



Bereavement  
Network



Information and guidance  
after the death of a relative or friend  
in a nursing or residential home



We acknowledge the distress and pain felt after the death of a loved one, and would like to offer our sincere sympathy to you and your family and friends who are affected by this sad loss.

When someone dies there are many decisions and arrangements to be made. These often have to be made at a time of great personal distress. This booklet will give you help and guidance about what to do, particularly in the first few difficult days of your bereavement.

This booklet outlines some information on coping with grief which we hope may be helpful in the days ahead. There is also a section on helping children cope with the death of someone they love.



## Taking time

Death can happen at any time of life. Sometimes it's expected, because of illness and ageing. Sometimes it happens suddenly – an accident or heart attack. Whether it is expected or sudden, the initial feelings can be overwhelming.

It is important to take some time to gather your thoughts, to cry, or to talk. It can be helpful to have the support of family and friends. If you have a minister, priest or belief group representative they can also give support at this difficult time.

Please don't be afraid to ask for help. The staff who cared for your relative will be happy to answer questions and offer support. The contact details of some useful organisations are at the end of this booklet.



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## Section 1: Practical matters

If staff in the home or your funeral director need to be aware of any special religious or cultural requirements when caring for your loved one after death, let them know as soon as possible.

### Medical Certificate of Cause of Death

The GP who cared for your relative before they died will issue a certificate showing the cause of death, unless it is necessary for the Coroner to be involved. Please keep this Medical Certificate Of Cause of Death safe. You will need it to register the death.

Sometimes there are circumstances concerning the death which require reporting to the Coroner. This may mean that the medical certificate cannot be issued immediately. See page seven for more information on the Coroner.

The medical certificate may also be delayed for other reasons, as only the doctor who has seen and treated your relative in recent weeks can issue it. Only provisional funeral arrangements should be made until you receive the death certificate.

### Registering the death

When you are given a Medical Certificate of Cause of Death you must register the death with the Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages within five days

The details of the main offices of the Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages in Northern Ireland with their telephone numbers and opening times, can be found in Yellow Pages or at [www.nidirect.gov.uk](http://www.nidirect.gov.uk)

There is no cost for registering a death. The only cost will be for copies of the death certificate issued by the Registrar. It can be helpful to purchase some



extra copies of the certificate at the time you register the death as they are often required to deal with insurance or business matters.

### Who can register a death?

- Any relative of the deceased who knows the details required
- A person present at the death
- A person taking care of funeral arrangements
- The executor or administrator of the deceased's estate
- A person finding the body, or a person taking charge of the body
- A person living in and responsible for a house, lodgings or apartments where the death occurred.

### The information you will need to give to the registrar:

- When registering a death you will need to complete a registration form
- The medical certificate of cause of death (National Health Number is helpful but not essential)
- The full name of the deceased
- Date and place of death and usual address
- Marital status
- Date and place of birth
- Occupation of the deceased – if the deceased was a wife or a widow, the full name and occupation of her husband (or deceased husband) will be required
- Maiden surname (if the deceased was a woman who had married)
- The name and address of the deceased's GP



- Details of any pension apart from a state pension that the deceased may have held.

The registrar will then give you two forms:

GRO 21 – this is required for the burial or cremation to take place

Form 36 – a form which is required by Social Security Offices regarding benefits.

## Deaths and the Coroner

If your relative was not seen or treated by a doctor in the 28 days before death or if their cause of death is unknown, unexpected or does not appear to have a natural cause, then the attending doctor will have to contact the Coroner. The Coroner will then either:

- Direct the doctor to complete the medical certificate of cause of death
- Direct the doctor to complete a coroner's proforma and forward it to the coroner's office or
- Order a post mortem examination to find out the cause.

Your permission is not required for this type of post mortem. A coroner's liaison officer will make contact with you and give you all the information you need, including the initial post mortem examination findings.

The death certificate will not be available until the Coroner's investigation is complete. However, following the post mortem examination, the Coroner can authorise the release of the body to your funeral director without a medical certificate. You can then go ahead and plan the funeral.

## Consented post mortem examination

On a rare occasion the GP may ask for permission to carry out a consented post mortem examination. This may help determine the nature and extent of the disease the person died from and increase medical knowledge about it.



If this procedure is to be considered, the next of kin will be asked for their consent. The GP will discuss with them what is involved, answer any questions and complete a consent form. It will be the next of kin's decision to grant or refuse permission for this post mortem examination.

## Spiritual support

Many people value support and comfort from their minister, priest or faith/belief group representative following the death of a loved one. You may also find it useful to contact them as they can provide support and help with planning the funeral service.

## Arranging the funeral

A funeral director of your choice can help to arrange the funeral. Most funeral directors are available seven days a week and provide an on call service 365 days of the year. As soon as you wish, you can contact them and begin to make arrangements; however when the death is reportable to the coroner, only provisional arrangements should be considered. These can be confirmed when the coroner allows the body to be released.

