

When someone has died – information for you



When someone close to you dies, you may be unsure what to do. We hope this leaflet will help you through the first few days. It explains:

- what you need to do, and
- how you may feel.

What do I need to do first?

- You will need to tell close family and friends what has happened.
- You will need to get the death certificate (sometimes called the 'medical certificate of cause of death' or 'form 11') from the doctor.
- You must register the death – you will need the death certificate to do this. See page 5 for more about this.
- You should think about the funeral. If you wish, you can contact a funeral director before you register the death. See page 6 for more about this.
- You should look for the will of the person who has died. If you can't find it, their solicitor may have a copy.

The death of someone close can be overwhelming, and you may need help to do all these things. Relatives, friends or neighbours can support you.

A priest, minister or religious leader may be able to help you or tell you where you can find help.

You can also get advice from a funeral director, your family doctor or a solicitor. Some organisations, for example Citizens Advice Scotland, may also be able to help. You will find contact details for some of these organisations in the 'How can I find out more?' section on pages 13 to 16.

What will happen next?

How will I get the death certificate?

- The doctor will normally give you the death certificate just after the death or the next day. Sometimes it may take longer, for example if the doctor needs to find out more about why someone died.
- You need to take the death certificate with you to register the death at an office of the Registrar of Births, Marriages and Deaths.
- The death certificate gives information about the person who has died, including what caused their death.
- You should read the death certificate and ask the doctor to explain anything you don't understand. You should do this before you go to the registrar's office.

What if I want to see the person who has died?

- If the person died in hospital and you would like to come back to see them, you can ask the ward staff to arrange this for you.

- You can ask a funeral director to arrange for you to see the person at the funeral home.
- A funeral director can usually arrange for the person who has died to be at home before the funeral, if this is what you wish.

What happens if the person who died wanted to donate their organs or tissue?

- You should tell the doctor or hospital staff that the person wished to donate their organs or tissue. You will need to explain that you know this because the person:
 - told you about this
 - included their wishes in a will, or
 - had a donor card or signed the Organ Donor Register.
- It may be possible to use tissue for transplant, but this must be done within 48 hours of the death.

What happens if there is a hospital post-mortem?

- A hospital post-mortem (sometimes called an autopsy) is the medical examination of a person who has died.
- Sometimes the doctor will ask for a hospital post-mortem to find out more about why someone died.
- If this happens, the doctor will always discuss it with you first. A hospital post-mortem can only be carried out if the person gave their consent before they died, or if their nearest relative agrees.

What happens if a death is reported to the Procurator Fiscal?

- When a death is sudden, unexplained or caused by an industrial illness it must be reported to the Procurator Fiscal.
- Doctors, registrars or the police usually report such deaths, but anyone who is concerned about a death can contact the Procurator Fiscal.
- If the Procurator Fiscal decides to investigate a death, the police will often speak to the doctor or relatives of the person who has died. This is to gather information that will help the Procurator Fiscal reach a decision.
- The Procurator Fiscal may also order a post-mortem to confirm the cause of death.
- The Procurator Fiscal will try to answer any questions you may have.
- They will complete their investigations as quickly as possible.

To find out more about this, phone the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service on 0131 226 2626 or look on the internet (www.copfs.gov.uk).

When and how do I register the death?

- You must register the death within 8 days. You can do this at any registrar's office in Scotland.
- You should phone the registrar's office before you go there. Sometimes you will need to make an appointment to register a death.

- You can find the contact details of local registrar's offices in the phone book under 'Registration of Births, Death and Marriages', or on the internet (www.gro-scotland.gov.uk).

Who can register the death?

- The death should normally be registered by a close relative or partner, or by an executor, someone who was present at the death, or the occupier of the property where the person died.
- However, anyone can register the death as long as they have the information that is needed. So if you feel too upset, you can ask someone else to do this.

What will I need?

- To register the death, you will need the death certificate.
- It is helpful if you can also take:
 - the person's birth and marriage or civil partnership certificates
 - their NHS medical card, and
 - documents about a State Pension or any social security benefits.

Don't worry if you don't have all these documents. The registrar will still be able to register the death.

What will the registrar give me?

- When you register the death, the registrar will give you:
 - a certificate of registration of death (form 14) – you should give this to the funeral director

- a green social security registration or notification of death certificate (form 334/S1) – you will need this if the person who died received a State Pension or any social security benefits, and
- a shortened version of the death certificate.
- You can also buy copies of the full death certificate. Some organisations may ask for this, for example insurance companies or banks.

For more information, go to the General Register Office for Scotland's website (www.gro-scotland.gov.uk) or ask someone at the local registrar's office.

Who else needs to know?

- When someone dies, you may need to tell other organisations and services – for example the UK Passport Service and the DVLA (Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency).
- In some parts of Scotland a new service called **Tell Us Once** can help you tell government agencies about a death. The registrar will tell you if this is available in your area.

