

# When Someone Dies

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*A practical guide for relatives and  
carers*



# **A guide to the days ahead**

This booklet is designed to help you cope, providing you with the practical steps you will need to take when someone close to you dies. It also looks at the emotional adjustments that you will have to face over the coming months, with information on sources of further help and support available to you.

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## Introduction

Losing someone close to you may seem very unreal. You may feel numb with shock, or perhaps begin grieving straight away. Either response is quite normal.

The most important first step to think about is whether there are people you might contact to support you, or even be with you, over the first few days.

## Find support

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

The guidelines listed below are designed to help you and your friend or relative cope with the practical steps you will need to take.

*The staff of Hospiscare are committed to doing all that they can to help you through the painful experience you are presently facing. Our sincere condolences go out to you.*

## Steps you will need to take

### *Obtaining the medical certificate*

When someone dies in the hospice, the Hospiscare Doctor will usually issue the next of kin with a medical certificate of cause of death as soon as possible.

In some cases before being able to give you a death certificate the Hospiscare Doctor will need to discuss the case with the coroner. If you are unsure of why this is needed, please ask a member of staff.

The discussion will take place on a weekday morning. We ask that you contact us at the hospice on 01392 688044 at 1pm and we will confirm that it has been done. We will then arrange a time for you to collect the death certificate.

### *If a post-mortem is required or if the coroner needs to be involved*

For most people a post-mortem is not necessary because there is sufficient information to be clear about the cause of death. For patients who have died suddenly or those with possible occupational illness, post-mortem will be necessary.

Please ask a member of the medical or nursing staff to explain what happens.

### *Registering the Death*

The people who are legally allowed to register the death are:

- A relative
- A person present at the death
- The occupier of the premises where the death occurred if she / he was aware of the death
- The person making the funeral arrangement (this does not mean the funeral director)

Next you will need to take the medical certificate to the office of the Registrar for Births and Deaths to legally record the death. The death should preferably be registered in the district where it took place and should be done within five days.

If your relative died in the hospice the death does not have to be registered in Exeter. You may register the death in your own hometown. In this case, when a death is not registered in Exeter, it is considered to be registered 'by declaration'. The death certificate will still be issued by the Exeter office and will be posted to the family. This means a delay of about two days while the certificate is forwarded.

What you should take:

- the medical certificate, unless the coroner is involved.
- the dead person's medical card if they had one.
- any War Pension order book for the dead person.

Information you will need to know:

A registrar will talk to you in private about the person who has died. You will need to know the following information:

- the date and place of death
- the full name and surname – also maiden name if the deceased was a married woman
- the date and place of birth
- the occupation, and if the deceased was a married woman or widow, the full name and occupation of her husband
- the usual address
- if the deceased was married, the date of birth of the surviving widow or widower
- whether the deceased was receiving a pension or allowance from public funds other than a state pension.

The registrar’s office also operates a “**Tell Us Once**” service, which alerts other government agencies to a death. If you wish to use this service you will need to take the deceased’s National Insurance number with you; they will be able to advise on the services that they are able to contact and cancel for you, this will include, benefits, state pensions, blue badge, passports etc.

The registrar will give you two forms:

- A certificate for burial or cremation (green form). This is for your funeral director and allows the body to be released for burial or cremation.
- A certificate of registration of death (white form). This is for the department of social services. Read the information on the back of the form, fill it in and send to your local social service office. For Devon County Council this is listed under Care Direct, whose telephone number is 0345 155 1007.

### ***Death certificate***

The death certificate is a copy of the entry made by the registrar in the death register. This certificate is needed to deal with money or property left by the person who has died, including dealing with the will. You may need several copies of the certificate, which you can get from the registrar, for which there will be a charge.

