

Bereavement

When someone close dies

Practical and emotional support at a difficult time

Acknowledgements

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This booklet is dedicated to the memory of Siobhán O'Driscoll, Bereavement Care Coordinator and Senior Social Worker in Beaumont Hospital, Dublin from 1993 to 2007.

This booklet provides an overview of the practical and emotional issues that you may face when someone close to you dies. It is not intended as something you need to read through from cover to cover. If you don't feel ready to read it yet, you may wish to leave it and come back another time.

A family member or friend may also find it helpful so that they can begin to understand a little of what you may be going through and how to offer help and support.

If you are reading this booklet online, you can click any text that is bold to find out more.

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Introduction

Your life has changed because someone close to you has died. Whether the death was sudden or expected this is likely to be an emotional and painful time for you. In the beginning your loss may be all consuming and you may find it hard to think about anything else. It may feel like your world has fallen apart.

We hope Part 1 of this booklet will help you to better understand what you are feeling and to explore ways to cope.

Some of the stress after a death can be caused by practical concerns such as registering the death, managing financially and dealing with legal issues. Part 2 will help you with these concerns and it will also provide information about post mortem examinations and inquests.

Part 3 has contact details for organisations and professionals you can go to for support and a list of books and websites you may find helpful.

Part 1 - Understanding Grief

When someone close to you dies, grief can affect every part of your life. You may be overwhelmed and frightened by how you are feeling. You may act in ways you don't expect. You may feel irritable and intolerant of others and day to day tasks can seem very trivial. You may feel physically unwell. You may wonder if you have the strength to deal with the pain and emotions you feel. Your grief may be all consuming for a long time and it is difficult to think about anything else.

There is no 'right' way to grieve and there is no set time in which you should be feeling better. Don't compare yourself to other people. Your grief is different from everyone else's, even from those around you who are grieving for the same person. Your relationship to the person who has died was unique to the two of you; therefore, your grief for them will also be unique.

However, there are some feelings, reactions and life changes that many people go through when someone close dies. You may experience some of these at different times. Your grief may come in waves. Every day can bring you different thoughts and feelings. It can be a very confusing and painful time. Sometimes knowing what to expect can be of help. These feelings of loss are very normal. However if at anytime they become overwhelming it is important to seek support from family, friends or a professional who understands bereavement.

Feelings of loss

Disbelief and shock

Your first reaction to the death may be disbelief. It is hard to take in the news that someone you love has died, even if the death was in some way expected. You may be in shock, feel numb, confused and stunned. You may be unable to think clearly. What is happening can feel very unreal. This sense of numbness and disbelief can protect you from the full impact of the death and help you to survive through the early weeks. This is very normal.

Sense of longing

You may have an intense longing to see the person who has died, to hear their voice, to hold them and to talk with them. There may be times when you feel you have seen or heard them, or felt their presence, perhaps in a crowd or familiar place. On the other hand you may find it difficult to recall their voice or picture them in your mind and this can be very upsetting.

Anxiety and fear

Feelings of anxiety and fear are natural at this time. You may feel vulnerable and alone. You may doubt your ability to cope, feel overwhelmed and experience a sense of loss of control at times. You may lack trust in your own judgement, lose confidence in yourself and struggle to make decisions. You may feel everything is falling apart.

It can be a time where you feel insecure and unsafe. You may worry about your own health and that of others. You may fear that something else terrible could happen. Sometimes this

anxiety can make you feel ill or lead to panic attacks.

It can be difficult to talk about these feelings but it can help to share your anxiety and fears with someone you trust or it may be easier to talk in confidence with a professional.

Despair

There may be times when the pain of your loss overwhelms you and you think you can't bear it any longer. You may wonder will it always be like this. You might question what is left to live for and feel quite hopeless about the future. This can sometimes lead to suicidal thoughts and feelings.

While you may feel that no one will understand your despair or be able to help you cope with it, it is important to find someone to talk to. Try talking to a close friend or family member or a professional who understands bereavement.

Anger

Anger is a natural and understandable response to losing someone you love. It is a normal expression of the upset and unfairness you may feel.

You may be angry at the person who has died, perhaps for leaving you to carry on alone. Maybe you feel that they didn't take care of themselves; that their death was unnecessary and could have been avoided. You may find yourself thinking about difficulties you had with the person during their life. You may be angry with yourself or with your family or friends. Perhaps you are angry at the unfairness of life or with God. You may feel anger at how others have reacted since the death. Your anger may be directed towards medical staff or others involved in

caring at the time of the illness or death.

You may feel anger about how the person died. The death may have been violent or by suicide or you may feel someone was responsible in some other way.

Sometimes the force of your anger can be frightening and may not be easy to talk about.

You may need help to deal with anger if:

- it becomes so intense that it preoccupies you;
- you start acting aggressively towards others;
- your behaviour becomes self destructive;
- it causes problems in your relationships.

Guilt

You may find yourself focusing on situations and times that you feel guilty about. You may blame yourself for things done or not done, said or unsaid. You may feel guilt for surviving when someone else has died. You may find you focus on times when you were not as patient or loving as you think you should have been. It's good to keep in mind that all relationships experience both happy and challenging times.

Guilt can preoccupy you and may be all consuming. While feelings of guilt and regret are normal, they may be hard to live with. Guilt is particularly difficult if you feel in some way responsible for the death or feel that you could have prevented it. Try not to isolate yourself and dwell on the negative thoughts. Sharing these thoughts and feelings with others can help you realise that guilt is common and you are not alone. Feelings of guilt are at times complex and difficult to resolve. They need to

be validated and it is important to find ways to accept, integrate and move forward with these feelings.

Although it is important to allow yourself to feel these emotions, you shouldn't have to do it alone. Resist the urge to keep the guilty thoughts to yourself and don't be embarrassed to share your regrets and worries with others, as this will help you realise that what you're experiencing is completely normal. Support from a professional or someone you trust may help you to reflect on the reasons for your feelings and consider ways to cope and move forward.

Shame

You may feel some shame or embarrassment about the circumstances of the death. There may be personal, family or medical details that have now become public that cause distress and pain. You may worry about how others will react. It can help to plan, in advance, how you would like to respond when faced with comments or questions that may be difficult. Shame can be disabling and can overshadow grief. It may help to talk it through with a professional or someone you trust.

Relief

There may be a sense of relief when someone close dies because their suffering is now over. It may be that you were worried about their pain, safety, health or future care and you no longer have to live with these concerns. You may also feel some relief if your relationship was difficult. You may feel guilty or uncomfortable about feelings of relief but they are a normal part of grief.

Envy

You may envy others whose lives seem to be going on as normal. It can be difficult to spend time with some people because you are reminded of what you have lost, for example if your partner has died you may find it hard to be with other couples. If your child has died it may be very painful to hear other parents talk about what is happening in their children's lives. It is very normal to have these thoughts and feelings.

Loneliness and Sadness

There can be a deep sense of sadness, loneliness and emptiness when someone you love dies. Their death may leave a huge void in your life. After a while, friends and family go back to their own lives and this can be a particularly lonely time for you. It can seem that life goes on as normal for those around you while your world has fallen apart.

Some people may seem to withdraw from you, perhaps because they don't know what to say or how to help. You may feel that others don't understand what it is like for you and this can leave you feeling alone and isolated. When you have lost a partner, a child or someone you shared everyday life with, feelings of loneliness can be particularly intense.

Depression

When you are bereaved you will experience many difficult feelings and mood changes, most of which are normal in grief. Some people may also experience a deep sense of hopelessness and despair that persists over time. If you experience these intense feelings for a prolonged period and you find it difficult

to cope in your everyday life, it could mean that you are experiencing depression.

The symptoms of depression include:

- feelings of sadness and hopelessness that don't go away,
- lack of interest in yourself or others,
- feeling unable to cope with everyday problems,
- lack of energy,
- being very tearful,
- being irritable with people around you,
- feeling incompetent and worthless,
- feelings of guilt and regret,
- problems getting to or staying asleep, disturbed sleep or sleeping too much,
- digestive problems, losing your appetite or overeating,
- withdrawing from people,
- anxiety or panic attacks,
- relationship problems and loss of interest in intimacy or sex,
- poor concentration, forgetfulness and difficulty making decisions,
- thoughts about death and dying,
- thoughts of suicide or self harm.

If you are concerned about how you are feeling or you experience a number of these symptoms, it is important that

you talk to your family doctor. You can also get support from a bereavement professional or services such as the Samaritans, Pieta House and Aware. See Part 3 for contact details for these services.

Dealing with Grief

Feelings of loss can be overwhelming and difficult to cope with. Although these feelings are very common the ways they are dealt with and expressed can vary from person to person. There are many factors that influence how someone experiences and expresses grief. Life experiences, personality traits, coping mechanisms and available supports, all shape individual responses.

Gender and cultural differences can also play a role in how people grieve. Although generalizations are not true for everyone, men and women may differ in the way they grieve. Traditionally it has been more acceptable for women to express their emotions while men have had fewer opportunities to share their feelings and have often coped with distress through staying busy and working things out on their own. It is important to recognise and support individual ways of grieving. Recognising these differences can help family members to understand each other's grief. Each person copes in their own way. Take the time you need to experience and understand your grief. Family and friends can often give the support you need but there may also be times when it helps to talk to a professional who understands bereavement or with others who have had a similar loss. See Part 3 for details of where you can find support.

