



Bereavement during the COVID-19 pandemic

Information for family and friends

The death of a loved one at any time is incredibly challenging. Losing someone close to you right now, with the added stresses surrounding Coronavirus and with hospital visiting restrictions in place, can make this difficult time feel even harder. We are sorry that you may have had to say goodbye to your loved one without being at their bedside, and thank you for helping us to keep others safe.

Below is some information about what people can experience following a bereavement and some information about where to go for additional support. This information is for anyone who has lost someone close to them during this time, whether or not the cause of death was related to COVID-19.

How might I feel over the coming weeks and months

People experience a wide range of emotions following a bereavement, all of which are entirely normal and appropriate, but which can feel incredibly challenging. Below are some examples of the kinds of feelings you might notice.

- You may feel in complete shock and disbelief and find it difficult to accept that your loved one has really died. You may feel the person who has died is just going to walk into the room and you will carry on life as normal.
- You may feel a pain of longing and sadness. Feelings of depression after bereavement are very common and life can feel like it no longer holds any meaning.
- You may feel overwhelmed and unable to move much, concentrate or communicate well.
- You may find you get stressed or panicky about things that normally you could cope with.
- You may feel regret and wish that you had spent more time with the person or told them that you loved them more, or not had arguments with them. You may also feel angry towards the person who has died.
- You may feel jumpy, tense, or restless.
- You may feel angry and a sense that it is unfair what happened to your loved one.
- Guilt is another common reaction. People who have been bereaved of someone close often say they feel directly or indirectly to blame for the person's death.
- You may struggle with sleeping and eating and feel disoriented about what day it is.



Bereavement during the COVID-19 pandemic

You may find that the combination of feelings you experience changes over time, along with their frequency and intensity. The passage of time, good support from others and looking after yourself often makes feelings of grief feel more manageable, but understandably you may always feel some pain and sadness connected to losing your loved one.

What can I do to support myself right now?

Reach out to friends and family: Someone who can listen and offer comfort. Grieving during isolation will feel very difficult and it is important to stay connected to others in whatever virtual way you can.

Be kind to yourself. Grieving during this pandemic comes with additional stresses that we all face. Beware of unhelpful self-critical thoughts such as “I should be coping better” and be kind to yourself –say to yourself what you would say to a friend facing a similar situation. Remember that it is normal and understandable to feel the way you do, so don’t judge yourself or expect yourself to feel any other way right now.

Feelings Fluctuate: Most people struggle to stay in “Grief” the whole time. You will find you may fluctuate between feeling the loss of your loved one - looking at photos, crying, talking about them - and more “restorative” activities, such as spending time on hobbies and talking about other things. This can be helpful, and is a natural part of grieving. Accept also that there will be times when you feel overwhelmed. Painful feelings may arise like a tidal wave. Allow the wave to happen and know you will not drown.

Get the basics right: Try to eat a little and often, and eat what you want, when you feel like it. Remember to stay hydrated. Grief takes up energy. It is important to be realistic with expectations you may have of yourself and ensure you rest well when you are able to. Sleep when you can, even if only for a few hours at a time.

Think about what your loved one would say to you, if they could. Imagining a conversation with your loved one can be helpful, and it helps you to think of ways of coping that they would encourage. This may not work for everyone, so only do it if it appeals to you.

Connect with what really matters to you. Don’t lose sight of what’s important for you and your life – do the things that matter to you and that give you a sense of fulfilment. Try to let go of any feelings of guilt connected to you ‘carrying on your life’.



Bereavement during the COVID-19 pandemic

Where can I go for support?

CRUSE Bereavement Care | www.cruse.org.uk | 0844 477 9400
Bereavement support & advice for all.

The Good Grief Trust | www.thegoodgrieftrust.org
Bereavement support & advice for all.

The Compassionate Friends UK | www.tcf.org.uk | 0845 123 2304
Support for bereaved parents, siblings & grandparents.

The Lullaby Trust | www.lullabytrust.org.uk | 0808 802 6868
Support for bereaved parents who have lost a baby or young child.

The WAY Foundation | www.widowedandyoung.org.uk | 0300 012 4929
Supporting young widowed men and women.

Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide | <https://uksobs.org> | 0844 561 6855
Support for people who have lost a loved one to suicide.

Support for children:

Childhood Bereavement Network | www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk

Hope again | www.hopeagain.org.uk | 0808 808 1677

Additional support:

You can contact **your GP** to discuss bereavement support and anything else related to your emotional wellbeing.

Samaritans | www.samaritans.org | 116 123
Emotional support for all.

PALS - Patient Advice & Liaison Team | Email: pals.team@gwh.nhs.uk | 01793 604031
For complaints or questions surrounding how your loved one was cared for.



Bereavement during the COVID-19 pandemic

Other useful documents:

'Supporting yourself & others – coping with death & grief during the COVID-19 pandemic'

<https://www.bps.org.uk/sites/www.bps.org.uk/files/Policy/Policy%20-%20Files/Supporting%20yourself%20and%20others.pdf>

Government guidance – 'Support for the bereaved'

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/support-for-the-bereaved>

Acknowledgments:

Produced by GWH Clinical Health Psychology Team & Palliative Care Team (May 2020), with thanks to Cardiff Critical Care Services & Cruse Bereavement Care

This information sheet is available to order in other languages and formats. If you would like a copy, please contact us on 01793 604031 or email gwh.pals@nhs.net

Document Control

Division: CS&SS (was D&O)
Department: Bereavement
Approved Date: 2 June 2020
Next Review Date: July 2023
Document Number: CS&SS - PIL0001