The people you may need to notify include the following:

- |                        |                          |                               |                          |                   |                          |
|------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------|--------------------------|
| Bank, Building Society | <input type="checkbox"/> | Solicitor                     | <input type="checkbox"/> | Insurance Company | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Credit Card Company    | <input type="checkbox"/> | DVLC                          | <input type="checkbox"/> | Council Offices   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Utility Companies      | <input type="checkbox"/> | Care Direct                   | <input type="checkbox"/> | Inland Revenue    | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Royal Mail deliveries  | <input type="checkbox"/> | Employer                      | <input type="checkbox"/> |                   |                          |
|                        |                          | Department of Work & Pensions | <input type="checkbox"/> |                   |                          |

## Contacting your local registrar:

There is an appointment system in place – please telephone 0345 155 1002 to contact registrars for all areas.

### **Axminster, Budleigh Salterton, Honiton, Ottery St Mary, Seaton and Sidmouth:**

East Devon Registration Office  
East Devon Business Centre  
Heathpark Way  
Honiton, EX14 1SF  
Tel: 0345 155 1002

### **Crediton, Cullompton and Tiverton:**

Mid Devon Registration Office  
Old Heathcoat School  
Community Centre  
King Street  
Tiverton, EX16 5JJ  
Tel: 0345 155 1002

### **Exeter:**

Larkbeare House  
Topsham Rd  
Exeter, EX2 4NG  
Tel: 0345 155 1002

### **Exmouth:**

Town Hall  
St Andrews Road  
Exmouth, EX8 1AW  
Tel: 0345 155 1002

### **Okehampton:**

Okehampton Town Council  
Offices  
Fore Street  
Okehampton, EX20 1AA  
Tel: 0345 155 1002

### **Tavistock:**

West Devon Borough Council  
Offices  
Kilworthy Park  
Tavistock  
PL19 0BZ  
Tel: 0345 155 1002

## Arranging a funeral

### When to begin?

Do not make final funeral arrangements until you know that the death does not have to be reported to the coroner, since this may affect the date on which the funeral is held.

Find out if there is a Will, since this may contain requests about funeral arrangements.

### Deciding on a burial or cremation

It is up to the executor of the Will or the nearest relative to decide whether the body is to be cremated or buried. Check whether your relative left any indication of their wishes.

### Finding a funeral director

- Most funerals are arranged by a funeral director, so you will need to choose which one to use.
- The Hospiscare staff can give you a list of local funeral directors and it is wise to obtain at least two written estimates. Funeral directors who are members of the National Association of Funeral Directors (NAFD), or the Society of Allied and Independent Funeral Directors (SAIF) must give you price lists when you contact them and these prices will not be exceeded without permission.
- A basic funeral does not include the costs of things like the church or crematorium fees, flowers or notices in the local paper. However, the funeral director will be able to advise you about these.

## The funeral director will need:

- The certificate of Burial or Cremation (Green form), which the registrar will have given you.

Or, if it's a coroner's case

- The coroner will have given the relevant paperwork for burial or cremation, whichever is applicable, to the funeral director.

*If you are not happy about the service you receive from the funeral director, your complaint can be dealt with by:*

### **The National Association of Funeral Directors**

618 Warwick Road  
Solihull  
West Midlands  
B91 1AA  
Tel: 0121 711 1343

### **Society of Allied and Independent Funeral Directors**

SAIF Business Centre  
3 Bullfields  
Sawbridgeworth  
CM21 9DB  
Tel: 01279 726777

## Arranging the funeral service

If there is to be a service or ceremony, contact the appropriate person to conduct it. This may be a minister of the deceased's religion. The funeral director will advise you of other people who can conduct a funeral service. Choose the place of the funeral and decide on a time. You may want to announce the details in the local paper.

Once a time and place have been agreed, decide who may be able to help you invite others to the funeral. Decide if you wish to have flowers for the funeral, or perhaps donations to a named charity.

### Burials

Find out if your relative had already reserved grave space in a churchyard or cemetery by checking their Will and looking through their papers. The Church of England has set fees for burial and a funeral service. The organist, choir, church heating and the erection of a headstone will cost extra.

Most cemeteries are non-denominational so you can have the service or ceremony which is appropriate to the faith (if any) of your relative.

If you wish to know about woodland burials, green funerals or other ways of conducting funerals, please ask a member of staff to contact the Hospiscare chaplain who will be pleased to talk about it with you.