How your body reacts to grief

You may expect that grief will only affect you emotionally but the upset and stress of losing someone close can also affect your physical health. Grief can impact the immune system leaving you more vulnerable to illness. Existing health issues may also flare up.

Your grief may affect you in some of the following ways:

- tiredness and exhaustion,
- crying and tearfulness,
- anxiety, nervousness, and being easily upset,
- lack of energy,
- appetite changes, weight loss or gain,
- sleeping problems,
- forgetfulness and inability to concentrate,
- upset stomach, diarrhoea,
- pain or tightness in your chest,
- palpitations and shortness of breath,
- headaches,
- loss of interest in sex,
- changes in menstrual cycle,
- agitation, irritability and tension.

Anxiety and panic attacks

If you are having palpitations, excessive sweating, difficulty

breathing or dizziness you may be having panic attacks. These are caused by severe anxiety which can be triggered by bereavement. Your family doctor can help you to manage panic attacks. Mental Health Ireland also provide helpful information. See Part 3 for details.

Finding Support

It is very important to take care of your health. Try to eat well and get enough sleep. If you are worried about any of these physical reactions, or if they persist, see your family doctor for a health check.

Impact on thinking and behaviour

The emotional and physical stress you are going through can make it hard to think clearly, to concentrate and to make decisions. Grief can also cause you to act in ways that are concerning for you or for those close to you.

- You might find yourself avoiding or being drawn to places, people or situations that remind you of the person who has died.
- You may have moments when you forget that the person has died and find yourself looking out for them.
- Your memory may be affected by grief and you will sometimes be distracted and lose focus.
- You may feel disorganised and find that things are getting on top of you at times.
- It can be an ordeal to complete simple tasks and find motivation to do everyday things.

- Alternatively as a way of coping you may immerse yourself in work or some other activity.
- You may become more impulsive, take risks and neglect to take care of yourself.

These changes are usually temporary reactions to your loss and will pass with time. Don't expect yourself to function as well as you usually do. You may find it difficult to make choices and it is best not to make major changes early on. If you are worried about decisions you need to take it may help to talk them through with someone you trust.

Alcohol and drugs

Some people may use alcohol or drugs (including some over the counter medication) to dull their pain or to escape from their feelings of grief. However, overuse may prolong grief and lead to other problems, such as drug or alcohol dependency. Alcohol and drugs can have a depressant effect and can lead to strong feelings of hopelessness, despair or suicidal thoughts, that may not have been experienced otherwise.

For these reasons you should try not to rely on alcohol and drugs to help you through your grief. If you or those close to you are worried about your use of alcohol or drugs you should talk to your family doctor or other health professional who can offer you support.

Spirituality and beliefs

Whether or not you have a religious faith you may find that long held beliefs that once helped you to make sense of life or were a comfort in difficult times are now challenged or no longer have meaning.

Your spirituality, beliefs or religious faith can also be a source of strength and may give you hope and comfort. It may help you understand and make sense of your loss. You may find support and guidance from your faith or religious community. For people who believe in a spiritual afterlife this faith can help them maintain a bond with the person who has died.

When faced with a death, people sometimes question their faith or other beliefs. It is not unusual to feel anger or disillusionment. It can add to your distress to feel such anger or to have a loss of faith, particularly if it has always been a support to you. It may help to talk with someone from your faith or church community.

Facing people and new situations

The support of family, friends and your community is really important at this time. Their friendship can help you feel less alone and help you to cope with day-to-day life.

There may also be times when you find it stressful to be around people and you may find yourself avoiding social situations. It may be upsetting to talk about your grief. You may be tired of hearing the usual expressions of sympathy. You might feel that some people are avoiding you and feel hurt by this but it may be because they don't know what to say or how to help.

You may find that you are left out of some social situations, or you may dread invitations to events such as weddings and family

gatherings. You may find that you don't want to meet people socially and can feel excluded from conversations that now seem trivial or irrelevant to you.

The death of someone you love can leave you feeling vulnerable and fragile which can affect your confidence. You may think your sadness will drive people away or that they'll get tired of listening to you. You may worry that you will burden them with your feelings. On the other hand you may find it hard to be on your own and need a lot of support and reassurance from family and friends. Your loss can be so overwhelming at times that you may have little interest in or energy for anyone else, even those closest to you. All of this is very normal.

While it may sometimes be difficult to be with family and friends, try not to isolate yourself. Don't miss out on the support other people can offer. If you feel that you can't talk to the people around you, look for the support of others who may understand better what you're going through. Consider joining a bereavement group where you can meet people who are going through a similar experience. See Part 3 for further information.

Parenting alone

If your partner has died and you are now faced with parenting alone it can be very difficult to balance your own grief and that of your children. You may feel overwhelmed by the responsibilities you now carry on your own. You may also find you have to manage expectations of other family members. Don't isolate yourself and accept offers of support that will help you and your children. The involvement of grandparents, extended family and friends is very important at this time. However, you and your children will also need time alone together and its okay to let your family know that this is important to you. For further

information please see the section on Helping children through grief in this booklet.

Returning to work

For some people going back to work can be a welcome step. It can give you a break from your grief and restore a routine. It may be the only part of your life that seems normal.

However, for many people returning to work is difficult. You may be expected to go back within a few days and this can be very stressful. It may help to speak to your employer or manager to plan your return and let them know the supports you need. There may be compassionate leave available or perhaps you can work part-time or reduced hours initially.

Managing the first days back at work

You may worry about becoming upset with your colleagues and others you meet. You may want to avoid people, their questions and expressions of sympathy and worry about how to respond.

It will help to have a plan of what you might say to colleagues and others. It's fine just to say thank you when people offer their sympathy. It is important that you can tell the story of your loss but be selective about who you talk to and what you tell them. Choose people you trust to be supportive and who will respect your privacy. You may be disappointed by some colleagues' responses but their reaction may be due to not knowing what to say or how best to support you.

Looking after yourself when you go back to work

Keep in mind that when you do go back to work you won't have the same energy for a while. You may be physically and emotionally drained and it may be hard to concentrate and feel motivated. You may feel overwhelmed by everyday tasks. Work can seem trivial and you may feel you are just "going through the motions". You may have lost confidence.

Sometimes the pressure of work combined with the feelings of loss can cause more distress. It is good to let those you work closely with know when things are particularly difficult and ask for their help. Try not to take on any new responsibilities at this time.

Returning to work and getting back into a routine can also be a positive step in your grief. Your friends and colleagues may be a valuable source of support.

Finding ways to cope

The intensity of the pain you may be feeling at this time can be frightening. When someone important in your life dies, you are mourning both for the person you loved and for the unfulfilled hopes and plans you shared. Grief can absorb all your energy and affect all areas of your life. Grief can last for a long time and there is no fixed time in which you should expect to feel better. There will be times when your grief is very intense and it is difficult to cope. There will be other times when the pain subsides and you feel able to do normal things. These are some suggestions that may help you.

- It helps to talk about the person who has died and about how you are feeling. It's good to have one or two people you trust to confide in. Don't be afraid to show your emotions to family and friends.
- Try not to distance yourself from people who care about you. Support from family and friends will help you to cope. Don't assume they know exactly what you need. It is important to let them know how you are feeling and what help you need from them.
- Everyone grieves differently. Some people value social media as a way to remember the person who has died, express grief and find support. For others this public expression of grief can be difficult.
- Give yourself the time to grieve. The pain of grief can come and go and you will have good and bad days.
- Don't compare yourself to others and how they have coped with their loss.
- You may not have the same energy for those close to you as before. You can only do your best as a parent, partner or friend and it's ok to be 'good enough' for a time.
- It may be difficult to meet all the demands of your job. It may be some time before you have interest and energy for work. Don't expect too much of yourself. Talk with your manager or people you are close to in work and let them know how they can help you.

Self care is very important when you're grieving. Try to eat well, take regular exercise and get enough sleep. Be careful not to rely on alcohol or drugs to ease the pain of grief. You should only use medication prescribed by your doctor.

If you feel you can't cope or your feelings are overwhelming, ask for help. Talk to someone you trust or a professional who

understands bereavement. See Part 3 for bereavement services and resources.

Prolonged and Complex Grief

It is normal for feelings of grief to last for a long time, however, intense emotional pain lasting six months or more that impacts negatively on your life, can indicate what is termed prolonged grief or complex bereavement.

The following reactions experienced and becoming more intense over an extended period of time can suggest prolonged or complex bereavement:

- Difficulty accepting the death
- Disbelief
- Denial
- Difficulty in reminiscing positively about the deceased
- Bitterness
- Anger
- Blame
- Guilt
- Excessive avoidance of places, people, or objects reminding you of the loss
- A desire to die, to be with the deceased
- Difficulty trusting other people.
- Feeling alone or detached from others
- Feeling that life is empty or meaningless

- Feeling one has lost a part of one's self
- Difficulties engaging with activities or making plans for the future
- Persistent sadness
- An inability to experience positive mood
- Emotional numbness

The intense grief causes significant difficulties in personal, family, social, educational, occupational or other important areas of life.

If you are experiencing these reactions it is important to find support from your family doctor or a bereavement professional. See Part 3 for bereavement services.

When death is sudden, accidental or traumatic

Sometimes a loss is so great, so sudden or in such terrible circumstances that you feel as though you won't survive what has happened. A sudden, accidental or traumatic death can be devastating for you and your family and shatter your world. The death may seem completely meaningless and it is very hard to accept that it has happened.