Some things to consider:

- Your relative may have talked to you or another family member about their wishes, for example, music, hymns, style etc., or have left instructions in their will or written separately. Their solicitor may also hold this information
- It may be helpful to ask children/young people in the family if they would like to be involved in the planning of, or participation in the funeral
- The cost of a grave will vary from one council area to another. The council may also charge a burial fee, even if there is already a family grave
- Think about who will pay for the funeral. Your relative may have contributed to a plan to pay for their funeral. If this is not the case and you receive





certain benefits you can apply for financial help. Ask your funeral director or contact the Social Security Agency. The Social Security Agency Bereavement Service can be contacted free of charge by calling 0800 0852463.

Contact details for funeral directors can be found in Yellow Pages.

Should you decide to arrange the funeral without using a funeral director, the Natural Death Centre can help, contact details are in the information section of this booklet.

## Cremation

The funeral director will arrange for completion of the necessary documentation which requires the cause of death to be confirmed by two doctors.



## People to tell

You are required to notify a number of agencies/organisations that someone has died. When you do this you reduce the risk of receiving distressing and inappropriate letters/phone calls in the weeks and months ahead.

Staff in the home, a family member or trusted friend could help you with this; use the checklist below as a guide (not all will be relevant to your situation).

- Other health care professionals eg. optician, dentist, podiatrist
- Any hospital the person was attending
- Home help organiser, district nurse, day care centre etc.
- Social Security Agency to cancel payments eg. pensions, attendance allowance
- Local council if rates were paid
- Solicitor/accountant
- Bank/post office
- Building society
- Credit union
- Credit card company
- Housing executive – contact district office and/or landlord
- Mortgage company
- Pension company and/or financial advisor
- Inland revenue



- Employer and trade union
- Insurance companies – life, contents, travel, medical
- Car insurance company – if you are insured to drive the car under the deceased's name – you will cease to be insured
- Gas/electricity supplier
- Telephone company, landline and mobile
- TV/internet companies with which deceased had subscriptions
- Royal Mail if mail needs redirected
- Unsolicited mail companies.

Return the following with a note of explanation and the date of death. Keep a note of reference numbers of anything you send back.

- Registration documents of care – if a change of ownership has to be recorded
- Passport to the passport office
- Driving licence to the DVA office. Details of what to do are available on [www.nidirect.gov.uk](http://www.nidirect.gov.uk) under 'Motoring' – 'Driver licensing' – 'Telling DVA about a condition' – 'Notifying DVA about a bereavement'
- Season tickets, membership cards – you may be able to claim refund
- Library books and tickets.



## Section 2: Coping with bereavement

### Grieving

All people will experience bereavement at some time in their lives. Grief is the normal process that we all experience following a loss. People can react to loss and bereavement in different ways. You may be surprised at the sorts of feelings and symptoms you experience. Grieving is very individual, and is influenced by your personality, life experience and the relationship you had with the person who has died.

People expect to feel sad and weepy after a death but they may also feel numb. Feelings of guilt and anger are normal but can be difficult to cope with, especially if they are directed towards the person who has died.

It can be hard to accept loss. You may find yourself denying that the death has occurred and it is not unusual to think you have seen or heard the person. You may feel strained and physically run down and have difficulty eating or sleeping. You may experience despair and depression and find that you have lost all interest in living.

All these are normal reactions that many bereaved people experience. They are not signs that you are 'going mad'.

### What can help after someone dies

There are some simple suggestions that people have found helpful:

- Cry if you want to, don't bottle up feelings
- Try and talk about your thoughts and experiences to someone you know and trust



- Allow yourself time to grieve
- Ask for and accept help from others.

Some people may feel the need to move house, or quickly dispose of possessions. Changes after bereavement should generally not be made in haste but be part of a process of facing emotions and working to rebuild your life.

Grief is an individual experience and there is no defined pattern or timescale for the grieving process. The time will come when you feel ready to start taking up life afresh and perhaps doing new things. This is not being disloyal to the person who has died as they will always be part of you.

If you feel you need additional help to cope with your bereavement, your GP, minister, priest, or faith/belief group representative will be able to support you or put you in touch with voluntary and community organisations that provide support to bereaved people. Some contact details are in the information section of this booklet.



## Supporting children after someone dies

This section provides some guidance to help you talk to and support children when someone close to them dies.

Children can respond to bereavement in different ways. It is important to talk honestly to them about the death so that they know what has happened. They will then understand why everyone is upset and not be confused or feel excluded. Give them the facts and spend time with them so they can ask questions or talk about what has happened. Use simple language and avoid expressions such as 'granny has gone away' or 'fallen asleep' as they cause confusion and anxiety.

Don't be afraid to offer children the opportunity to be involved in planning and participating in the funeral, this can help them understand that the person they knew and loved is gone. Explaining to them in advance what will happen will prepare them and help them decide what they want to do.