### Cremation

Someone can only be cremated if the cause of death is definitely known. Your funeral director will arrange for the completion of the following four forms:

- an application form (form A) signed by the next-of-kin or executor.
- two cremation certificates (forms B and C) each signed by a different doctor. These are paid for out of the funeral costs. If

the death is referred to the coroner, these two certificates are not needed. Instead, the coroner will give the funeral director (form E) which is a certificate for cremation.

- a certificate (form F) signed by the medical referee at the crematorium. The medical referee has the power to refuse cremation and either decide that a post-mortem (see above) is required or refer the matter to the coroner.

## **Paying for the funeral**

Refer to Gov.UK internet site: [www.gov.uk/after-a-death](http://www.gov.uk/after-a-death), for information about paying for a funeral. Sometimes it is possible to obtain a certain amount of money from the deceased's estate in order to pay for funeral costs.

Some employers provide occupational pension schemes that pay a lump sum to help with funeral costs. Professional bodies and trade unions sometimes have schemes to help with these expenses.

## **Financial help**

Bereavement benefit may be available on assessment and can be claimed over the phone by calling the Department of Work & Pensions on 0345 6088601. If you are already on benefits they will be able to advise accordingly.

## **Emotional aspects of grief**

**The death of a loved one is an experience that we all face at some time in our lives. Death is a part of life's cycle and to mourn deeply for someone we have loved is entirely normal.**

However, people find it uncomfortable to talk about death and in many ways we are even discouraged from thinking about it. This can make it difficult for us to turn to others for support, even though what we most need is someone to talk to and express our feelings.

Each of us experiences grief in our own particular way and no two people are alike. People from different cultural backgrounds will have different ways of mourning and different ways of supporting each other. However, there are several experiences in grief which appear to be common to everyone, and this section will describe some of these experiences in order to help you through the whole process.

### **There is a need to mourn**

The reason that every culture has some form of funeral ritual is that the ritual itself provides a focus for our grief. At the funeral, if we have not begun already, we have the opportunity to mourn openly for our loved one, and say goodbye.

Mourning is essential. We must experience whatever feelings emerge within us and try to express them out loud, preferably to someone else. It is necessarily a painful process and there are no short cuts. It is rather like having a piece of work to do. It may take months, or even years, to begin to feel like your old self again, so give yourself lots of time to complete the work of grief.

## **What can I expect to feel?**

No two people experience grief in the same way. However, the feelings described below are a sample of the many that occur. It is rare to move smoothly from one stage to the next, or even experience all the feelings below. Rather, you may have setbacks and sometimes feel as if you are having to start your grief all over again. Don't be disheartened by this. As long as you are allowing yourself to feel whatever you feel, you are doing the work of grief.

### **Shock**

To feel shocked at the news of the death of someone close to you is natural. You may feel numb and unable to believe that it's true. Some people are unable to feel much for some time; some become quiet and withdrawn; others quickly become agitated and anxious. Whatever you are feeling try to bring it to the surface and express it. Don't put on a brave face in order to protect yourself and others from embarrassment.

### **Anxiety**

It is quite common to feel anxiety (the same as fear) in the early stages of grief as you may face an unclear or unknown future. If you notice persistent physical sensations of anxiety (such as a pounding heartbeat, muscle tension, increased perspiration and increased breathing) or if you worry a lot, it may be helpful to learn how to relax.

Learning to relax is a useful skill which many people can teach you these days. If your anxiety symptoms persist, contact your GP and ask to be referred to someone who will be able to help you.

### **Anger**

Life can feel unjust when someone close to us dies, so it is natural to feel some anger in grief. For some people however, feeling angry is the only way they know how to grieve.

You may feel angry at the unfairness of the fact that your relative is dead.

Or you may feel that medical services could have done more or should have reacted differently.

If you have concerns about the service you have received, ask for a discussion with a senior member of staff involved in the care of your relative.

Mostly we feel anger about the death itself and our feelings of helplessness. A part of you may be angry with the person who has died (for example, ‘How could they leave me like this?’ or ‘Why didn’t they look after themselves properly when they were alive?’) and you may feel awkward about sharing these feelings. Again, try to talk about them with someone you trust and who is a good listener. If you bottle up your feelings they will only catch up with you later.