You may feel dazed, insecure, angry and vulnerable. The shock can overwhelm you with feelings of helplessness, hopelessness and a loss of control. You may be frightened by how you are feeling and worry that you won't be able to cope. Your relationships may become strained.

Your grief can be particularly intense when someone you love has died suddenly and traumatically perhaps by suicide or murder, in an accident or following an assault or in a road traffic collision.

In traumatic deaths the emergency services, Gardaí or media are likely to be involved. This can add to your distress. There may be intrusion into your family and you may feel very exposed. Your family's privacy may not be respected. The life and death of the person you love may be publicly discussed and accounts can be inaccurate. This can cause you significant pain.

What reactions to expect

Sudden death robs you of the chance to say goodbye, to deal

with unfinished business or prepare for the loss of someone close. It can be especially distressing if you parted badly or feel in some way responsible. The physical and emotional shock can last for a long time. You may have many of the feelings of grief described earlier but, the emotions and reactions you have to cope with following a traumatic death may be more intense.

These reactions may include

- feeling physically sick,
- feelings of helplessness, despair, depression and terror,
- feelings of anger, guilt, relief and frustration,
- a sense of unease, confusion and disorganisation,
- a need to understand what happened. A need to blame or hold someone responsible for the death. You may go over and over events to try to understand what happened and regain a sense of control,
- a loss of security and confidence in the world. You feel that the safe world you lived in no longer exists. You may fear for yourself, for your family and friends and become worried that something else terrible will happen. You may become overprotective of others,
- you may be preoccupied with the person who has died. You may have distressing images of how they died or how their body looked afterwards. You may worry about whether they suffered pain or distress before dying. Thoughts of the death and how it occurred may dominate your memories,
- you may feel that you are losing control or, losing your mind, You may feel numb, 'shut down' or withdrawn from others.

There may be many unanswered questions about what happened. You may be troubled by thoughts about what could have been done to protect the person or prevent their death and have a strong sense of 'what if'? You may experience 'survivor guilt', asking yourself why you survived when others died or questioning if you could have done something to prevent the death.

You may experience some of these trauma reactions, such as:

- flashbacks to the event,
- nightmares,
- disturbed sleep,
- distressing images,
- sounds and smells,
- feeling very nervous,
- jumpy and looking out for danger,
- feeling intensely angry and short tempered,
- negative thoughts and beliefs,
- avoiding people and places that bring up painful memories or becoming withdrawn.

These intense reactions can overshadow your grief and it would help to talk to your doctor or a bereavement professional for support.

When death is by suicide

When bereaved by suicide the sudden and traumatic nature of the death can make the normal grief process more intense and

complex. You may struggle to make sense of the death and wonder how you can survive what has happened.

Initially you or those close to you are faced with finding the right words to tell family and friends, including children about the death and how the person died. You will be concerned about the effect the news will have on them. With adults it can be helpful to do this in stages, preparing them by saying you have bad news to tell them and then that the person has died in tragic circumstances. You can then go on to tell them about what has happened as you understand it.

It can be incredibly difficult and traumatic to tell children and this is addressed later in this section.

Those close to the person who has died may be troubled by questions such as 'why', 'what if' 'did they really intend to die', 'were there signs that were missed'. It is very hard to accept that there are some things you may never know the answer to. The official investigation by the Gardai and the Coroner may feel intimidating and private family details may become public leaving you feeling exposed. The person who found the body may be particularly traumatised and in need of support.

People bereaved by suicide often experience feelings of rejection, shame and betrayal. You may blame yourself or feel judged. You may feel anger towards the person who died or towards others. You may feel that some people avoid you or avoid talking about the person who died. This can intensify your pain and can leave you feeling more isolated.

It can feel that no one else can fully understand. Sometimes the pain of your loss can be a way of staying close to the person who has died. Others may want you to recover before you feel able.

When death is by murder or violence

Murder is devastating because another person's actions took the life of someone you love. The shock of losing someone to murder or a violent action leaves those close feeling totally bewildered, horrified and distraught. A death due to murder or violence can cause intense feelings of rage, anger and a desire for justice. It is incredibly difficult to accept that the life of someone you love was ended intentionally by someone else. Struggling to understand why and how this happened can be all consuming. You may be troubled by images, nightmares or flashbacks to the murder. You may fear for your own safety or the safety of other loved ones.

Often families of murder victims feel isolated and alone. You may feel other people cannot understand the depth and complexity of the loss. You may feel blamed or stigmatised or think blame is being attributed to the person who has died. Some people may make insensitive remarks or seem only interested in the details of what happened. This can upset and isolate you further.

Dealing with the Gardaí, coroner, media and the legal system can be very stressful and overwhelming. The inquest and trial are very difficult for families as distressing information is made public and your privacy is invaded.

Finding support

Sudden, accidental and traumatic loss can intensify other grief reactions and feelings and it is important to take care of yourself and to get support from others.

Finding constructive ways of expressing difficult and intense feelings such as anger, fear and regret will help. There is no set time and it can take longer than people might expect.

Family and friends may be able to support you and you may also need to seek help from a professional who understands grief and trauma.

It may also help you to talk to someone who has been through a similar experience. There are dedicated support services for families bereaved by suicide and murder. You will find contact information in Part 3.

Telling the children

If you have been bereaved by a suicide or traumatic or violent death, your first instinct may be to protect your children from what has happened. However, children are very sensitive to any changes at home and will know something is wrong. It is important to tell them as soon as possible as they may over hear conversations or find out from someone else. It is best that children hear from a parent or someone very close to them. Children's understanding of death and their grief reactions depend on their age and stage of development. Even very young children often understand more than adults realise and they sense when those around them are upset. As with adults, each child will react differently to death. Have others close by to support you and them.

The details of what happened may quickly become known so it is best to be honest giving information appropriate to their age and their ability to understand. Sometimes children have been there at the time of the death or when the body was found. They will need particular support to help them understand what happened.

- No matter how painful it is to explain the truth, it is better for children to hear about the death from a parent or other adult they are close to.

- You know best how much information is right for your children, but in general it is important to tell them the basic facts about what caused the death. Use words they can understand and give them simple explanations at first. Children need sufficient information or they may fill in the gaps with their imagination or by looking at media reports, information online or social media.
- You could start to explain when and where the person died and what part of their body was hurt or injured. Check with them that they understand what you have said and ask if they would like to know more. Reassure them that they can also come back to you for more information when they are ready.
- It is important to encourage them to ask questions and to talk about how they are feeling about the death and the person who has died. Sharing your feelings of shock and sadness can help children to express their own feelings.
- Where the death was by suicide children may worry that they said or did something to cause the person to die. Reassure them that this is not true. Depending on the age of the child, it may be appropriate to discuss possible reasons why the person ended their life or to explain that you don't know why this has happened.
- Talk to them about other ways to deal with worries and stress such as telling someone close to you how you feel and getting their help.
- Children will need support to form an explanation of what happened that will help them respond to questions from other children.

- It is helpful to let adults who are in regular contact with your children (for example teachers, child minders and parents of their friends) know what they have been told about the death.

You will find more advice on helping children through grief in the section 'When children are bereaved'. See also Part 3 for further information.

How grief affects families

A bereavement is an unsettling and uncertain time for families. Many families come together to support and comfort each other. However, it is a very stressful time and there may be disagreements and hurt within the family. Some families may find it difficult to be together or to support each other.

When someone in your family dies your family life can be upset and disrupted by their loss. You may grow closer to some of your family and distant from others. You may be surprised or disappointed by how others have reacted to the death or supported you in your grief. Past family difficulties and tensions can resurface. It takes time for a bereaved family to adjust to the upheaval and changes that occur following a death.

Everyone's grief is different

There are many ways of coping with grief and no one 'right way'. Each member of your family had a unique relationship with the person who has died so everyone is grieving their unique loss.

It can be difficult to understand how others in your family are expressing their grief. At a time when you may be feeling intensely sad or overwhelmed, others may seem to be coping well. They may have gone back to work and to other activities. They may seem less affected by the death. You may be worried that someone isn't coping. Others may be worried about you. These differences in the way people grieve can result in strained relationships but it is normal that people react differently. It may help to talk about this and get a better understanding of how each of you is feeling.

Communicating within the family

Some families talk easily about their loss and some find this really difficult. It may be too hard to talk to each other about what has happened. You may be worried that you will burden others and want to protect them from how you are feeling. You may not be close to your family and find it easier to talk with friends.

It is important to involve the whole family when someone dies. Some information, may have been kept from a family member in an effort to protect them but this can create mistrust and tension and leave them feeling isolated. Children or vulnerable family members should be given information in a way they can understand. You will find more information in the section 'Helping children through grief'.

Changing family roles

We each have different roles and responsibilities in our family. The person who has died may for example, have been the carer, the organiser or the peacemaker. They may have been the person everyone turned to for advice and support and it can feel like the family is falling apart without them. It can be difficult for families to adjust. Roles and responsibilities may need to change. Be mindful that responsibilities are shared and no one becomes over burdened.

There may be financial matters to manage and decisions to be taken about your family or business, decisions about the family home, personal belongings, inheritance or arranging care for someone should be discussed as a family. It may cause resentment and conflict if one person makes decisions without discussion or if some family members do not get involved.

