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University Health Board



## Help following bereavement of someone close to you

May 2020 - This booklet has been written to take into account the special circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic. Information contained herein may change when special measures cease.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board would like to offer you and your family our deepest sympathy at this time. Coping with bereavement can be extremely difficult and we know that it is not easy to turn your thoughts to the practical arrangements that are now needed. This booklet has been written by the Health Board staff for people bereaved of all ages, in an attempt to give you the essential information you need at this time.

We do hope it will be helpful for you and we would appreciate any feedback if you feel the information could be improved.

## **WHEN SOMEONE CLOSE TO YOU DIES**

Whether it has been sudden and unexpected, or you have known for some time that it was imminent, the death of someone close to you may be hard to come to terms with. There is always shock and grief and there are so many things that need to be done. Grieving is natural affecting all people differently. You may experience a mixture of emotions such as numbness, shock, disbelief, grief and sometimes anger. It may help to share these feelings with friends and relatives who may also share the same feelings of loss.

For some people extra support may be necessary from support services, which are detailed in this booklet. This may be of particular importance where those close to the person are particularly distressed or have a mental health problem or learning disability.

Following the death of someone close to you there are certain formalities to which you must attend and this booklet aims to guide you through this.

## **COVID-19 (Coronavirus) PANDEMIC**

Losing a loved one is hard at the best of times. In this current pandemic, restrictions on hospital visiting and isolation at home make it harder to cope with a loss. Try to keep in contact as much as possible with friends and family by phone. Consider using devices with FaceTime, Skype, Zoom etc. to keep in contact, as seeing another person can feel more personal than just talking on the phone.

A number of procedures have changed during the pandemic in order to reduce the risk of infection to yourself and to others. Everything from the registration of a death to planning of funerals has been affected. This booklet will tell you about some of the changes.

## **WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS?**

Following the death of a relative or friend there are certain formalities to which you must attend. The most important things you need to consider first are:

- Registering the death
- Choosing a Funeral Director
- Deciding whether there is to be a burial or cremation

### **1. MEDICAL CERTIFICATE OF CAUSE OF DEATH**

In order to register a death, a Medical Certificate of Cause of Death must be issued by a

doctor. In the current pandemic, these certificates are sent directly from the doctor to the Registrar.

### **If the death was in hospital**

You should make telephone contact with the Bereavement Officer in the hospital. The Bereavement Officer will ask you some questions of your loved one in order to assist them in the coordination of the relevant paperwork - i.e. If Burial or Cremation is required. The Bereavement Officer will be able to confirm when a Medical Certificate of Cause of Death is issued.

The relevant contact numbers are as follows;

Tel: 01443 443249 - Bereavement Officer, Royal Glamorgan Hospital

Tel: 01685 728625 - Bereavement Officer, Prince Charles Hospital

Tel: 01656 754088 - Bereavement Officer, Princess of Wales Hospital

Tel: 01443 430022 (ext 72644) - Bereavement Officer, Ysbyty Cwm Rhondda

Tel: 01443 715217 - Bereavement Officer, Ysbyty Cwm Cynon

The Bereavement Officers are normally available between the hours of 9:00am and 4.00pm Monday to Friday, however they are not available at weekends or on Bank Holidays. Within Community Hospitals the times are 9.00am - 12.30pm.

As part of the administration process, the Bereavement Officer will automatically inform the General Practitioner of the death.

### **If the death was at home**

The deceased's GP will usually be responsible for issuing the Medical Certificate of Cause of Death. You should contact their GP surgery to discuss this with them.

### **Involvement of the Coroner**

In some cases the Coroner has to be informed of the death and the Registrar be in receipt of written authorisation from the Coroner in order to register the death. This will mean that registration of the death may be delayed but by no more than 5 calendar days.

## **2. MAKE CONTACT WITH A FUNERAL DIRECTOR**

You may contact a Funeral Director as soon as you wish. You can inform a Funeral Director of a death before you obtain a Death Certificate. There may be a need to check if the deceased has made a Will and has left specific instruction regarding the funeral arrangements. Funeral Directors will be able to give you support and advice on many of the things you need to think about.

