



Coping with grief and loss



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Everybody's journey through grief is different - but you are not alone. We offer support of various kinds to the families of our patients. Please take a look at the information in this booklet to find what support is right for you.

You can also find this information at:

www.willen-hospice.org.uk/bereavement

Support for you or someone you know

We will all grieve in our own way and at our own pace. Your experience and the support you feel you may need, may change from day to day, and shift as you journey through your grief. You may want to set up a tribute to your loved one, do something to celebrate their life, talk to someone outside your family or none of the above. Grief is a personal journey.

Although each of us experience grief differently, some things can be common to many. We have tried to pull together information that may be helpful to you including practical arrangements you need to make after a death, advice on how to remember your loved one, and how to deal with your emotions, particularly during the Covid-19 pandemic.



Bereavement and funerals during Covid-19

We are living in unprecedented times, never before have we had to deal with a virus the scale of Covid-19. As a result, you may already be aware that some aspects of how we would usually manage and support families when a loved one dies have changed, regardless of the cause of death.

There are some official tasks that must be done following a death. Here we aim to answer some of your questions.

What will happen when my loved one dies?

If they die at the Hospice we will ensure they are treated with dignity and respect at all times. If you are not able to be with your loved one because you are isolating, we will keep in touch with you to inform you how they are at every stage. We will do our best to meet their wishes for their death when the time comes. Even though you cannot be there in person, it may be possible for us to arrange video or telephone contact between you. When they die, we will let you know.

If they are in a care home or nursing home, their staff will keep you informed.

What happens next?

The funeral director of your choice will come to your loved one's room, or their house if they are at home, and safely remove their body. This may include the use of a body bag or a coffin before they are moved from the house. If they had tested positive for the Coronavirus, unfortunately you will not be able to see the body as it will be securely closed. If your loved one dies in the Hospice and you would like us to place something with them in the coffin, then please let us know and we will do so.

If your loved one did not die with Coronavirus, as long as you are well, you will be able to see their body if you wish to.

Registering a death

Registration of death is now done electronically, rather than in person. You can find out more about this at www.milton-keynes.gov.uk

What happens to their belongings?

We will arrange an appropriate time to reunite you with your loved one's belongings if they died at the Hospice. If they were in a care home or residential home, the staff there will contact you about this.

Can I keep something to remember them by?

Your funeral director will arrange this for you, for example, they can take a lock of hair or finger/hand print. Anything they take will be kept in a sealed bag for a week before it can be given to you (to avoid any risk of infection).

How do I make funeral arrangements?

Think about which funeral director you would like to use, we can provide you with a list. Funeral arrangements should be made over the telephone or by email if possible given the current conditions. Funeral directors can email or post the forms needed to complete the arrangements. If you need to speak to them face to face then they ask that no more than two people are present. Due to the pandemic, restrictions on services are changing all the time. Your funeral director will be able to give you the latest guidelines.

At the time of writing, up to ten immediate family members can attend, and they must abide by social distancing rules. Those attending will all need to sit separated and two metres apart from each other and will not be allowed to touch the coffin.

This will be the case whether or not the person died of Coronavirus.

Many bereaved people may be in isolation and unable to attend funerals, even under the new rules. Funeral services may be delayed and much shorter than usual.



Paying your respects

If you can't attend the funeral, it may be possible to still feel part of the event to an extent. Perhaps ask a friend, relative or someone from the funeral directors to record, video, or even live stream the event. You may be able to write or record a message to be read out or played at the funeral. Speak to your funeral director for advice.

You could write a letter or eulogy to the person who has died or doing a drawing for them can also be a way of saying 'goodbye' if you have not been able to do this, particularly for children.

If possible, you could also arrange for it to be placed in the coffin and even ask the funeral director if they can place it into the person's hand, if you wish. Your loved one will then be touching what you have touched; this can be comforting if you have been unable to hold their hand while they were dying.

If you are not able to get a handwritten note to the funeral director, emailing it to them to print out is another option and will still mean your thoughts are with the person who has died.

Writing a eulogy

Eulogy means 'high praise', and is the telling of someone's life: values, interests and personality. You can do this whether you can be at the funeral or not. When writing it, think about what that person meant to you, what they contributed to your life and the lives of those around them, and memories of them from throughout their life; funny memories can be very welcome on such a difficult day.