## **Guilt**

Another universal feeling in grief is guilt, which is simply anger turned in on oneself. You may think that there was more that you could have done, that you could have reacted more quickly to signs that the person was in distress. You may have been, or felt yourself to have been, responsible for your relative who has died and now that they are gone you blame yourself for not having taken better care of them. It is worth remembering that for every action we take in life there are always many other actions we could have taken. We usually simply take the action which seems to be the right one at the time.

If you were caring for your relative for a long time before they died, your feelings of loss may be complicated by some milder feelings of relief. For example, if both you and the deceased are released from a long painful illness, or if the relationship with the deceased had been difficult at times. This is quite understandable and does not make you a bad person for feeling it. It helps if you can talk through these feelings with someone else so that you can let go of your guilt.

If the death was more sudden it may have left you feeling guilty about things left unsaid. There is often a great deal of unfinished emotional

business. Perhaps you did not say how much you cared or you did not say you were sorry about things you may have said or done in the past, or perhaps you did not say thank you for the happiness that he or she brought you, or maybe you did not say goodbye.

It is worth remembering the good things that you were able to give them when they were alive; if you think of what they would be feeling about you right now, if you had died and they had lived, you may have a clearer idea of what you meant to them.

It is important to express these painful thoughts and feelings in both tears and words since it is only through expressing our grief that we are able to get through it effectively.

## **Depression**

Acute anxiety and anger often gradually give way to more constant feelings of depression and apathy (a feeling that you don't want to do anything). This happens as you finally come to realise at a deeper level that your loved one will never return. The fight and anger against this realisation and the feeling that somehow none of this is real dissolves into a well of despair.

Unfortunately, these feelings of hopelessness often coincide with the time when all the immediate friends and family who were available for support at the funeral seem to be scarce. Friends are often embarrassed at not knowing what to say and, sometimes without realising it themselves, they stay away.

Similarly, you may worry that you will become a burden on others and consequently avoid contacting the very people you would find it easy to talk to. Try to remember that if a friend had turned to you for support in their grief, there is a good chance you would feel honoured that you had been asked to help them.

If you are feeling particularly low, you may wish to contact one of the bereavement counselling organisations listed at the back of this booklet. Also, you may wish to talk it through with your GP who will be

able to advise and possibly prescribe medication. Drugs such as anti-depressants cannot take away the feeling of grief but your doctor may feel that they have a role to play.

### **Expressing your grief**

Grief raises many emotions and it is important to allow yourself to feel whatever you feel. In the early months of grief you will probably feel moments of sharp intense grief interspersed with a more constant sense of dull loss.

You may feel lost in the world and simple daily chores may involve painful recollections of tasks previously done together. Going to bed at night or waking in the morning may feel particularly lonely and upsetting. People sometimes have difficulty falling asleep. Because grief is such an exhausting variety of emotions, you may feel tired a lot of the time.

### **Taking care of yourself**

The work of grief is exhausting and places great physical demands on the body, as well as the more obvious emotional ones. You may feel physically exhausted a lot of the time and consequently have more colds and flu than normal. If any symptom persists, be sure to tell your doctor.

Try to look after yourself. Eat well and regularly, even if you are not particularly hungry. Get plenty of rest, and sleep if you can. If you have persistent or continuing sleep problems, speak to someone who can help. Your doctor may be able to refer you to someone who can train you to relax naturally and therefore sleep more easily.

Give yourself lots of time. Don't rush back to work if you are not feeling up to it, but keep your workplace informed. If necessary, get a letter from your doctor to give to your boss in order to protect your job.

Try to plan things in the future to work towards and look forward to, but don't make any major life decisions, such as moving house. So often decisions made in grief are regretted later on. It may help to involve your friends and family in your planning and listen to their views as well as your own. Many people find that a gentle routine helps.