Helping and supporting each other

- Try to understand and be tolerant of others in your family who are grieving differently to you or who have different ideas about how things should be done. Let others know how you feel and listen to their perspective.
- Get as much support as you can to help with new responsibilities.
- Family gatherings and other opportunities to remember and share memories can help you to feel closer to each other and to the person who has died. This can be especially important for children.
- If tensions in your family are upsetting for you, it may help to talk to someone outside the family or to a bereavement professional.

When a child dies

The death of your child regardless of their age is devastating and traumatic. When a child dies before you, at any age, it upsets what we consider to be life's natural order. It can feel as though you have lost part of yourself. The sense of unfairness of a life cut short magnifies parents' feelings of grief. When you lose a child, you grieve for the lost hopes and dreams you had for their future and for the life experiences that they will miss.

A parent's grief

Although you may experience many of the feelings and reactions described in the first section, parental grief can be particularly intense and difficult to bear.

Shock

The sense of shock, disbelief and numbness can be very intense particularly if the death is unexpected. Your experiences can feel unreal and as though everything is happening at a distance or that you are functioning on auto-pilot. In the early days shock can protect you from the severity of the early pain. As time passes your child's absence feels more permanent and real and the depth of your grief can be frightening.

It may help to share these feelings with the people you are close to, so they can continue to support you.

Longing

Bereaved parents describe an aching, intense longing for their child. It can be unbearable to think that you will not see or hold your child again. It can be of some comfort to keep something with you that reminds you of them or to spend time in a place where you feel close to your child.

Guilt

Guilt is a very normal grief reaction. You may have a sense of guilt that you were unable to protect your child, even if you had no control over the circumstances of their death or you may feel responsible in some other way. If your relationship with your child has been difficult, guilt can be particularly profound. If your child's behaviour was particularly challenging or a source of constant concern for you guilt may be associated with some sense of relief.

You may feel guilt for surviving or going on with life without them. You may feel some guilt as you begin to feel a little stronger and go back to do some of the things you enjoy. Although feelings of guilt and regret are difficult to talk about, sharing these feelings with others who understand your loss, may help you and allow you to be more compassionate with yourself and gradually let these feelings go.

Anger

You may feel intense anger and blame if someone else was involved in your child's death, for example in an accident or an assault. You may feel anger towards your child if you think they contributed to their death in some way, through taking risks or if

they have died by suicide. Anger is sometimes directed towards health care or other services involved with your child. You may feel anger which is not directed at anyone in particular but is a rage felt at the unfairness of your child's death.

Sadness And Despair.

The deep sadness and despair you experience may be impossible to put into words. You feel an intense pain of separation. Your grief can take you over and leave little or no room for anything or anyone else. Everyday tasks can be almost impossible.

Your child's death leaves a huge void in your family. There are many painful daily reminders of your loss, many are unseen by others, such as a quiet house, an empty bedroom, your child's friends as they go through life. Family times can be very difficult because of the absence of your child. It can very difficult to share such intense sadness and despair or feel understood by people who have not lost a child. It can help to talk to other bereaved parents or attend a specialist service for bereaved parents. See Part 3 for specialist bereavement services for parents.

If you feel you can't cope

Parents can experience feelings of depression and a loss of meaning in life. For some it can be very hard to find the motivation to keep going. You may experience distressing thoughts and feelings or feel detached from life around you or long to be with your child. If these feelings persist and become overwhelming or you have suicidal thoughts it is important to seek support from someone you trust, your family doctor or a bereavement professional. See Part 3 for specialist supports

for parents who are grieving and for supports for people experiencing depression or suicidal thoughts.

Facing Social Situations

Social occasions can be very difficult. People you meet may be reluctant to mention your child in case they upset you and this can be hurtful. It may not be easy to say that your child has died in situations where you don't know someone very well or where you don't feel comfortable. Questions such as, 'how many children do you have?', can be difficult to answer. It can be helpful to plan in advance how you might respond in these situations.

Returning to Work

Coping with work can be difficult, particularly as time passes and your colleagues are less conscious of your grief. However, the routine and distraction of work may help you to have some sense of normality in your life. You may find that while at work you can put your feelings on hold but you find the feelings of grief return when you are alone. You may feel guilty if you get distracted from your grief. However, a temporary break from grief is healthy and can give you the energy to cope at other times.

Couples' grief

Each parent's unique experience of grief may impact their relationship. You may find it difficult to support each other because of the depth of your own grief. It may be very painful to talk to each other about your feelings and it can be very hard to witness your partner's pain.

You may try to protect one another other from the extent of your grief. You may feel that you have to be strong for your partner or fear that you will upset them if you talk about your distress. In the same way that you each had a separate and special relationship with your child, each of you will grieve in different ways.

You may differ from your partner in how you express your feelings; one of you may want to talk about your child while the other may find this very difficult. One of you may look for support from others while the other may want to withdraw from people. One of you may want to spend time at the grave or be surrounded by photographs of your child while the other may avoid such reminders. You may notice other differences, such as how you approach returning to work and other activities, how you cope with day-to-day responsibilities or how you relate to your other children.

Many couples experience difficulties with intimacy after the death of a child. You may have little energy for each other. While physical closeness may be comforting to one of you, it may be more difficult for your partner. This can result in feelings of rejection, loneliness or frustration.

What you can do

The differences in how you grieve the death of your child can put a strain on your relationship. It can be difficult to understand each others grief. It is important to try to talk, even when you feel like withdrawing from each other. Try to share your thoughts and feelings to help you understand each other's response to your loss. You will need to give each other time to grieve. It is normal for each parent to do a certain amount of grieving on their own. The death of a child can cause a crisis in some relationships and it may help to talk to a bereavement professional. See Part 3.

Caring for your other children

Despite your devastating loss you need to keep family routines going, particularly when you have other children to care for. This can be very demanding and you may have little energy and feel overwhelmed at times. On the other hand family commitments and other responsibilities can help you to keep going. You may try to protect your other children from your grief. You may also find you are more protective of them and are anxious to keep them close to you because nothing feels safe or secure any longer. This can be difficult especially for older children. It is helpful to talk openly with them and explain how you are feeling. This will help them to understand your grief and and why you may be more anxious and protective. It also allows them to express their own feelings and worries and will help you find ways to deal with your loss as a family.

What you can do

Be realistic and don't expect too much of yourself. Grief can be all-consuming, so for now you are unlikely to function at the same level as before. Accept support from family and friends to help you with your children and your children's needs. You will be better able to support your children if you take time to care for yourself. For further information please see the section on Helping children through grief.

Grieving as a Lone Parent

Whether you are parenting alone by choice or you are separated, divorced or your partner has died, the experience of grieving as a lone parent can be very lonely and stressful as you deal with

many emotional and practical demands. If you are caring for other children it can be difficult to balance day to day parenting and supporting your children in their grief, while you are grieving yourself.

If you are separated or divorced you may have increased contact with your ex partner and this can bring up complex feelings at a very difficult time.

If your partner has died, the death of your child is likely to intensify your earlier grief.

It can be of help to have family or friends share some of the caring responsibilities for your children or to be a support for you as you make important decisions. Sharing memories, thoughts and feelings with someone close can help with the intensity of your grief.

Siblings Grief

A sibling is a brother or a sister. The plural is siblings, and it can refer to brothers, sisters, or a combination of both. Siblings may share a special bond with the child who dies, and this can be a confusing and difficult time for them. A sibling who is a child may experience grief differently depending on their age, stage of development and understanding of death. Siblings may worry about themselves, or others in their family dying; some may become overprotective of family members; some may have feelings of guilt or shame, particularly if they were jealous or angry at the amount of time parents spent with the dying child, or if they felt they did not spend enough time with the dying child. Most children and young people overcome the death of a sibling with the support of their family, however each child may react differently and their grief support needs may be different.

More information about this can be found in the section below ‘When children are bereaved’.

When an adult child dies

Your role as a parent lasts a lifetime. You may have felt a sense of relief and gratitude that your child came safely through their teenage years into adulthood. Generally parents expect their child will outlive them and so the death of a child at any age is incredibly difficult to accept. You may feel a deep sense of unfairness for yourself and your child and feel angry that their life was cut short and that they have missed out on many opportunities in life that you had hoped for them and envisioned sharing with them.

As children become adults the parent - child relationship changes. You may have been very close and have had shared interests. Perhaps your son or daughter was a great support to you and you relied on them. You may desperately miss their company and friendship and worry about how your life will be without them.

If the relationship with your child was strained or if you were estranged from them, their death can bring up a lot of painful emotions. It may help to remember that all relationships go through difficult times and it is important to hold on to good memories and the love you have for your child despite the difficulties you have had.

If your son or daughter had their own family, they can be a source of comfort and support to you. However, they may also be the focus of everyone’s concern and sympathy and you may feel you can’t express your grief or that your loss has been less recognised. You may have limited involvement in planning of

the funeral or service or in other decision making and this may be upsetting. If you have grandchildren perhaps there is an expectation that you will help with their care more than you feel able to. On the other hand you may like to be more involved with your grandchildren but do not want to intrude or you find that contact with them has been reduced. Try to find ways to share memories together and support each other through your grief.

As you get older you may be experiencing other losses and have less support to help you cope with your grief. Regardless of your age or stage of life, a parent experiences intense grief and it may help to talk to someone close to you or to a professional who understands bereavement.