There are currently restrictions on who may attend funerals, which are based on advice from the government. Local arrangements may vary and are likely to change in the weeks and months ahead. You should discuss this with the funeral director.

## **3. REGISTERING THE DEATH**

### **Where to Register**

The death needs to be registered at the Office of the Registrar of Birth and Deaths nearest to where the person died:

**Rhondda Cynon Taff** Tel: 01443 494024  
**Merthyr Tydfil** Tel: 01685 727333  
**Bridgend** Tel: 01656 642392/93/94/91

In the current pandemic, Register Offices are closed to the public, and registering a death will be done over the telephone.

### **When to register**

As soon as you have been informed that a Medical Certificate for the Cause of Death has been sent to the Registrar, arrangements can be made to register the death. A death must be registered within five working days following the death unless referred to the Coroner.

**Important to note:** To register a death at the Rhondda Cynon Taff and Merthyr Tydfil Register Office, please phone the Register Office on the above numbers to arrange a telephone appointment. In the Bridgend area, the Register Office will contact you directly.

### **Who may register a death?**

It is usually a relative that registers the death. If it is not possible for a relative to register the death the Registrar can give you advice on who may register.

### **Information required by the Registrar**

Before phoning the Registrar, it will be helpful to have ready:

1. The date and place of death.
2. The full name of the deceased (and maiden/ former name if applicable)
3. The deceased's date and place of birth.
4. The deceased's occupation and, in cases where the deceased is female, the name and occupation of her husband.
5. The deceased's usual address.
6. Whether the deceased is in receipt of a pension or allowance from public funds.
7. If the deceased was married, the date of birth of the surviving widow or widower.

Once you have registered the death you will be issued with two certificates. These will be sent to you by first class post.

1. Death Certificate. The Registrar will issue you with as many death certificates as you require although all copies are chargeable. Photocopies are not usually acceptable for matters such as banking, insurance etc.
2. Certificate of Burial / Cremation (known as the "Green Form"). This form needs to be given to the Funeral Director.

In addition to the above you will be issued with a Registration/ Notification of death form which needs to be completed and returned to the Department of Work and Pensions (known as the "White Form").

## **4. ITEMS THAT MAY NEED RETURNING**

Following the death of an individual, certain items will need to be returned to the issuer. These may include Passport, National Insurance card, Library cards, Season Tickets, Driving Licence, NHS loaned equipment, Order books/Giro cheques and Pension books. When doing this please remember to make a note of any identifiable numbers for future reference.

Unused medication should be returned to a pharmacy, and should not be flushed down the sink or toilet.

Financial help may be required and it is possible that you may qualify for help from the state. Contact Department of Work and Pensions for details: Tel: 0800 169 190.

## **OTHER HELPFUL INFORMATION**

Following a death from COVID-19 infection, due to the nature of the virus, the recommended guidelines are that clothing should be destroyed. In hospital, valuables will be double-bagged, and these bags must not be opened until 7 days after death. Please call the relevant ward to arrange collection.

## **VIEWING YOUR NEXT OF KIN**

During the COVID-19 pandemic, it will not be possible to view your next of kin at the hospital mortuary. Arrangements for viewing at the Funeral Director's Chapel of Rest may vary from one Funeral Director to another, so you should discuss this with them.

## **CHAPLAINCY**

Hospital Chaplains are available through the Bereavement Officer or Hospital Ward for advice and support for all faiths. Other support can be sought as follows:

Jewish Faith: Cardiff United Synagogue, Tel: 02920 473728

Islamic Faith: Muslim Council for Wales, Tel: 02920 224466 or 02920 344555

You will want to make sure that arrangements are made efficiently and yet with dignity and respect for the person who has died. You may want to do all this yourself, but if not, we suggest you seek the help of a relative or a trusted friend. People like to feel they are taking part and will be glad to help. Try to involve one or two people who will share the burden of telling family and friends the sad news.