## Recovery

Grief is such a universal human experience that to talk of recovery is perhaps inaccurate. However, time really is a great healer when it comes to grief. When you are newly bereaved, it is hard to imagine that eventually you will find a way to live without your loved one. It may be hard to imagine that you will ever be able to laugh or enjoy yourself again. But somehow, with time, you will be able to take up the threads of your life and begin to weave a new future. It may be a different future from what you expected but it will not necessarily be any less positive than the past. There will almost certainly be good things waiting for you in the future.

There may be new hurdles to face, things to learn and challenges to meet. In facing these challenges, friends and relatives are an important means of support. Therefore, do your best to maintain your contact with people who have been important to you in the past.

Overcoming grief is not a smooth process. There are many ups and downs. Pangs of grief can sometimes occur years after a death, when you thought you had recovered from it. This is to be expected as you will never forget the person you have lost. Their life, however long or brief it was, will have changed the course of your own forever.

You may find it comforting to realise that, even though someone dear to you has died, their influence on you and others lives on.

The person you are today is probably different from what you would have been had you never known the dead person. In some ways therefore, you were influenced by them and so they live on through you.

In time you may find you have not thought about your grief for a few minutes, and later this may stretch to hours at a time. At first you may feel guilt that you are not actively grieving, particularly if you have managed to enjoy yourself for a change. Gradually you will feel more comfortable about enjoying the company of other people and new relationships. But, whatever happens, you need not fear that you will ever forget what your loved one meant to you.

## The do's and don'ts of grief

- Do express your feelings as much as possible.
- Do talk through what has happened and what you are feeling with someone you trust (your family, a close friend or an appropriate support group).
- Do contact Hospiscare or one of the voluntary organisations listed in this booklet if you would like someone to talk to. They are there to help you.
- Do take care of yourself - get lots of rest, eat well and give yourself lots of time to grieve.
- Do begin to make longer-term plans for the future so that you always have something to look forward to. But remember, don't rush into any big life changes.
- Do choose a funeral director you like and trust.
- Do contact your doctor if you feel unwell or would like the doctor to refer you to someone to talk to.
- Do keep in touch with friends and family. Remember that most people feel honoured to be asked to help. However, some people may feel awkward and embarrassed about offering their help, so it may be left up to you to ask for it, even though this can be difficult.
- Don't hide your feelings. Try to bring out into the open whatever you are feeling. This is central to the work of grief.

- Don't rush into having the funeral right away unless it is the practice of your culture and don't be persuaded to have an expensive funeral unless you really want it.
- Don't make any major life changes while you are still grieving. Give yourself lots of time to think about changes you may wish to make and discuss these plans with others.
- Don't enter into any financial or legal arrangements unless you fully understand them.
- Don't hurry yourself to overcome your grief. There is no fixed time that it takes to get over your loss.
- Don't let others rush you into anything before you are ready. But remember that sometimes you may not know whether you are ready for something unless you give it a try.
- Don't turn to drugs, smoking or alcohol to stop yourself feeling the pain or grief. If you find yourself going down this path, talk to your GP sooner rather than later.

## **Sources of further help and support:**

**Further information on the practical aspects of death can be found on the Gov.UK internet site: [www.gov.uk/after-a-death](http://www.gov.uk/after-a-death). It is a useful source of more detailed information.**

Many people manage to get through their grief with the help of their friends and family, and without any professional help. However, sometimes it can be helpful to talk through your feelings with someone who is caring and interested but not directly involved with your life.

Sometimes it is only clear that you need professional help some weeks or months after a bereavement. If you are worried that you are having problems with your grief, you might find it reassuring to talk to one of the following:

### **Your GP**

Your doctor is responsible for coordinating your overall physical and emotional health. Your GP may be able to refer you to a specialist bereavement counsellor, or they may encourage you to contact one of the voluntary groups.

### **Hospiscare bereavement support**

Hospiscare is here to help support you when someone dies. Nigel Mason, Hospiscare's chaplain, oversees the bereavement service and is available to talk to at any time during this difficult period in your life.

The bereavement service offered by Hospiscare consists of trained bereavement volunteers who will make contact by telephone to the bereaved after the funeral has happened. It is an invitation to talk on a one to one basis either by telephone or by meeting with our bereavement volunteers. Such support continues for as long as the bereaved may wish.