Grandparents and close family

The death of a grandchild or other child you are very close to is deeply distressing. As well as grieving for the child who has died you are also upset and worried as you witness the grief and distress of their parents. Although you will not be able to take away their pain and can feel quite helpless, you are there to support them in a way that only those very close are able to. It can help to spend time with them, to listen to them and offer them comfort. Parents really value having opportunities to talk about their child with people who were close to them. Offers of practical help can also relieve a lot of their stress. It is also important for you to get support with your own grief.

Finding ways to cope

The death of a child is a devastating experience for parents and for the whole family. Their absence will be deeply felt and

your child will always be a central part of your life. As well as the suggestions in the first section Understanding Grief the following may help you to find ways to cope as you grieve for your child.

- Managing your grief can be overwhelming. Even though it may seem unimaginable, you can find ways to go on living a meaningful life.
- Take small steps, try not to think too far ahead. Living in the present moment and focusing on everyday tasks can help you feel less overwhelmed.
- Although many day to day experiences as well as special occasions may bring an upsurge of grief, you build strength and develop strategies to cope with each challenge you meet.
- Remembering happy times with your child can bring you comfort.
- Try to do things that help you to relax and give you some enjoyment. It is important to have times when you have some release from the intense pain of your grief.
- People will want to be supportive but often don't know what to say or how to help. Let people close to you know what you need.
- It may help to talk to a bereavement professional or to contact a support service for bereaved parents. See Part 3 for bereavement services and resources.

When children are bereaved

Many people worry about what to tell children and how to help them when someone close to them dies. It is important to tell them the truth but in language they can understand. Children's understanding of death and their grief reactions depend on their age and stage of development. Even very young children often understand more than adults realise and they sense when those around them are upset. As with adults, each child will react differently to death. Children's grief differs from adults in that it is sporadic - a child may move quickly from being visibly upset to wanting to play.

Children may react to grief in the following ways.

- Physical reactions such as aches and pains, waking at night, bed-wetting, headaches, tummy aches and changes in the child's eating patterns.
- Their behaviour may also change. They may lash out or misbehave, perhaps to express anger or other feelings. They may seem indifferent at times, perhaps when their feelings are too much for them to deal with.
- Some children may try to be good all the time. They may try to take on extra responsibilities in an effort to help or protect their parents or brothers and sisters.

Children learn from adults how to deal with death. Talk about the person who has died and encourage children to talk about their feelings. It can help to identify particular feelings, for example by telling them that you are also sad and sometimes you feel angry.

It is ok to cry in front of children but talk to them about why you are upset as can feel frightened or helpless when they see their parent distressed. Children may be reluctant to talk about the person who has died for fear of upsetting others and may need to be encouraged to do so.

It is helpful to talk about how you are, as this will give them permission to talk about their feelings.

Caring for children is demanding, especially when you are grieving. Ask for support from family, friends or professionals. If you are concerned about a child, check with your GP or a professional who understands children's bereavement. See Part 3 for children's bereavement services and resources.

Helping children through grief

When should I tell the children?

It is best for children to hear about a death from a parent or someone very close to them. Talk to them as soon as you can so they don't hear through someone else. It is difficult to predict how a child will react. Some children become very upset while others ask lots of questions. Some children won't want to leave your side while others may want to be on their own.

What should I tell them?

Keep explanations short and simple. Use the words 'dead' or 'died'. Phrases such as 'gone to sleep' or 'passed away' are confusing for young children. They may believe that the person is alive somewhere and will come back. Equating death with sleep can confuse and frighten children.

For a younger child, it might be useful to say "Daddy was very sick. It was a big sickness. The doctors and nurses could not make him better even though they tried very hard. Daddy's body could not work anymore and he died". Young children need help to understand that there are different types of sickness, 'little' and 'big' sicknesses. Otherwise they may fear that all illness results in death. Your explanation will also depend on the questions they ask.

Children sometimes feel that something they said or did may have caused the death. Perhaps they had a fight with the person or feel may have hurt them in some way. Explain the cause of death in language they will understand, and reassure them that they are not in any way responsible.

Be honest and open and listen to what the child has to say. In this way, you will reassure them that it's ok to talk about the person, to ask questions and to tell you about their worries whenever they want to.

Children may ask the same questions many times over. Although this may be difficult for you, it is their way of trying to understand what has happened. Be as honest as you can. As children get older their understanding of death will change, so a child bereaved at age five will have new concerns and questions as the years go on.

Should I let them see the person?

It can help children to take in the reality that the person has died if they can see their body. However don't insist that they do anything they don't want to. Prepare them for what to expect, including how the body will look and feel to touch. Reassure them that you'll be there with them.

Should they be involved in the funeral?

Involving children in the funeral services will help them feel included. Prepare children for what will happen. Let them decide what they would like to do. Don't ask them to do anything that makes them feel uncomfortable.

Is it better for the children to stay at home or to be cared for by other family and friends?

While it may be necessary for children to spend some time being cared for by others, it is very reassuring for them to spend as much time as possible at home with their family.

How can I reassure them?

Maintain their usual routines as much as possible. The death of someone close, especially a parent, may leave children feeling insecure and worried about who will look after them. Reassure children that you love them, that you are still a family and that you will take care of them. Give them lots of attention and love which will comfort them.

How should I deal with concerning behaviours?

Children may react to distress by regressing to behaviours such as thumb sucking and bed-wetting. Because they are feeling angry and sad they may act in aggressive or destructive ways. Most of these reactions are temporary. Try to be patient. Help them to understand why they are having angry outbursts and try to set limits on their behaviour. However, if you become worried about your child's behaviour, talk to a professional who can help. See Part 3 for resources and services for children.

Supporting a child in returning to school.

Going back to school may be particularly difficult for children. They may be worried about what people know and what they should say. It will help to prepare a simple explanation about what has happened and what to say to their friends.

Talk with the school about how they can support your child to manage the transition back to school.

Older children also have to deal with the anxieties and insecurities of being a teenager making this a very difficult time for them. Talk with your child regularly about how they are finding school.

They may feel vulnerable and can be hurt by how other children react to them or by something they say.

Their concentration may also be affected because of the upset and changes they are coping with.

Keep in touch with your child's teachers about how your child is coping. Ask them to let you know of any concerns they may have.

Where can I get help for my child?

Your child may need additional support. Please see Part 3 for resources and services for children. There are also resources for parents and carers which you may find useful.

What to expect when children are grieving

0 - 2 years

While babies and toddlers do not have an understanding of

death they are affected by separation from a parent or carer. They experience loss and are also likely to pick up on the anxiety or distress of those close to them. They may become irritable and clingy. They may be fretful, cry a lot or become quiet and withdrawn.

What you can do

Babies and toddlers will react both to the separation from the person who has died and to changes in their normal routines. They should be cared for by people they are close to or familiar with. They will feel more secure if you keep their routines, such as mealtimes and bedtimes as normal as possible.

2 - 5 years

Children of this age cannot fully understand that death is permanent and may think the person is asleep or away. As time passes they will miss the presence of someone close and may search for them. Children feel insecure and frightened when the familiar things around them change. This age group needs a lot of reassurance that they will be safe and looked after.

Younger children may feel that they said or did something that made the person die. They need simple explanations of what happened and reassurance that they are not to blame.

Children of this age are very sensitive to separations from family. In times of upset even short separations can be distressing as they don't have a sense of time. They do not have the words to explain what they are feeling. They may become clingy, withdrawn or express their upset through tantrums or regressive behaviour such as bed-wetting or returning to a bottle or soother.

What you can do

Talk to your children about their worries and feelings. They are likely to have lots of questions. It may help to read simple story books about death (there is a list of resources in Part 3), start a memory box or use painting or drawing to help them express how they feel. Keeping their usual rules and routines such as bedtimes and mealtimes is important. If they attend a pre-school or crèche talk to the staff about how your child is doing. They need extra affection and reassurance to help them feel secure.

5 - 8 years

From about the age of five, children begin to understand more about death. They can understand that it is permanent and that the person is not coming back. They can be very curious and may be particularly interested in details such as the cause of death and what happens when the person is buried or cremated. They may ask very direct questions about death, the body, the coffin and so on. However, they can be confused by more abstract ideas such as 'life after death'. Younger children may assume that the person can still think and feel and may worry for example, that they are cold or lonely. It will help to explain that this isn't the case when a person dies.

Children of this age have very active imaginations and in the absence of an explanation they can relate to they may imagine circumstances that are inaccurate and frightening. It is important to explain the cause of death in terms they can understand. As with younger children, you should use the words 'dead' and 'died'. Avoid phrases such as 'gone away' or 'passed away'.

At this age a child may find it hard to take in the reality that someone has died and act as if nothing has happened. This can

be their way of coping with difficult feelings. They may become withdrawn or clingy, or have angry outbursts. They may be afraid to sleep alone and may have disturbing dreams. They may complain of headaches or tummy aches. They may worry that someone else close to them will die. Talk to them about their fears and reassure them that the people they love will always take care of them.

What you can do

Encourage them to be involved in the funeral or remembrance service. Talk about the person with them, share memories and let them know that you also miss the person who has died. Children mainly express their grief through play and activities rather than through talking. It may help them to make scrap books, photo albums and memory boxes. It may also help to paint, write letters or stories, visit the grave or go to a special place they shared with the person who died. As with younger children they will feel more secure in their normal routines and need to be reassured.

