – thinking about how you will cope in the future may frighten you.

These are some of the common feelings that many people share and over time you may find that these feelings lessen. Whilst every person's experience of grief is unique there are some common reactions to bereavement.

'Is it normal to have physical reactions to my loss?'

Physical reactions to a death are very common. You may find you don't want to eat, you feel exhausted and frequently people find that they are unable to sleep. Poor sleep patterns can leave you unable to think clearly and feeling drained. Other physical symptoms can include feeling empty inside, headaches, stomach aches and generally feeling run down. Whilst these reactions should pass in time, if they persist you may want to consult your GP.

'Am I going mad? I keep on hearing their voice?'

You may have what you feel are some odd experiences. It is not unusual to see or hear the person who has died. Many people talk to the person as if they were still there. This can

happen when you are not expecting it, almost as if your mind has 'forgotten' for a moment that they have died.

'Why can't I stop going over and over every detail of his last few days?'

It is a common reaction to keep on repeatedly thinking about what happened particularly if the death was sudden or traumatic or occurred in traumatic circumstances. It seems to be the mind's way of processing what has happened and this tends to reduce over time. Talking with the health care professionals involved at the time of death may help.

'I feel like there's no point going on'

It is not unusual for people coping with bereavement to think about their own death and ending their own life as a way out of the pain. It is really important to share these thoughts with people you can trust. It is very common to feel hopeless and despairing after the death of someone close but if these feelings continue and you feel overwhelmed, please see the section **'When to seek further help'**

'I just feel so guilty'

A lot of people wonder whether they could have done anything differently which might have helped or prevented the death; they may feel guilt at somehow having let the person down or think constantly 'if only I had.....'. It is also common to feel relief at someone's death following a long and painful illness and then to feel guilty for feeling like this. It can be extremely painful to live with these emotions but ultimately feeling guilty will not help. If you can, try and focus on the good times and avoid focussing on events in the past which you cannot change.

If you find you cannot move past these feelings of guilt, you may choose to seek support to talk about them further.

‘Why do I feel so angry?’

Unfortunately the death of someone close can bring changes in terms of financial and family responsibilities that you may feel you can't cope with. You may feel really angry that you are being left on your own to cope with all these things. Or perhaps you feel angry with someone you consider to be responsible for the death. Anger is a healthy and normal part of grief. It is a reaction to feeling out of control and abandoned. If you do have questions about the final illness of your loved one, then it may well be helpful to make contact with the doctors or nurses who looked after them.

‘Why have people stopped caring?’

‘They don't come around anymore or ring me like they used to’. Sometimes people avoid the bereaved person because they don't know what to say or are scared of upsetting you. Sometimes people just do not realise how long it takes to recover from a death and expect you to be feeling better very quickly. You may need to tell friends and family that it helps to talk about the person who has died.

‘I can't concentrate and I am worried about how I will cope at work’

People find it hard to concentrate after a death; you may find it really difficult to read a book or watch television; it's quite normal to feel like this and to forget where things are or what you are meant to be doing. However this can be worrying and can cause problems at work. It is a good idea to talk to your manager to explain this. It may even be worthwhile exploring whether there is a possibility of altering your working hours or other ways of working to help you through this difficult period.

‘When am I going to start to feel better?’

It takes time to heal from grief and each of us responds differently. Coming to terms with a death is a very gradual process which can take a long time. In the initial days after a bereavement family and friends often pull together and support you but frequently the reality of the death takes time to sink in and it is often when family and friends think you should be ‘getting better’ and pull back a little that you feel at your most lonely and sad.

Over time people usually find that that they are able to get on with their lives whilst continuing to remember their loved ones. Generally people start to feel like this within one to two years of the death. If you are beginning to start rebuilding your life try not to feel guilty – it does not in any way mean you are being disloyal to the person who has died.

Taking care of yourself – do’s and don’t’s

It is generally agreed that the following may be helpful at this difficult time.

- Do express your emotions.
- Do remember that you need time to rest, think and sleep.
- Do be gentle with yourself. If you have a bad day, put it behind you and have another go.
- Don’t stifle your feelings.
- Don’t avoid talking about what has happened.

Supporting children and young people

Adults try to protect children, often afraid they will make the situation worse for the children, believing they are too young to understand. Adults also try to shield children, believing that not talking will protect them from feelings of sadness and pain. However this can leave children feeling excluded, afraid and alone, unable to ask questions relating to illness and death.

Like adults, children will feel a range of emotions such as: sadness, anger, confusion, fear, loneliness, guilt and disbelief.

Behaviours you might see in a child who is bereaved

- Children may become clingy
- They may show distress at separation from family members
- Children may worry about their health and that of those around them
- Children may have difficulties concentrating and become distracted
- Children can become the compliant child or the naughty child
- They may have difficulties eating or sleeping

Dealing with these behaviours can seem overwhelming and you may feel you need support

What children need:

- An opportunity to make sense of what has happened, and tell their own story
- Clear, age-appropriate information about what has happened and what is happening now, and to be included
- Reassurance about their own health and that of those around them
- Reassurance that it is not their fault
- Adults who will answer questions and share feelings
- An opportunity to remember the person who has died
- An opportunity to attend the funeral, and contribute to the way the service is run

Talking reduces both isolation and anxiety. It enables children to understand their own experience of bereavement and that of others. It fosters an ability to cope, and empowers them with a more positive outlook.

When to seek further help

The following is a list of symptoms and feelings often associated with grief. Whilst these can be a normal part of grieving, if they persist and make it difficult to manage day-to-day tasks you may wish to seek professional help if you

- Are always feeling exhausted, anxious, suicidal, depressed, helpless, experiencing uncontrollable anger, sleeplessness or feeling stressed
- Are becoming withdrawn and unable to speak or spend time with family and friends, or are finding it difficult to cope at work/school etc
- Are becoming dependent on drugs or alcohol
- Have little desire to get involved with the activities you once enjoyed

Your family doctor may be able to help particularly if you are worried about your own physical or mental health.

Support organisations

CRUSE: Bereavement counselling	0808 808 1677 / local 0114 2493328
SOBS: for people bereaved by suicide helpline	0300 111 5065 / local group 07858290078
St Luke's hospice: Bereavement counselling for families/friends of loved ones cared for by St Luke's team	0114 2357505
Child Bereavement UK: supporting bereaved children and young people	08000288840
Winston's Wish: supporting grieving children and families	08088020021

With many thanks to the creators of 'Bereavement Support in West Cheshire' leaflet on which this document is largely based.