## **THE CORONERS' ROLE**

In some circumstances it will not be possible for an attending doctor to issue a Medical Certificate of the Cause of Death. There are many reasons why this cannot be done, but in general it is when the death has been sudden, unexpected or due to an accident. The Coroner has responsibility for investigations into these deaths. The Doctor/ Bereavement Officer will be able to discuss this with you. In these circumstances the hospital will inform the Coroner's Office. The Coroner may order (by law) a post-mortem examination without obtaining permission from the relatives, in order that the cause of death can be ascertained. In cases of Coroner's post-mortem the Coroner's Officer will contact you and will explain the procedure. The Coroner then takes responsibility for the issue of the certificate.

The Coroner will advise you when final funeral arrangements can be made.

A Coroner's inquest without a post-mortem may also be a necessity to establish the surroundings of a person's death if no post-mortem is required.

**Note that COVID-19 is not a reason for referral to the Coroner.**

## ROLE OF PATIENT ADVOCACY LIAISON SERVICE (PALS)

- To listen to your comments, suggestions, compliments or queries about services the Health Board provides
- Help to resolve problems where possible, quickly on your behalf
- Provide contact details and referral pathways to other voluntary/support groups or organisations across your local community
- Provide an “On the Spot” information service
- Liaise with Hospital staff on your behalf if necessary
- Provide a link between you and the hospital
- Provide advice on the Health Board’s formal complaints process

The Patient Advocacy Liaison Service can be contacted as follows:

Prince Charles Hospital and Ysbyty Cwm Cynon  
Tel: 01685 724468 (08.30 – 16.30 Monday to Friday)

Royal Glamorgan Hospital and Ysbyty Cwm Rhondda  
Tel: 01443 443039 (08.30 – 16.30 Monday to Friday)

Princess of Wales Hospital, Bridgend  
01656 754194 (08.30 – 17.00 Monday to Friday)

E mail: CTUHB\_PALS@wales.nhs.uk

## PEOPLE YOU MAY NEED TO INFORM

### Legal / Financial

- Bank/Building Society
- Solicitor
- Executor
- Insurance Companies
- Credit Card Companies

### Employment/ Pension

- Job Centre Plus Office
- Inland Revenue
- Personal Pension Companies
- Employer
- Trade Union
- Department of Work & Pensions

### Domestic & Personal

- Social Services
- TV Licensing
- Gas / Electricity / Water
- Newspaper / Milk Delivery
- Telephone/ IT Provider
- Rental Companies
- General Practitioner
- Vehicle Licensing
- Council Offices
- Cancel Appointments
- Clubs / Association
- Royal Mail Deliveries

## SOME USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

Coroner's Office                      Tel: 01443 281100  
Pensions Office                        Tel: 0800 7310469  
Probate Registry of Wales        Tel: 02920 474373

# Coping with Grief and Loss

Grieving is a normal process following the death of someone we love. However, with the effects of the pandemic, we may need extra support in our grief, and we may need to adjust our normal coping strategies and the ways we mourn. Many of the ways we usually grieve may not be possible for a while, for example, getting together to remember the person who has died, hugs or handshakes, getting out in nature, going to religious gatherings or families and communities getting together in large groups.

We all live with grief in our own way; however, there are some feelings and reactions that many people experience:

- Numbness and disbelief - "it hasn't really happened".
- Feeling very weepy or being unable to cry at all.
- Feelings of anger towards others or the situation.
- Thinking that you have seen or heard the person, or searching for them.
- Anger, anxiety, loneliness, depression or feelings of 'I can't cope'
- Feelings of guilt. We might feel worried that their death was in some way our fault.
- Difficulty sleeping or eating and in concentrating, and finding your memory is affected.
- Feeling physically low and concerned about your health.
- Regret about all the plans and dreams that you had before.
- Challenges to your beliefs.
- Low motivation for doing anything, even taking basic care of yourself can feel like a huge challenge.
- Finding everyday situations and relationships difficult to cope with.