8 - 12 years

Children at this age understand the finality of death and know that everyone dies someday. They are also more aware of the long term consequences of their loss and will think about the future without the person. They will have questions about what caused the death. They need honest and clear information otherwise they may fill in the gaps by imagining what may have happened and piecing together information they have overheard. Their ideas about what has happened may be more troubling for them than the actual circumstances.

They may worry about their own death and the death of others close to them. If a parent has died children will be especially worried about their other parent. This can leave them feeling unsafe and insecure and may cause separation anxiety, for example a reluctance to leave you to go to school. They may also be very protective towards you. Reassure them that you are ok and that they don't need to mind you or worry about you. If your children are worried about who would care for them if something happened to you, talk to them about arrangements you have made.

At this age, children are often conscious of being different to their friends and a death in the family can leave them feeling as though they stand out from others. They may question why this had to happen to them. Some children may feel angry and they may take it out on the people who are closest to them. It can be very hard for you to deal with this when you are also feeling vulnerable. Allow children to express their anger but within safe limits to ensure they don't hurt themselves or anyone else.

What you can do

It can be hard for children of this age to talk about their feelings and worries. Let them know that you are happy to listen to them whenever they are ready to talk. It may be helpful to arrange for your child to also spend time with other family and friends they are close with, to ensure they have a wider circle of people to support them.

Adolescents and Young Adults

Adolescence is a time of significant change, when young people begin to develop their own identity, separate to the family.

Adolescents may experience a wide range of grief reactions including those experienced by adults such as shock, sadness, loneliness, guilt and regret. However, they will not have the same life experience, support systems and coping skills. This may be their first experience of profound sadness and loss and it may feel very intense and overwhelming. Older adolescents may be reluctant to talk to their family about how they are feeling and may find it easier to confide in friends. Adolescents may blame others for what has happened and be angry and argumentative. They may also be upset, tearful and want to spend time alone.

Younger adolescents may need to be with parents or close family to feel more secure. On the other hand some adolescents may feel they should take on a more adult role, for example caring for younger children or worrying about a parent or other adults close to them. Try to protect them from taking on too many responsibilities but ask for their opinions and keep them involved.

What you can do

With support, young people do cope with loss and bereavement. Reassure them that you will all get through this difficult time.

The experience of death can add to the natural tendency of a young person to question what is important in life. Listen and encourage young people to talk about how they are feeling and what the death means to them. Help them to understand that their feelings of grief are a natural expression of love for the person who has died and a normal reaction to their loss. Give them space to grieve in their own way and let them know you're there when they need you. Respect their wishes and involve them in decisions affecting them and the family.

Feelings such as guilt, anger and regret are common, especially if there was conflict with the person who has died. It may help to remind them that disagreements and conflict are part of all close relationships. You can help by giving them opportunities to talk about these difficult feelings either with you or someone else close to them or with a professional.

The predictability of structure and routines can be reassuring for young people particularly in a time of change. Maintaining usual expectations and boundaries is also important.

Encourage them to get back to activities they enjoy as soon as they feel ready.

If you are concerned about how your teenager is coping talk to them about what is worrying you. If you think they need more support or if you are worried about their mood, their level of anxiety or risk taking behaviours, talk to your family doctor or a bereavement service. See Part 3 for resources specific to children and adolescents. It may be helpful to let their school know so they can also provide support.

Coping with your grief as time goes on

Grieving is a process during which you try to adapt to a new life and a new world without someone you love. You will move back and forth between times when you feel overwhelmed by your grief and times when you feel more able for everyday life. The following are some suggestions to consider as you cope with your loss:

- Try not to make major changes in the months following your bereavement. If you need to make an important decision it may help to talk it over with someone you trust.
- Take your time in deciding what to do with personal belongings. It may help you to involve family or friends in these decisions.
- You may have had to take on new roles and additional responsibilities. Where possible share these with others to avoid becoming overwhelmed.
- If you find it difficult to talk to the people closest to you it could help to talk to others who have been bereaved, to attend counselling or join a bereavement support forum or group (see Part 3).
- Some people find it helpful to write about their feelings and experiences in a journal or blog.
- Allow yourself to have happy times with your family and friends. It can be helpful to have some distraction and release from the pain and upset you feel. Plan things you enjoy and can look forward to.

- Birthdays, anniversaries and other significant family occasions can be especially painful. You may dread these times as they approach. It can help to have a plan for the day and to spend it with people close to you.
- Take time for yourself. Do things you enjoy. Don't be afraid to say no to things you don't feel up to. Make time to rest and to eat well. Exercise is a healthy way to relieve stress and is important for your wellbeing. It can also help you to sleep better.
- Remembering the person who has died, sharing memories and finding ways to mark their importance in your life can help you to stay connected to them and keep their memory alive.

Hope for the future

The death of someone close can touch all areas of your life. It causes deep pain and distress to live without someone who has been important to you. Whether your relationship was happy or difficult you will still experience strong feelings and grieve for your loss.

Sometimes you may feel detached from those around you. You may feel lost. You may long to have the person back with you. At first they are on your mind all of the time and most of your energy is absorbed by your loss. You may have little energy for other people or commitments, no matter how important they are to you.

Gradually, you will regain interest and feel able to be more involved in other areas of life. This is important for your wellbeing and does not mean that your love for the person who has died

has lessened. They will remain an important part of your life and you will always have a strong bond with them. Your relationship with them has changed but not ended. The person who has died may have influenced you in many ways including your values, beliefs, your likes and dislikes. They may have introduced you to interests and ideas. You carry forward what they have given to you and this can help you to feel close to them. You can pay tribute to their importance in your life in many ways for example:

- remember times you shared with them and the closeness between you,
- keep belongings that were special to the person or spend time in places that were special for you both,
- share memories with other people who loved them or who care for you,
- have memorial ceremonies or events and remember them at family occasions,
- continue to care for the things they cared about,
- get involved in support groups, voluntary work, fundraising or other activities in memory of the person who died,
- consider their ideas and beliefs as you face decisions,
- draw on their love for you as a source of strength.

A happy future can be difficult to imagine when someone you love has died. There will always be times when you feel sadness but the intense pain will lessen and change over time. There may be people or things in your life that become increasingly important to you and provide some enjoyment and release from

your grief. You may notice small but positive changes in how you are coping and this can be encouraging. These gradual changes can help you to find a purpose for living and hope for the future.

Remember, there is no time line for grief or set period for when grief ‘should be over’ - everyone’s grief journey is unique and may be different from your last experience of grief. Being patient and compassionate with yourself, and others, is part of this journey.

How to help when someone is bereaved

It can be very daunting to know what to say or how to support someone in the most painful moments of their life. The words you use are less important than showing genuine care. Everyone grieves in their own way and therefore people need varying kinds of support. A person who has been bereaved needs those close to them to listen, to spend time with them, to be willing to support them in whatever way they find helpful. They may find it hard to reach out for support and it is important to ask what would help. There will be times they need to have people around them and times when they need to grieve alone.

You might think that someone else is better placed to support them but others may also assume this and there is a risk the person may become isolated. There is no 'right thing' to say. It will help to just be there for them, to listen or to help in practical ways.

Keep in contact and let them know that you are there if they need you.

What can I say?

Acknowledge that this is a very difficult time and ask them how they are. Try not to use cliches as they can be insensitive. It's ok to mention that you don't know what to say that would help.

It can be difficult to know how to respond when people who are bereaved question 'why them' or 'why this happened?'. This is

usually an expression of pain rather than a question they expect you to answer. It can be helpful to just acknowledge how hard it must be.

Practical Support

When people are grieving it may be difficult for them to ask for help. Suggest something you can do, for example, helping with paperwork, cooking, shopping or looking after children. These everyday tasks can be overwhelming when you're grieving.

While some people may appreciate practical support at the time of the death, others may appreciate and need support for longer or at a later stage. It may be useful to check in every now and again to see if any support is needed.

Emotional Support

Often people who have been bereaved find it comforting to talk about the person who has died. It is good to give them opportunities and time to talk. Listen closely so you can understand how they are feeling and what is the most important or hardest thing for them at this time.

Our wish to make it better perhaps by suggesting solutions or comparing their experience to others who are bereaved, can stop the person from saying what it is really like for them.

If they say they have regrets or are feeling angry or guilty allow them time to talk about it. These are difficult feelings to bear and it helps to express them. They may be angry and frustrated at times and may take this out on those closest to them. Try to make allowances for this.

As time goes on

It is important to stay connected as time goes on. In the months after the death, the day-to-day life of family and friends goes back to normal. However the bereaved person may only now begin to feel the full extent of their loss.

Grief comes in waves so expect there to be good and bad days. During good times they may feel able to get on with life as normal and in difficult times they may need extra care and understanding.

As time passes, they may have to face new challenges that are difficult for them and they may need on-going help and support.

It is good to acknowledge significant times like anniversaries, birthdays and other family occasions that may be particularly sad or hard for people who are bereaved. Be patient and continue to support them. Grieving takes a long time.

Part 2
What you need to know

When someone close to you dies, there are practical, financial and legal matters that arise that need to be addressed in the early days and weeks. This may be stressful and difficult to manage at this time. It may help to ask for the support of a family member or friend.

The following sections provide information on financial assistance and legal matters.

About money matters

How will I pay for the funeral?

