

Bereaved?

Support and Practical Advice

The death of someone close can be shattering. Everyone experiences grief differently; there is no 'normal' or 'right' way to grieve. How we react will be influenced by many different things, including our age and personality, our cultural background and religious beliefs, our previous experiences of bereavement, our circumstances and how we cope with loss.

Shock: It may take you a long time to grasp what has happened. The shock can make you numb, and some people at first carry on as if nothing has happened. It is hard to believe that someone important is not coming back. Many people feel disorientated - as if they have lost their place and purpose in life or are living in a different world.

Pain: Feelings of pain and distress following bereavement can be overwhelming and very frightening.

Anger: Sometimes bereaved people can feel angry. This anger is a completely natural emotion, typical of the grieving process. Death can seem cruel and unfair, especially when you feel someone has died before their time or when you had plans for the future together. We may also feel angry towards the person who has died, or angry at ourselves for things we did or didn't do or say to the person before their death.

Guilt: 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 also feel guilt if you had a difficult or confusing relationship with the person who has died, or if you feel you didn't do enough to help them when they were alive.

Depression: Many bereaved people experience feelings of depression following the death of someone close. Life can feel like it no longer holds any meaning and some people say they too want to die.

Longing: Thinking you are hearing or seeing someone who has died is a common experience and can happen when you least expect it. You may find that you can't stop thinking about the events leading up to the death. "Seeing" the person who has died and hearing their voice can happen because the brain is trying to process the death and acknowledge the finality of it.

Other people's reactions: One of the hardest things to face when we are bereaved is the way other people react to us. They often do not know what to say or how to respond to our loss. Because they don't know what to say or are worried about saying the wrong thing, people can avoid those who have lost someone. This is hard for us because we may well want to talk about the person who has died. It can become especially hard as time goes on and other people's memories of the person who has died fade.

Practical Advice – step by step

1. Register the death

Register the death (<https://www.gov.uk/register-a-death>) within 5 days - this includes weekends and bank holidays. Before you can register the death you'll need either:

- a medical certificate - ask the GP or hospital doctor
- permission from the coroner that you can register the death - if the death was reported to a coroner (Procurator Fiscal in Scotland)

You'll get a 'certificate for a burial' to give to the funeral director, or an application for cremation which you need to complete and give to the crematorium. You must do one of these before the funeral can take place.

2. Arrange the funeral

The funeral can usually only take place after the death is registered. Most people use a funeral director, though you can arrange a funeral yourself.

3. Funeral directors

Choose a funeral director who's a member of either:

- National Association of Funeral Directors - <https://nafd.org.uk/funeral-advice/find-a-member/>
- The National Society of Allied and Independent Funeral Directors (SAIF) - <http://saif.org.uk/members-search/>

These organisations have codes of practice - they must give you a price list when asked. Some local councils run their own funeral services, for example for non-religious burials. The British Humanist Association and Institute of Civil Funerals can also help with non-religious funerals.

4. Arranging the funeral yourself

Contact the Cemeteries and Crematorium Department of your local council to arrange a funeral yourself.

5. Funeral costs

Funeral costs can include:

- funeral director fees
- things the funeral director pays for on your behalf (called 'disbursements' or 'third-party costs'), for example crematorium or cemetery fees, or a newspaper announcement about the death
- local authority burial or cremation fees

Funeral directors may list all these costs in their quote. You can get quotes from several funeral directors to see what is available within your budget.

6. Paying for a funeral

The funeral can be paid for:

- from a financial scheme the person had, for example a pre-paid funeral plan or insurance policy
- by you, or other family members or friends
- with money from the person's estate (savings, for example) - getting access to this is called applying for a 'grant of representation' (sometimes called 'applying for probate')

You can apply for a Funeral Expenses Payment (<https://www.gov.uk/funeral-payments>) if you have difficulty paying for the funeral.

7. Tell government about the death

The Tell Us Once service allows you to inform all the relevant government departments when someone dies (<https://www.gov.uk/after-a-death/>). You'll also need to tell banks, utility companies, and landlords or housing associations yourself.

8. Deal with your own benefits, pensions and taxes

Your tax, benefit claims and pension might change depending on your relationship with the person who died.

Taking Care of Yourself

Do.....

- Talk to other people about the person who has died, about your memories and your feelings.
- Look after yourself. Eat properly and try to get enough rest (even if you can't sleep).
- Give yourself time and permission to grieve.
- Seek help and support if you feel you need it.
- Tell people what you need.

Don't....

- Isolate yourself.
- Keep your emotions bottled up.
- Think you are weak for needing help.
- Feel guilty if you are struggling to cope.
- Turn to drugs or alcohol – the relief will only be temporary.

You are not alone – we are here for you...

If you feel that you cannot cope with the grief and are concerned about any of the symptoms we have mentioned, or even if you just need someone to talk to, please contact the surgery and book an appointment with your GP.

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