



Bereavement Handbook for Worcestershire

A Handbook offering helpful, practical and emotional advice together with information on how to contact Local and National Support Services.



Introduction

The death of someone close is likely to be one of the most distressing experiences anyone has to face. The early days following the death can be bewildering and difficult and it can be a very confusing time with mixed feelings, thoughts and emotions.

This handbook hopes to offer some helpful, practical and emotional advice at this very difficult time, whilst offering information about how to contact Local and National Support Services.

The Handbook is divided into three sections:-

Part One - Offers some guidance and practical advice

Part Two - Explores some of the feelings you may be experiencing

Part Three - Provides some useful hints, contacts and support

Part One - Practical Advice

Following the death of someone there are a great deal of practical jobs to be done and it may be useful to have the help of a family member or friend who is good at speaking to people and organising things.

The following pages give a brief guide, but the booklet, 'What to do after a Death in England and Wales' (booklet DWP 1027), from the Department for Work and Pensions, goes into much more detail. If you do not already have a copy you will be given one when you go to register the death.

People die in lots of different situations and depending on the circumstances of the death, the next few weeks may vary widely. With an expected death the following process usually takes place:

Death Certificate

Your local doctor will normally issue a death certificate within 24 to 48 hours and you need to obtain this certificate before you can register the death. In some cases the doctor may be unsure of the cause of death and the coroner would be informed. In this case the coroner usually issues the death certificate directly to the Registrars Office, unless an inquest is requested.

Registering a Death

To register a death in Worcestershire you need to call the Worcestershire Registration Service on 0845 603 2859. An appointment with the Registrar will be made and guidance given as needed.

All deaths need to be registered – normally within five working days (unless the coroner is involved). The next of kin or a close relative normally registers the death, but confirmation on who can register the death will be given by the registrar.

The registrar will need to know:

- Date and place of death
- Full name, date and place of birth of the deceased
- The deceased's last address.

You will need to take with you:

- The medical certificate of the cause of death
- The deceased's medical card if available.

The registrar will give you:

- A certificate for burial or cremation - known as the green form - this is needed by the funeral director (unless it is a cremation and the coroner is involved or it is an inquest)
- A certificate for Department of Works and Pensions (DWP) so that any benefits can be adjusted – Form BD8
- Certified copies of the registered entry can be purchased. These are shown to insurance companies, banks, building societies etc. to prove that the death has occurred.

Hospital Death

If the person died in hospital there is often a Bereavement Officer based at the hospital, who will guide you through the next few days.

Unexpected/Sudden Death

If the death was sudden or unexpected then you may already have had contact with the local police. Although this can sometimes be distressing it is required by Law. The police then have to consult with the coroner to see if any further information is needed regarding the death, which may involve a post mortem and an inquest.

The Coroners Officer will remain in contact and keep you up to date with progress. You can still contact a Funeral Director who will be able to let you

know when formalities have been completed and the funeral can take place.

Organising the Funeral

You may know exactly what the deceased person's wishes were regarding a funeral. If not, it is worth checking if they made a will. This may be held at a local solicitors' office, and they may have some responsibility for dealing with the estate.

The type and cost of funeral can vary and it is worth establishing the cost in advance. If you have not decided on a funeral directors most of them will be listed in the Yellow Pages Phone Directory, and it is best to choose one who is a member of either the National Association of Funeral Directors or the National Society of Allied and Independent Funeral Directors.

Finances

Many people have money worries after bereavement so it is a good idea to check whether you are entitled to any state benefits. Your local Citizens Advice Bureau or Worcestershire Hub Centre will be able to assist you. The registrar will also have a Bereavement Benefit Form SF200 available.

Bereavement Register

To avoid unwanted post the Bereavement Register is a service which has been specifically set up to remove from data bases and mailing files the names and addresses of people who have died (contact details at back of this handbook).

People to Inform

There are various people who need to be informed of the death and it may be useful to use these checklists to guide you. Tick boxes have been provided to help with this.