Funerals can be expensive. There are number of Department of Social Protection payments that you may apply for to get additional help to meet the expense of the funeral:

- The Bereaved Parent Grant is a once-off payment to widows, widowers, surviving civil partners and surviving cohabitants with dependent children.
- If someone dies from an accident at work, an accident while travelling directly to or from work or an occupational disease a Funeral Grant is available.
- Additional Needs Payment: Whether you qualify or not for one of the above grants, if you are on a low income you may be eligible for an Additional Needs Payment

to help with funeral costs. Each case is decided on its merits by a Community Welfare Officer and are paid under Supplementary Welfare Allowance of the Department.

To apply for the above payments or grant please contact the nearest Intreo centre or Social Welfare Branch Office to you.

In many cases a payment or a grant cannot be paid until all the necessary documentation is received. If you are claiming the grant, you are responsible for the production of certificates, documents and any information required, for example:

- Death certificate or interim death certificate
- Birth certificate
- Marriage or Civil Partnership certificate (if applicable)
- Funeral receipts
- The deceased person's Personal Public Service (PPS) number
- Your PPS number may also be required

Main social welfare payments

If you were living with or dependent on the deceased person, any current benefits or payments you are getting from the Department of Social Protection may change, or you may be able to claim additional benefits. Depending on your income and circumstances you may be entitled to a social welfare payment in your own right, for example:

- The Bereaved Partner's (Contributory) Pension and related social welfare benefits may be payable if either you or your deceased husband, wife, civil partner or cohabitant

has enough PRSI contributions.

- A Bereaved Partner's (Non-Contributory) Pension is a means-tested payment that is paid to o a bereaved partner who does not qualify for the PRSI-based Bereaved Partner's (Contributory) Pension without dependent children and who pass a means test.
- A One-Parent Family Payment can be paid to you if you are parenting alone as a result of the death of your spouse, civil partner or cohabitant. This is a means tested payment. If you also qualify for a Widow's, Widower's or Surviving Civil Partner's Contributory Pension you will have to choose which payment is of most benefit to you because you cannot get both.
- A Guardian's payment is paid to the child's guardian up to the child's 18th birthday or 22nd birthday if he or she is in full-time education and where the child is considered an orphan.
- If a person dies because of an accident at work or occupational disease, Death Benefit under the Occupational Injuries Scheme may be paid to their surviving spouse or civil partner.

Additional payments

Bereavement can cause financial difficulties. The Supplementary Welfare Allowance Scheme provides financial support to people with low incomes. You may qualify for a weekly supplement payment under the scheme to meet certain special needs, for example, help with rent and fuel costs. In addition, payments can also be made for urgent or exceptional needs.

How to apply for a payment?

To check your entitlements and apply for a payment please contact the nearest Intreo centre or Social Welfare Branch Office to you.
www.gov.ie/en/directory/category/e1f4b5-intreo-offices

More information

The Citizens Information Board provides very useful information on the practical concerns you may have when someone close to you dies including information on accessing money, getting help with funeral expenses, dealing with legal and tax matters and other practical issues.

The Citizens Information Board is a free nationwide service which provides this information through its website, a telephone helpline and face-to-face in centres:

- Citizens Information Online **www.citizensinformation.ie** and specifically on the following section **www.citizensinformation.ie/en/death**
- Citizens Information Phone Service is a nationwide service that can be reached on 0818 07 4000, Monday to Friday, 9am to 8pm. If you are calling CIPS from outside Ireland, dial +353 21 229 8178.
- Citizens Information Centres provide free, impartial information, advice and advocacy.

The booklet 'Bereavement: A Practical Guide' developed by the Citizens Information Board has more information about money matters such as loans, tax and accessing bank accounts and

legal matters such as wills and probate. This booklet is available on the Citizens Information Board website, and on request from staff on the telephone helpline or from your nearest Citizens Information Centre .

Further information on all matters relating to tax may be obtained from Revenue on their website **www.revenue.ie**

The Money and Budgeting Advice Service (MABs) is a free and nationwide service that offers advice on money management, budgeting and if you are struggling with debt. Further information is available by calling their helpline 0818 07 2000 or visit **www.mabs.ie**

About post mortem examinations, the Coroner and inquests

Post Mortem Examinations

Following some deaths, a post mortem examination (PME), or also called an autopsy, is carried out to clarify the cause of the death. The results may help you to understand how the person died and to come to terms with the death. There are two types of PME, a hospital (consented) post mortem examination and a Coroner's post mortem examination.

What is a hospital post mortem examination?

A hospital PME may be carried out when the family or hospital Consultant would like to learn more about the illness, even when the cause of death is known. The hospital PME may advance medical knowledge and helps others by contributing information about the cause or treatment of the disease. This is only carried out with the consent of the designated person who acts on behalf of the family. If you do decide to grant permission, the doctors will discuss what is entailed, how to get the PME results and ask you to sign a consent form and advise you when the PME results will be available. You should discuss the PME results with the consultant who was treating the person who died or with your family doctor.

What is a Coroner's post mortem examination?

The coroner is an independent public officer, employed by the Department of Justice. There are certain deaths that must be notified to the coroner under Irish law. Some examples of these include:

- Sudden and unexpected deaths;
- When the GP or hospital doctor is uncertain about the cause of death and so is not able to issue a Medical Certificate of the Cause of Death;
- Accidental or violent deaths (for example falls or road traffic accidents);
- Deaths that occur within 24 hours of hospital admission;
- Deaths that occur within 24 hours of any medical, surgical or other procedure;
- Any maternal death or late maternal death;
- Any death of a stillborn child, death intrapartum or infant death.

The coroner decides whether a PME should take place based on the information they have about the death. The coroner does not need your consent but you will be told if a PME is to happen.

Further information on other circumstances where a death must be reported to the coroner is available on the Department of Justice website. **www.gov.ie/en/department-of-justice-home-affairs-and-migration/publications/additional-circumstances-where-a-death-must-be-reported-to-the-coroner/**

If a coroner's PME is to happen, you or another member of the family will be asked to formally identify the person who has

died. This may take place in the presence of a member of An Garda Síochána. A garda may also contact you to get more information about the health of the person who has died and the circumstances surrounding the death. This is to help the coroner and does not mean that the death is considered suspicious.

What is organ retention?

During a PME small samples of tissue are examined to help understand the cause of death. These are made into blocks and slides that form part of the medical record of the deceased person.

In some cases, it may be necessary to complete further testing on the person's organs to help identify the cause of, or contributory factors to death. When this happens, the organs may be temporarily retained. Each hospital has its own procedures about how they will inform you of this. For a hospital PME, the hospital will seek the consent of the family member or designated person, before organs are temporarily retained. However, it is important to note that in cases of a Coroner's PME examination, the temporary retention of organs does not require consent.

If organs are temporarily retained, someone in the hospital (or in some cases the coroner's office) will talk to the designated person about the family's wishes for the burial or cremation of the retained organs once the examination is completed.

You may find it very upsetting to deal with these issues. It is important to talk with a member of the hospital staff you have been dealing with or your family doctor so you understand what is happening and why.

When can I get a death certificate?

In a hospital PME, the medical reason for the cause of death will be signed by a doctor and sent to Medical Records Department. The team in this department will send the certificate to the Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages. Once you are notified that this has happened by the hospital, you can apply for the death certificate as outlined in the next section below.

When the coroner has ordered a PME, the hospital cannot give you any information about the cause of death. You cannot get the death certificate until the PME results are available. This can take several weeks or months. You can get an Interim Certificate as to the Fact of Death from the coroner's office. This is usually enough for social welfare and some other financial matters where proof of death is needed. Contact the local coroner's office to get further information. You can get the coroner's name and contact details from the hospital or your local authority or council or on the following website **www.gov.ie/en/directory/category/345ba-contact-details-for-coroners/**

What is an inquest?

An inquest is an inquiry held in public by the coroner. The purpose of an inquest is to establish the circumstances and cause of the death. The coroner decides if it is necessary to hold an inquest. If the coroner considers the cause of death may be due to unnatural causes, or in other cases at their discretion, they can hold an inquest, sometimes with a jury. Evidence is taken from witnesses who can assist in answering questions for the coroner's enquiry. At the conclusion of the inquest, the coroner will read out a formal verdict in which the identity of the deceased, how and when the death occurred, the cause of

death and the manner of death are recorded. While the coroner or jury may make a general recommendation designed to prevent similar deaths, they do not decide whose fault it was or whether there was a criminal offence.

Why is the coroner holding an inquest?

The purpose of an inquest is to establish the circumstances and cause of the death. Any witnesses, such as gardaí, medical personnel or others who were present at the death may be asked to attend and give sworn evidence. An inquest does not decide blame or innocence in relation to the cause of death. It is an enquiry into the facts surrounding the death, and is presided over by the Coroner. There may or may not be a jury. You may have a legal representative (such as a solicitor or barrister) present who can question any witnesses on your behalf. If an inquest is to take place, it can be months (or sometimes up to a couple of years) before the final hearing. The inquest will be postponed if there are investigations by An Garda Síochána (criminal case) relating to the death.

After the inquest, the Coroner's office will arrange to register the death and you can then obtain the death certificate in the usual way (see next section). Once the inquest is over you can get a copy of the PME report from the Coroner's office. Because the report will contain very explicit medical details from the PME, it may be helpful to go through it with your GP or hospital doctor.