**For further information contact your local Hospiscare community nurse:-**

<b>Axminster:</b>	<b>01297 32408</b>
<b>Budleigh Salterton:</b>	<b>01395 443629</b>
<b>Crediton:</b>	<b>01363 771067</b>
<b>Exeter:</b>	<b>01392 688000</b>
<b>Exmouth:</b>	<b>01395 224089</b>
<b>Honiton:</b>	<b>01404 549166</b>
<b>Okehampton:</b>	<b>01837 658077</b>
<b>Ottery St Mary:</b>	<b>01404 549166</b>
<b>Seaton:</b>	<b>01297 626800</b>
<b>Sidmouth:</b>	<b>01395 578706</b>
<b>Tiverton:</b>	<b>01884 242777</b>

You can also phone the supportive care team on 01392 688008 who will be pleased to talk to you at any time to offer support during this difficult period.

Children and young people may have particular needs in coming to terms with the death of someone special to them.

If it would be helpful to talk about their needs, please telephone the supportive care team on the number above.

Our chaplain is available to talk with you whether you are a believer in any faith or none. You can contact him on 01392 688009. If he is unable to help you he will try to find a person who can or will put you in touch with a person of your own faith.

***Further information will be sent in the next few weeks outlining our bereavement services.***

Hospiscare are grateful for all donations given, whether they are monetary or flowers from a funeral. All these kind donations will be acknowledged with a letter; this can sometimes take several weeks as the funeral directors will hold on to all monetary gifts for about six weeks giving others time to send their cheques.

Hospiscare provides a house clearance service; we can collect items that you are unable to take to a Hospiscare shop, like electricals or unwanted furniture that you may wish to donate. You can contact our house clearance team on 01392 453057, or email: [clearance@hospiscare.co.uk](mailto:clearance@hospiscare.co.uk)

## Voluntary bereavement services

### Cruse – Bereavement Care

A national bereavement volunteer counselling service with branches in Exeter and other centres:

Tel: Cruse Devon 0300 330 5466 or their national helpline on 0808 8081677

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

### Age UK

A national organisation for older people

Crediton Tel: 01363 775008

Exeter Tel: 01392 202092

Tiverton Tel: 01884 255369

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

### Citizens Advice

Dix's Field

Exeter

EX1 1QA

Tel: 03444 111 444



# Hospiscare is a charity

We make a difference in Exeter, Mid and East Devon because we are part of our local community, because we are supported as a charity and because we are professionals in a range of disciplines. We are only able to provide our vital services to families with your support – our dedicated, professional care is free to those who need it, so we need your help to employ specialist nurses, doctors and consultants. If you would like to make a contribution towards the charity, please let us know.

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## Tell us about your experience of Hospiscare

Hospiscare welcomes feedback, compliments and complaints and we use them to develop our staff and services.

We know the majority of people have a positive experience, but encourage all your feedback, positive or negative. We investigate complaints thoroughly and treat them as an opportunity to learn and improve our practice.

To tell us about your experience of Hospiscare please contact:

Director of Nursing

Hospiscare, Searle House, Dryden Road, Exeter EX2 5JJ

Phone: 01392 688000

Should you make a complaint, we will send you a letter or email with details of any investigation with an expected timescale where possible. If you wish to see a copy of Hospiscare's Complaints Policy please ask. If you are dissatisfied with our response you can contact:

### **The Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman**

Millbank Tower, Millbank, London SW1P 4QP

Email: [phso.enquiries@ombudsman.org.uk](mailto:phso.enquiries@ombudsman.org.uk)

Customer Helpline Tel: 0345 015 4033

***Let us know if you would like the information in this leaflet in a different format; for example in large print or spoken word.***

Hospiscare is registered by: Care Quality Commission, Finsbury Tower, 103-105 Bunhill Row,

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Hospiscare, Searle House, Dryden Road, Exeter, EX2 5JJ

Telephone: 01392 688000 Fax: 01392 495981

[www.hospiscare.co.uk](http://www.hospiscare.co.uk)

Registered charity no. 297798



**Hospiscare**  
Caring in the heart of Devon