How do I arrange the funeral?

- You can speak to a funeral director as soon as you feel ready.
- You do not have to wait until the death has been registered.
- However, do not feel you have to rush. Taking your time may make planning the funeral easier.

- You can find the contact details of local funeral directors in the phone book.
- You do not have to use a funeral director, although most people find this helpful.
- If you wish to make some of the arrangements yourself, the Natural Death Centre can provide support and information. [Find out how to contact them on page 16.](#)

How do I plan the funeral?

- It might help if you ask yourself a few questions:
 - Did the person who died make any requests or leave instructions for their funeral?
 - Who should be involved in planning the funeral? You could speak to family and friends about this.
 - Will it be a burial or cremation? Where will it take place?
 - Who will conduct the ceremony? If the person died in hospital, the Spiritual Care Team can give you advice and support, or put you in touch with representatives of religious and non-religious organisations. Ward staff can contact the Spiritual Care Team for you.
 - Will you put a death notice in any newspaper? What would you like it to say?
- You can ask a funeral director for advice.

How do I know if I can afford to pay for the funeral?

- Funeral costs vary and you may wish to ask several funeral directors about the service they provide.
- Funeral directors should explain their costs and give you a written estimate.
- Before meeting the funeral director, you should try to think about how to pay for the funeral.
 - Find out if the person who died:
 - made arrangements to pay for their funeral – for example with a life assurance policy or a prepaid funeral plan, or
 - left enough money to pay for their funeral.
 - If no money is available, and you get benefits or tax credits, you may be able to apply for a Funeral Payment from the Social Fund. You should:
 - ask someone at your local Jobcentre Plus if you qualify for this, or call the Department of Work and Pensions on 0845 606 0265, and
 - tell the funeral director as soon as possible if you want to apply.
 - If your wife, husband or civil partner has died, you may be able to apply for a benefit called a Bereavement Payment.
 - You should ask someone at your local Jobcentre Plus if you qualify for this, or you can call the Department of Work and Pensions on 0845 606 0265.

- You can find out more about this benefit on the internet: go to www.direct.gov.uk and look for the Bereavement Payment section.

The Funeral Payment and Bereavement Payment are subject to conditions, and you should not assume you are eligible.

- If no one is able to arrange and pay for the funeral, the local council may do so.

How can I deal with my feelings?

As you try to cope with the emotional upheaval of a death, the following thoughts may be helpful.

Take your time

You may feel numb, or find it difficult to believe what has happened. You may feel relief that the person is no longer suffering. You may feel sad, angry or guilty. You may also feel panicky about what needs to be done, or about what lies ahead. It's important, especially in the first few days, that you allow yourself:

- time to take in what has happened
- time to talk about the person who has died
- time to feel the pain and the loneliness
- time for yourself.

Do it your way

We are all different, and we react to death in different ways. There is no right or wrong way to grieve. Just try to do what feels right for you.

Take care of yourself

It is important to look after yourself. For example, you should try to eat well, and avoid drinking too much alcohol. It's also important to know that it's normal to feel afraid, have nightmares or struggle to see the point of life. However, if you are worried about your feelings, you can speak to your doctor.

Remember

Grief is normal – it is part of what it is to be human and to have feelings.

Grief is a journey – it is often hard, but it will get easier.

Grief has no shortcuts – grief takes time. It often takes much longer than you and many people around you may expect.

It is normal both to grieve and live – when you find yourself not thinking about the person who has died, that is all right.

Grief can be scary – and can lead to depressing thoughts and even thoughts of suicide. It is natural to think this way and okay to talk about it.

Finally - it is important not to expect too much of yourself, and know when to ask for help. The death of someone close is a major event in anybody's life and there are no quick ways of adjusting. It can be helpful to find someone you trust that you can talk to, for example a friend, your doctor, or a religious leader. If after a while you feel you are still not coping, you may want to speak with your doctor. **You can**

also get help from some organisations in the 'How to find out more' section of this leaflet on pages 13 to 16.

How do children cope with their feelings?

If you are supporting children after a death, it is important to remember that children grieve too. They often express their grief through their behaviour. They may become quieter, or more easily tearful or angry in everyday situations. They may have physical symptoms, for example a sore tummy.

When someone dies, children usually realise something is wrong. They need help to understand what has happened and to express their feelings. Here are some thoughts that you may find helpful.

- **It's important to be honest with children** – you should tell them the person has died, and explain what this means using words they understand. Help children understand that death is natural: all living things die, accidents happen, and illness and old age are all part of the life cycle of people and animals.
- **Children may feel hurt** or angry that the person has gone, or may feel it happened because of something they said or did. It is important to allow children to express these feelings, and to reassure them that they are not to blame.
- **Children will move in and out of their grief** – sad and tearful one moment, and maybe playing the next. It is important to recognise this is normal and to try and support them.