Encouraging children to write a letter or draw a picture to place with the person who has died will give them an opportunity to be involved and can be a positive way for them to say goodbye.

Children will want to remember the person who has died. Sharing stories about them, looking at photos and keeping and displaying mementos are all ways of keeping memories alive.

When children are grieving they may become moody and aggressive or quiet and withdrawn. They can find it difficult to concentrate and have a disturbed sleep pattern. They may go back to behaving like a younger child.

It may be helpful to speak to their teacher and tell them that the death has occurred.



For most children the changes in their behaviour will pass in time. If you are worried that they still seem to be struggling after a few months, do ask your GP for help or contact one of the organisations listed at the back of this booklet.



## Section 3: Information and local support

### Registrars' offices

The telephone numbers of local Registrars' offices are listed in Yellow Pages under Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages or via [www.nidirect.gov.uk](http://www.nidirect.gov.uk) under the section 'Government, citizens and rights', then under 'Births and registration'.

### Funeral directors

Details of local funeral directors can be found in Yellow Pages, those registered under SAIF and NAFD belong to a professional body, and can be found on [www.saif.org.uk](http://www.saif.org.uk) and [www.nafd.org.uk](http://www.nafd.org.uk)

Planning to arrange a funeral without using a funeral director contact:

The Natural Death Centre

In the Hill House

Watley Lane

Twyford

Winchester SO21 1QX

Tel: 01962712690

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

### Benefits and pensions

The Social Security Agency Bereavement Service can be contacted on Freephone number: 0800 085 2463 to report a death and check if you are entitled to any benefits or financial help. All the telephone numbers of the benefits and pensions offices you will need are listed in The Phone Book in the Business Listings section under Government Offices – Benefits and Pensions or via [www.dsdni.gov.uk](http://www.dsdni.gov.uk).





[www.nidirect.gov.uk](http://www.nidirect.gov.uk) is the official government website for Northern Ireland and has a very helpful death and bereavement section which includes wills and probate; what to do after a death; and benefits, property and money. This bereavement section is within 'Government, citizens and rights'.

## Coroners Service for Northern Ireland

Mays Chambers

73 May Street

Belfast BT1 3JL

Tel: (028) 9044 6800

Website: [www.coronersni.gov.uk](http://www.coronersni.gov.uk)

Email: [coronersoffice@courtsni.gov.uk](mailto:coronersoffice@courtsni.gov.uk)

Coroners Liaison Officers

Tel: (028) 9044 6811/(028) 9044 6809/(028) 9044 6814

Contact [www.the-bereavement-register.org.uk](http://www.the-bereavement-register.org.uk) to stop all unsolicited mail.

## Support organisations

### Age NI

3 Lower Crescent

Belfast BT7 1NR

Tel: 0808 808 7575

[www.ageuk.org.uk/northern-ireland](http://www.ageuk.org.uk/northern-ireland)



## Alzheimer's Society

Unit 4 Balmoral Business Park  
Boucher Crescent  
Belfast  
BT12 6HU  
Tel: (028) 9066 4100  
[www.alzheimers.org.uk](http://www.alzheimers.org.uk)

## Citizens Advice Bureau

46 Donegall Pass  
Belfast BT7 1BS  
(can give advice on bereavement benefits)  
Tel: (028) 9023 6522  
[www.citizensadvice.co.uk](http://www.citizensadvice.co.uk)

## Cruse Bereavement Care

NI Regional Headquarters  
Prince Regent Commercial Centre  
8 Prince Regent Road  
Belfast BT5 6QR  
Tel: (028) 9079 2419  
Email: [northern.ireland@cruse.org.uk](mailto:northern.ireland@cruse.org.uk)  
[www.cruse.org.uk](http://www.cruse.org.uk)

## Samaritans

Tel: 08457 90 90 90  
[www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org)



## Lifeline

If you are in distress or despair, Lifeline counsellors are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to listen to you and give you the help and support you need, in confidence.

Tel: 0808 808 8000 (Freephone number)

[www.contactni.com](http://www.contactni.com)

## Supporting Children

### Barnardo's Child Bereavement Support Service

23 Windsor Avenue

Belfast BT9 6EE

Tel: (028) 9066 8333

[www.barnardos.org.uk/childbereavementservice](http://www.barnardos.org.uk/childbereavementservice)

### Cruse, Child Bereavement Service

NI Regional Headquarters

Prince Regent Commercial Centre

8 Prince Regent Road

Belfast BT5 6QR

Tel: (028) 9079 2419

Interactive website for young people (12-18 years):

[www.rd4u.org.uk](http://www.rd4u.org.uk)

Freephone helpline 0808 808 1677



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## Other useful websites

Child Bereavement Network: [www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk](http://www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk)

Winston's Wish: [www.winstonswish.org.uk](http://www.winstonswish.org.uk)

Child Bereavement Trust: [www.childbereavement.org.uk](http://www.childbereavement.org.uk)

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