	Completed	Not completed
Mortgage Company		
Housing Assoc/Landlord		
Building Society		
Property/Contents Insurance		

DVLA		
Credit Cards		
Gas Supplier		
Water Supplier		
Electricity Supplier		
The Family Doctor		
Social Services - if involved		
School/College – if appropriate		
Council Tax		
Bank		
Life Insurance Company		
Car Insurance		
Store Cards		
Mobile Phone Company		
Telephone Company		
Relevant Hospital Doctors		
Employer		
Union/Professional Organisations		

Things to Cancel

Service Contacted	Contacted
Meals on Wheels	
General Appointments e.g. dentist, optician	
Newspapers	
Redirect mail if required	
Care/ household services e.g. home help, cleaner, meals on wheels	
Medical appointments, tests, hospital scans etc.	
Milk if delivered	

Items to Return

Item Returned	Contacted
Medicines back to pharmacy	
Driving Licence	
Library Books	
Mobility aids e.g. commode, walking stick, chair raisers, specialist cushions/mattress	
Passport	
Disabled Parking - Blue Badge	

Part Two - Emotions and Feelings

This section of the handbook offers you the opportunity to explore and perhaps begin to understand the roller-coaster ride of changing emotions you may well be experiencing at this time.

Whoever has died, each loss is unique and everyone will cope with it in his or her own way. Although bereavement is a personal and often traumatic event, many people go through a recognisable process of emotions and reactions, when someone close to them dies.

Realising that the following emotions associated with grief are quite normal may help.

- Numbness
- Yearning
- Anger
- Guilt.

Grief

When someone is bereaved they usually experience an intense feeling of sorrow and grief. People grieve in order to accept a deep loss and carry on with their lives. Working through grief can be a painful process, but it is often necessary to ensure future emotional and physical well-being.

Grief is a natural, unavoidable reaction, which allows us to begin to come to terms with our loss, and to adjust to the change it has made to our lives.

For every individual the loss of a loved one and the changes experienced are different, as each person's grief is unique.

Grieving takes place after any sort of loss, but most powerfully after the death of someone we love and have known for sometime. It is not just one feeling, but a whole range of feelings, which take time to work through and cannot be hurried.

A similar experience of grieving and loss can also be felt by those who have suffered stillbirths, miscarriages, or lost very young babies. They will also need the same support, care and consideration.

Numbness

In the few hours or days following the death of a close relative or friend, most people feel simply stunned, as though they cannot believe it has actually happened. They may feel like this even if the death has been expected. This sense of emotional numbness can be helpful in getting through all the important practical arrangements that have to be made, such as getting in touch with relatives and organising the funeral. For many people, the funeral or memorial service is an occasion when the reality of what has happened really starts to sink in.

Yearning

Soon though, this numbness disappears and may be replaced by a dreadful sense of agitation, of pining or yearning for the dead person. There is a feeling of wanting somehow to find them, even though this is clearly impossible. This makes it difficult to relax or concentrate and it may be difficult to sleep properly.

Anger

People often feel very angry at this time - towards doctors and nurses who did not prevent the death, towards friends and relatives who did not do enough, or even towards the person who has left them. Again, this is a common reaction but if this feeling persists help should be sought.

Guilt

Another common feeling is guilt. People find themselves going over in their minds all the things they would have liked to have said. They may also feel that they could have done some things differently, or changed what had happened in some way.

A sense of relief is often felt when someone has died after a particularly painful or distressing illness. This feeling of relief is natural, understandable and very common.

Coping with Emotions in the Weeks/Months Following Bereavement

In the weeks following the funeral there can still be sudden changes of emotion which can be confusing to oneself, friends and relatives, but are just part of the normal way of passing through the different stages of mourning.

These strong, confusing emotions can be felt for quite a while after death and can be followed by periods of sadness and extreme tiredness. Feelings of grief can occur at any time, sparked off by people, places or things that bring back memories.

During this time it may appear to others as though the bereaved person is spending a lot of time just sitting, doing nothing. In fact, they are usually thinking about the person they have lost, going over both the good times and the bad times they had together. This is a quiet but essential part of coming to terms with the death.

As time passes, the initial fierce pain of early bereavement normally begins to fade. Feelings of sadness and depression tend to lessen and it is again possible to think about other things and even to look to the future. Time helps us to adjust and for the majority of people it often helps to gradually resume some normal daily activities.

Cultural Differences

People from different cultures deal with death in their own distinctive ways. The rituals and ceremonies of mourning may be very public and demonstrative, or private and quiet. In some cultures the period of mourning is fixed, in others not. The feelings experienced by bereaved people in different cultures may be similar, but their ways of expressing them are very different.

Children and Adolescents

Even though children may not completely understand the meaning of death, they also feel the loss of close relatives or friends. However, depending on their age their level of understanding and how they cope may be very different. Young people may not speak of their grief for fear

of adding an extra burden to the grown-ups around them.