Grieving is a gradual process that can take a long time; it is important that you give yourself time to grieve and take care of yourself during this time. It can also feel like you are doing better, and then feel like you go back to square one again. This is normal. Grief can come in waves, you may feel okay one minute and then very low the next, or have good days and bad days. Sometimes if you have had a challenging relationship with the person who has died it can be more, not less, difficult - you may be grieving the relationship you wish you'd had, as well as the person who has died. You may also feel like your grief is suspended during the crisis - like you have gone into lockdown as well. Grief affects everyone differently, don't feel guilty about your feelings, accept them and take time to grieve.

*"Grief... is really just love. It's all the love you want to give, but cannot. All that unspent love gathers up in the corners of your eyes, the lump in your throat, and in that hollow part of your chest. Grief is just love with no place to go."* [Jamie Anderson]

## Here are some suggestions for things that may help

- Make a special place in your house or garden where you can remember the person who has died. Use a shelf or a small table which can be a focus for your love, and your grief. You can put pictures of your loved one and anything else that was special to them there. Lighting a candle can be a physical reminder of your love for them.
- Reach out to friends and family, or some of the organisations listed below. It is so important to talk about it, even if it is on the phone, or through a window, or through the internet. Talking to someone in a similar position can also help, but your experience will always be unique to you.

- If it is not possible to have a normal funeral or memorial service, see if you can gather online, or ask everybody who would have attended to light a candle or listen to a piece of music at the same time so you can find a way of connecting emotionally even if not physically. Recording the funeral, even if you plan a memorial later, can help anyone who couldn't attend.
- People will want to help but may not know what to say or do - tell them. 'Please can I talk about what happened?' or 'Please can you send me something/shop for me/send me music' or 'Please can we talk about something normal or distract me' Ask for what you need - there is no right or wrong.
- Write a journal. Writing the feelings down can help to give them shape and movement. Drawing pictures of how you are feeling or singing can help give the feelings a channel rather than feeling so 'stuck'. Grief needs to move.
- Grief and trauma are felt in the body as much as the mind. Try to move your body in any ways that feel good. Stretching, yoga, exercise, dancing, even just a little bit can help the feelings feel less 'stuck'.
- You may feel that you didn't get a chance to say goodbye properly or say all things you wanted to. Writing a letter to the person who has died can give an opportunity to express those feelings, even though you cannot send it.
- Sometimes anger is easier to feel than grief. The death of a relative or friend can affect families very strongly, and misunderstandings are easy if you are communicating by telephone or text message. Try to give each other the benefit of the doubt, and avoid arguments if possible.
- Spend time with/in nature, even if it is just through the window, maybe looking at how it changes all the time. This time will pass too.
- Meditation or mindfulness, or any other spiritual practice can help bring perspective and comfort and help the feelings be less overwhelming.
- Keeping some kind of routine can be helpful. Try to eat regularly even if you don't feel hungry. Try to keep a sleep rhythm. Small achievable tasks can help, but try not to expect too much of yourself.
- Plan for what you will do when we are able to be out and about again - both to remember the person and also any places you want to visit to remember them especially.
- Don't push yourself into major decisions if possible—there are no right times for doing anything, only at your pace.
- Don't rush to dispose of or distribute clothing and possessions—do this when you feel ready.
- Try to let children share your grief and encourage them to express their feelings. Talking, reading, drawing and playing games can be helpful. Organisations below have loads of good resources and advice.
- Plan for anniversaries, such as Christmas and birthdays, and the anniversary of your loved one's death.
- Recall happy memories—this may be painful, but can also be comforting. Looking at photographs and keeping personal mementoes may help.
- Be gentle with yourself.

You may feel very alone or lonely. We are all in this together and we as a community will do whatever we can to support you.

If you feel that you are not coping, you can seek advice from your GP, or contact one of the organisations on the following pages.