If you can't be at the funeral you could share it by reading it out to people you live with or over the phone or via video call or you could even just email it to other people who knew them. If it is a letter you could also read it to a photo of the person perhaps, if you have one.

People often read poems, extracts of text or prayers that express how they feel, are reflective of the person who died or that meant something to them. You can still choose a reading and share it, in the same way as a eulogy or letter.

You may not want to write something or to read out anything and that is absolutely fine. You can always just take some time to sit with your thoughts and memories, or even to talk to them in your head.

Give yourself time and space

Set time aside for remembrance in your own way. This is particularly helpful if you cannot be at the funeral.

Some ideas:

- Look at pictures or mementos that remind you of them
- Play their favourite music
- Light a candle
- Follow any of your own cultural rituals

Ask those who have been able to attend the funeral to call you afterwards so you can hear their account of the event and take the time to share your memories of the person.

These are just some thoughts - you may think of others or have your own cultural rituals that you would like to follow. You must do whatever feels right for you - there are no rules.

Create an online tribute

Our Willen Hospice Tribute Pages are a wonderful way to share memories, thoughts and photos of someone special. They can be especially helpful at this time when people cannot be together as much as we'd like. You can include funeral notices and help people who cannot attend to be in touch.

The tribute is ongoing and you can also invite friends and family to light virtual candles for special occasions and anniversaries, leave messages and even donate to the hospice in memory of your loved one.

It is really easy to set up and it only takes a few minutes to do it: visit **remember.willen-hospice.org.uk** to get started.

How do I support children and young people?

Supporting a bereaved child or teenager can be especially difficult for parents and guardians when you are also grieving yourself. It's difficult to know what to do.

We have found the following advice has helped other families to cope:

- Talk to your children honestly and explain what is happening in a way they understand, all the while giving them information and reassurance.
- Use the correct terminology for example to say dying and died rather than 'gone to sleep', 'passed away' or 'lost' as this stops any misunderstanding

or confusion and the possibility of difficulties in getting a child to go to bed etc

- Talk to your children about the funeral. Include them and give them choices to attend should they wish to and give them a chance to say goodbye.
- Freely talk about the person who has died and encourage children to talk about their memories.
- Different age children will grieve according to their developmental stage and understanding.
- Often children's grief may be shown in their behaviour, distraught one minute, then playing happily the next, this is all normal.
- Inform the school about your children's loss and ask your child what they would like to happen when they return to school.
- It's helpful to maintain the normal boundaries in the home regarding your children as this contributes to the child feeling safe. They know what they are allowed and not allowed to do but if you relax the rules it can cause concern on the part of a child.

If you would like to talk to someone about support for a child or young person, please call us on **01908 663636** or email us at **bereavement@willen-hospice.org.uk**

How can I cope with my feelings?

While there are a number of practical things you will want to get on with after a loved one dies, it's important to look after yourself and address how you are feeling.

Helpful resources

We have gathered lots of useful information on our website that can help you deal with some of the challenges you may face on your journey through loss and bereavement. Take a look at **www.willen-hospice.org.uk/bereavement**

Light a candle with us

We hold a virtual moment of togetherness by lighting a candle at 8pm on the last Sunday of each month to remember loved ones. The virtual event is streamed on our **Facebook** page **[@willenhospicemk](https://www.facebook.com/willenhospicemk)**. Join us by lighting your own candle at home.

We are hoping to soon be able to offer memorial services for small groups to help commemorate your loved one.

Talk to us

Our experienced Bereavement Team are here for you for as long as you need us. While we're unable to meet with you in person at the moment, we can talk on the phone, video calls or by email. We can help you with practicalities that may be overwhelming or confusing for you, or with your emotions. Email bereavement@willen-hospice.org.uk or call us on **01908 663636** to speak to someone.

Talk to us so we can together determine how best to support you, that may be through a facilitated group, support phone calls or for some bereavement counselling.

Bereavement and grief self help guide

You may find it helpful to follow a structured self-help guide. You'll find an extremely useful guide on our website, which has been developed by NHS Scotland, using cognitive behaviour therapy principles. This can be completed online or downloaded from www.willen-hospice.org.uk/bereavement. While this has been developed in Scotland, its content is for use across the UK. You can work through this at your own pace to suit your own needs.

Contact us

If you need to talk, we are here for you. Please call us on **01908 663636**, email bereavement@willen-hospice.org.uk or visit www.willen-hospice.org.uk/bereavement