- **After the death of someone close** children will worry that they, or others close to them, could die too. Again it is important to be honest with children: everybody dies some time, but most people live a long time.
- **Adults often worry** about letting children see the person who has died or attend the funeral. Every child is different, but if they are going to be present you can help them prepare by explaining what will happen. A funeral director may be able to help you with this. Younger children might like to draw or write something to be placed with or in the coffin. You could ask older children for ideas for the funeral, for example a special piece of music, or a favourite memory to share with other people.
- **You should try to keep children to their routine** – this will help them feel more secure.
- **You could look through photos with them** and share stories about special times: sharing memories can help all the family feel stronger.

How can I find out more?

This leaflet normally comes in a folder, and you can ask the person whose name has been written on the folder for more information. You can also speak to the Spiritual Care Team or the Bereavement Coordinator at your local hospital. You can find contact details for hospitals in the phone book or by calling the NHS inform Helpline on 0800 22 44 88.

You may find the following information helpful:

- **What to do after a death in Scotland**
Information about all the legal matters, including registering a death and dealing with wills.
You can get this information from the Scottish Government website (www.scotland.gov.uk) or you can ask the registrar for a copy.
- **Talking about bereavement**
A leaflet that helps you understand the thoughts and feelings of grief.
You can get this from the NHS Health Scotland website. Visit www.healthscotland.com or ask someone at the local hospital for a copy.
- **We're sorry to hear...**
Useful information and advice about looking after yourself following a death.
You can get this from Cruse Bereavement Care Scotland. Visit www.crusescotland.org.uk or phone 01738 444 178 and ask for a copy.

- **Living through grief**

Coping with the thoughts and feelings of grief over the weeks and months following a death. You can get this from Cruse Bereavement Care Scotland.

Visit www.crusescotland.org.uk or phone 01738 444 178 and ask for a copy.

You can get emotional support from:

- **Breathing Space (Scotland)**

A free, confidential and anonymous phone-line service for anyone who is experiencing low mood or depression, or who is unusually worried and needs someone to talk to.

Phone 0800 83 85 87 (Monday to Thursday from 6pm to 2am and from Friday 6pm through to Monday 6am)

Visit www.breathingspacescotland.co.uk

- **ChildLine**

A free and confidential helpline for all children and young people in the UK. You can call, email or write to ChildLine for help and advice about anything.

Freepost 1111, Glasgow G1 1BR

Freephone number 0800 1111 (24 hours a day, 7 days a week)

Email scotland@childline.org.uk

Website www.childline.org.uk (ChildLine offers a counselling service online. Log on to the website to speak to a counsellor.)

- **Cruse Bereavement Care Scotland**

Information and support for people who have been bereaved.

To find out about one-to-one support in your area, phone 0845 600 22 27.

To get copies of leaflets or for more information phone 01738 444 178, email info@crusescotland.org.uk or look on the internet (www.crusescotland.org.uk).

- **Bereaved relatives or friends living in England, Wales or Northern Ireland** can contact Cruse Bereavement Care UK.
Phone 0844 477 9400
Email helpline@cruse.org.uk
Website www.cruse.org.uk
- **Bereaved children and young people** can phone 0808 808 1677 (Monday to Friday between 9.30am and 5pm) or look on the internet (www.rd4u.org.uk).

- **Samaritans**

A confidential emotional support service for anyone experiencing feelings of distress or despair.

Phone 08457 90 90 90* (24 hours a day)

Visit www.samaritans.org.uk

*Please visit the website for the latest call charges

- **The Compassionate Friends**

Support for bereaved parents and their families.

Phone 0845 123 2304 (every day from 10am to 4pm and from 7 to 10pm)

Visit www.tcf.org.uk

- **Winston's Wish**

Support for bereaved children and for people who are concerned about them.

Phone 08452 03 04 05 (Monday to Friday between 9am and 5pm)

Visit www.winstonswish.org.uk

You can get general advice and information from:

- **Citizens Advice Scotland**

Free, confidential, impartial and independent advice about almost anything, including NHS services and your rights. To find your nearest branch, look in your phone book or on Citizens Advice Scotland's website (www.cas.org.uk).

- **NHS inform**

Scotland's national health information service.

Free phone 0800 22 44 88 (every day between 8am and 10pm)

Visit www.nhsinform.co.uk

- **The Natural Death Centre**

Free support and information about death and funerals, including home burial, family-organised and environmentally friendly funerals.

Phone 01962 712 690

Visit www.naturaldeath.org.uk

If you need information in another language or format contact your local NHS board. If you need help to do this contact the NHS inform Helpline on 0800 22 44 88 (textphone 18001 0800 22 44 88).

Produced by Health Rights Information Scotland, a project of Consumer Focus Scotland, for the Scottish Government Health Directorates. Version 1 - Produced in April 2011