## HELP AND SUPPORT INFORMATION

**In response to the COVID-19 (Coronavirus) pandemic, the following hospices will be offering telephone and online bereavement support. You can access this support by contacting them as follows:**

**Merthyr Tydfil area** – Hospice of the Valleys

Website: [www.hospiceofthevalleys.org.uk/for-families-carers/bereavement/](http://www.hospiceofthevalleys.org.uk/for-families-carers/bereavement/)

Email: [enquiries@hospiceofthevalleys.com](mailto:enquiries@hospiceofthevalleys.com)

Tel: 01495 717277

**Rhondda and Cynon Valleys** – St David's Hospice

Website: [stdavidshospicecare.org/what-we-do/bereavement-care](http://stdavidshospicecare.org/what-we-do/bereavement-care)

Email: [bereavement@stdavidshospicecare.org](mailto:bereavement@stdavidshospicecare.org)

Tel: 01633 851051

**Taff Ely and Bridgend** – City Hospice

Website: [www.cityhospice.org.uk/patients-and-families/bereavement-service](http://www.cityhospice.org.uk/patients-and-families/bereavement-service)

Email: [city.hospice@wales.nhs.uk](mailto:city.hospice@wales.nhs.uk)

Tel: 02920 671 422

### **Cruse Bereavement Care**

Offering support, advice to adults, children, and young people when someone dies.

Tel: 0808 8081677 (National Helpline)

Website: [www.cruse.org.uk](http://www.cruse.org.uk)

Email: [helpline@cruse.org.uk](mailto:helpline@cruse.org.uk)

Merthyr Tydfil and Rhondda Cynon-Taf

Tel: 01685 876020

Email: [merthyr.rct@cruse.org.uk](mailto:merthyr.rct@cruse.org.uk)

Bridgend

Tel: 01792 462845

Email: [morgannwg@cruse.org.uk](mailto:morgannwg@cruse.org.uk)

Cruse Website for Young People

Website: [www.hopeagain.org.uk](http://www.hopeagain.org.uk)

### **Government Information**

Helpful information can be found on the government website.

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

### **2 Wish Upon a Star**

Provides bereavement support for families who have suddenly and traumatically lost a child or young adult aged 25 years and under.

Tel: 01443 853125

Website: [www.2wishuponastar.org](http://www.2wishuponastar.org)

### **The Compassionate Friends**

Offering support to bereaved parents and families after the death of a child of any age from any cause.

Tel: 0345 1203785

Email: [info@tcf.org.uk](mailto:info@tcf.org.uk)

**Age UK**

Offering information and advice on money, care, health and housing.  
Tel: 0800 6781602

**Age Cymru**

Tel: 02920 431555  
Website: [www.ageuk.org.uk](http://www.ageuk.org.uk)

**Citizens Advice Line**

Offering a range of advice on benefits, debt, money, housing and family.  
Tel: 0344 4772020

**Marie Curie**

Information and support relating to terminal illness and when someone dies.  
[www.mariecurie.org.uk/help/support](http://www.mariecurie.org.uk/help/support)  
Tel: 08000 902309

**Samaritans**

Tel: 116 123 (24 hour)  
Website: [www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org)

**SANDS**

Works to support anyone affected by the death of a baby, working to improve the care bereaved parents and families receive and promoting research to reduce the loss of babies' lives.  
Tel: 0808 1643332  
Email: [helpline@sands.org.uk](mailto:helpline@sands.org.uk)

**Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide**

Tel: 0300 1115065  
Email: [support@uksobs.org](mailto:support@uksobs.org)

**Terence Higgins Trust - (HIV Services & Support)**

Tel: 0808 8021221  
Website: [www.tht.org.uk](http://www.tht.org.uk)

**Victim Support (help after crime)**

Tel: 0808 1689111  
Website: [www.victimsupport.org.uk](http://www.victimsupport.org.uk)

**Winston's Wish**

Charity offering support and advice for bereaved children. Tel: 0808 8020021  
Website: [www.winstonswish.org.uk](http://www.winstonswish.org.uk)