The grief of children and adolescents, and their need for mourning, should not be overlooked when a member of the family has died. Wherever possible it may help them by attending the funeral and expressing their own grief for example, by talking, writing, or buying flowers.

How Friends and Relatives Can Help

Family and friends can help by spending time with the person who has been bereaved. It is not so much words of comfort that are needed, but more the willingness to be with them during the time of their pain and distress. A sympathetic arm around the shoulders will express care and support when words are not enough. It is important that, if they wish it, bereaved people are able to cry with somebody and talk about their feelings.

Others may find it hard to understand why the bereaved have to keep going over the same ground again and again, but this is part of the process of resolving grief and should be encouraged.

People often avoid mentioning the name of the person who has died for fear that it will be upsetting. However, to the bereaved person it may seem as though others have forgotten their loss, adding a sense of isolation to their painful feelings of grief.

Practical help with cleaning, shopping or looking after children can ease the burden of being alone. Elderly bereaved partners may need help with the chores that the deceased partner used to handle - coping with bills, cooking, housework and so on.

It is important to allow people enough time to grieve. Some can seem to get over the loss quickly, but others take longer. So don't expect too much too soon from a bereaved relative or friend - they need the time to grieve properly, and this will help to avoid problems in the future.

Getting Help to Resolve Feelings of Grief

Some people hardly seem to grieve at all. They avoid any mention of their loss, do not cry at the funeral and appear to return to their normal life remarkably quickly. For some people this is just their normal way of dealing with their loss and no harm occurs.

Others however may suffer physical illness and periods of deep sadness for

some time. Some people get stuck in the grieving pattern, the sense of disbelief and shock continues and never seems to end, they cannot think about anything else but the death of their loved one.

Bereavement can turn the world upside-down and is one of the most painful experiences we endure. It can be strange, terrible and overwhelming. In spite of this, it is a part of life that we all go through and usually does not require any specialist help.

For those who need support to resolve their grief or find themselves turning to smoking or alcohol to lessen the pain of grief, help should be sought, either from the local GP surgery or from other community and voluntary organisations. Some of these are listed at the back of this handbook.

Part Three - Support and Advice

Things to Do

Express your feelings as much as possible. Try to bring into the open whatever you are feeling. This is important in working through your grief. Give yourself time to overcome your grief. Talk through what has happened with someone you trust, or a local support group.

Take good care of yourself, and if possible get lots of rest, eat well and give yourself lots of time to grieve. Contact your doctor if you feel unwell, and speak of your loss.

Keep in touch with friends and family. Many people may feel awkward about offering their help so it may be left to you to ask for it, even though this may be difficult for you.

Begin to make longer-term plans for the future so that you will always have something to look forward to, but avoid rushing into making any big changes in your life.

Things to Avoid

- Don't rush into having the funeral right away unless it is the practice of your culture
- Avoid entering into any financial or legal arrangements unless you fully understand them
- Avoid making any major changes to your life while you are still grieving

- Give yourself lots of time to think about changes you may wish to make and discuss plans with others
- Avoid letting 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.

Useful Contacts

Here is a short list of some organisations used to dealing with people who have suffered a bereavement. It is sometimes easier to talk to a stranger on the telephone about the things you are going through than it is to talk to a person who is close to you. Occasionally, especially at popular call times you may find that the phone lines can become very busy. It is advisable to keep trying as when you get through, individual advice and support will be offered.

Citizens Advice Bureau

Look up local office in the telephone book or go to their website:

www.citizensadvice.org.uk

CRUSE Bereavement Care

Local (Worcestershire)

Helpline: 01905 22223

National Helpline: 0870 167 1677

www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk

Noah's Ark Trust

(Grief support to bereaved children and young people in Worcestershire).

Tel: 01905 745735

www.noahsarktrust.co.uk

Samaritans

24 hour Helpline: 0845 790 9090

Web www.samaritans.org.uk

The Bereavement Register

Tel: 0870 600 7222

www.the-bereavement-register.org.uk

Worcestershire Hub

For advice on where and how to register a death

Tel: 0845 603 2859

Quiet Thoughts Following The Loss of a Loved One

So many roads and paths we take
Are brightened by the rays of others
That have touched us with their
Warm and sunny ways.
And when they leave this earth
It seems they're never really gone,
For bright and happy memories
Linger on and on and on.

Anon.