Can I attend an inquest?

If a coroner decides to hold an inquest, you may need to attend the Coroner's Court. The family and any other interested parties will be provided with information about when and where the

inquest will be held. The Coroner's Court is open to the public and to members of the press.

Will there always be an inquest?

If the coroner's PME establishes that the cause of death is due to natural causes and there is no need for further investigation, there is no need for an inquest. The coroner's office will arrange to register the death and you will be able to get the death certificate in the usual way. This will not be the case if there is to be an inquest.

The emotional impact of an inquest

An inquest can be a very difficult experience for your family. It may bring up many painful feelings and memories. You will hear details of what happened at the time of the death that may be distressing for you. Attending the inquest may help to answer some of your questions about the death and is an opportunity for you to ask questions that you feel are relevant. However, some questions may remain unanswered and this can be very difficult. You should bring a family member or close friend for support.

Where can I get more information?

Each hospital will have a local booklet or leaflet on PME services in their area. You can access further information on the Coroner's Service from the Department of Justice website. **www.gov.ie/en/department-of-justice-home-affairs-and-migration/campaigns/coroner-service/**

About registering the death

You should register the death as soon as possible. To register a death, contact your local HSE civil registration office for opening hours. Contact details of the HSE civil registration offices are available on **www.civilregistrationservice.ie**

Who can register the death?

A death can be registered by a relative or civil partner who has all the information needed. If no relatives can be found or if they all live abroad, are ill or do not have the necessary information then the death may also be registered by a 'qualified informant' which includes but is not limited to :

- any person present at the death,
- any other person who has the information needed,
- any person who was in the same residence when the person died at home,
- a member of staff at the hospital or other institution where the person died,
- a person who found the body of the person concerned,
- a person who took charge of the body,
- the person who arranged the burial of the body, or any other person who has knowledge of the death.

What information will I need to register the death?

You will need the following information about the person who has died:

- the date and place of death;
- their place of birth;
- their gender (male/female);
- their first name(s), surname, birth surname and address;
- their personal public service number (PPSN, formerly RSI number);
- their marital status;
- their date of birth or their age last birthday;
- their profession or occupation (job or trade);
- if they were married, the profession or occupation of their spouse;
- if they were less than 18 years old, the occupation(s) of
- their parent(s) or guardian(s);
- their father's name(s) and birth surname;
- their mother's name(s) and birth surname;

The person registering the death will also have to give their first name(s), surname, address and signature. You must also state why you are qualified to register the death.

What do I need to register the death?

The doctor or hospital department will give you a Medical Certificate of the Cause of Death. Bring the certificate to the

HSE civil registration office and sign the register of death in the presence of the registrar. The registrar will issue the death certificate. There is no charge for registering a death but you will have to pay for the death certificate. The current charges will be on display in the HSE civil registration office.

What if there is to be a Coroner's post mortem or an inquest?

When a Coroner's post mortem is carried out neither your family doctor nor the hospital doctor will be able to sign the Medical Certificate of the Cause of Death. As a result there will be a delay in getting the death certificate. You can get an Interim Certificate as to the Fact of Death from the Coroner's office. This is usually enough for social welfare and some other financial matters where proof of death is needed.

Once the Coroner determines the cause of death, they will register the death with the Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages and you will then be able to get a death certificate.

Registering a stillborn baby

In Ireland, all stillbirths can be registered but it is not mandatory. A stillbirth is registered by signing the Register of Stillbirths. A stillbirth may be registered in any HSE Civil Registration Service. The General Register Office has more information on how to register a stillbirth at **www.gov.ie/en/service/e6c3d6-registering-a-stillbirth/**

About legal matters

This section provides some basic information about legal issues that may arise after a death. You should seek legal advice for your individual situation.

Explanation of legal terms

A person who makes a will is a testator. A person who dies without a will is said to have died intestate. This means that the person's property and money will be distributed according to the law. The person's belongings are known as the 'estate' or 'assets' - they might include property, money, personal belongings - that have to be distributed after their death.

An executor is a person named in a will who carries out the terms of the will. There may be more than one executor. The executor may be a beneficiary under the will.

A beneficiary is a person named in the will who receives money or property from the estate.

An administrator is a person who administers the will if no executors have been appointed or who administers the estate if there is no will. A legacy (or bequest) is a gift made in a will.

Probate is the process by which a will is put into effect.

More information is available at **www.citizensinformation.ie/en/death/the_deceaseds_estate/dealing_with_the_deceaseds_estate.html**

Wills

Try to find out if the person who has died made a will. If it is not kept at home, the will is usually with the person's solicitor or in their bank for safekeeping.

When they have not left a will

A person is said to have died 'intestate' when they have left no will. It may be necessary for you to take out Letters of Administration. These give the nominated contact person the same legal authority as the Grant of Probate. You can either contact a solicitor or the Probate Office directly about getting a Grant of Probate.

House and land

If a house or land has been left to you or if the title for the house has to be transferred to your name you will need a Deed of Assent. You should probably ask a solicitor to help you with this.

If you do not transfer the title you will not become the legal owner. You may have serious problems if you want to sell the property in the future or leave it to someone else in your will.

For more information about wills, deeds and probate, contact:
The Probate Office
1st floor, 15/24 Phoenix Street North
Smithfield, Dublin 7
D07 X028
Tel: 01 888 6174 or 01 888 6728
www.courts.ie

The booklet 'Bereavement: A Practical Guide' developed by the Citizens Information Board provides information on legal matters following a death. This information is available from their website **www.citizensinformationboard.ie.**

Guardianship of children

When the parents are married to each other

Married parents are joint guardians of their children. You each have the same duties and rights regarding your children's welfare. You have the right to choose who you wish to be guardian to your children in the event of your death. When one parent dies, the surviving parent usually becomes sole guardian of the children.

If the parent who has died appointed a person to act as a guardian in the event of their death, they act jointly with the surviving parent in making decisions about the child's welfare. Guardians appointed by deed or will are known as testamentary guardians. In some instances, the court may appoint a guardian to act jointly with the surviving parent.

When both parents die without appointing guardians, any person may apply to the court to be appointed guardian. This will most likely be the child's nearest relative. The courts can consider the wishes of children over the age of twelve, if this is appropriate, regarding who should be their guardian.

When the parents are not married to each other

A father who was living with the mother for 12 months before the birth, and 3 months after the birth is a guardian by law. Visit **www.citizensinformation.ie/en/birth-family-relationships/married-couples/guardianship-status-of-fathers/**

Where the mother agrees, the father can become a joint guardian by signing a statutory declaration in the presence of a Peace Commissioner, a Commissioner for Oaths or a Notary Public. At present there is no where you can register the declaration. You should keep copies and put the original in a safe place.

The statutory declaration form is available from: **http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2020/si/210/made/en/pdf** (SI 210 of 2020)

Where the mother does not agree to the father becoming a guardian he can apply to the district court to become a joint guardian. He can do this even if his name is not on the birth certificate. The court must act in the best interest of the child when making its decision.

The mother may appoint testamentary guardians. The father may only do this if he is a guardian himself. If the mother dies, the father does not automatically become a guardian but he may apply to the court to be appointed as a guardian.

Part 3
Bereavement support

The death of someone close generates feelings of loss that may last a long time. Everyone's loss is different and therefore everyone's grief is different. Many people find their own way through grief with support from friends and family. It may also be helpful to seek support from professionals who understand bereavement or from organisations that provide services including

- helplines
- bereavement self-help resources
- support from other bereaved people
- support for people bereaved by suicide
- counselling

In this section we outline where you may be able to find counselling and support. We give contact details for some services and support groups including details of their websites where you may get more information. There is also a booklist you may find useful.

The services listed here are only some of the bereavement services available throughout the country. Your family doctor, public health nurse, hospital or community centre may be able to put you in touch with a local service.

Helplines that offer bereavement support

Irish Hospice Foundation Bereavement Support Line

The Bereavement Support Line is open to any adult who:
• Has been bereaved.
• Is concerned about somebody else who has been bereaved.
• Is finding a previous bereavement difficult
Freephone 1800 807 077 10am to 1pm, Monday to Friday
Visit **www.hospicefoundation.ie**

Barnardos Helpline

Bereavement information and support for children and families.
Phone 01 473 2110 10am to 12pm, Monday to Thursday
Visit **www.barnardos.ie**

Childline (ISPCC)

Ireland's 24-hour national listening service for young people up to the age of 18. Calls and messages are answered by staff and volunteers who are trained to listen to children and young people.
Freephone 1800 666 666 any time
Text 50101 10am to 4pm every day
Chat online anytime at **www.childline.ie**

Pieta

Free individual counselling, therapy and support for people who have been bereaved by suicide and for people who are thinking about suicide.
Freephone 1800 247 247 any time
Text HELP to 51444 - standard message rates apply
Visit **www.pieta.ie**

Samaritans

Emotional support for anyone who is struggling to cope or needs someone to listen without judgement or pressure.
Contact jo@samaritans.ie
Freephone 116 123 any time
Visit **www.samaritans.org**

Text 50808

A free text service, providing everything from a calming chat to immediate support for people going through a mental health or emotional crisis.
Text HELLO to 50808 any time
Visit **www.textaboutit.ie**

Organisations that offer bereavement resources and support

Health Services Executive (HSE)

The HSE provides a range of services, resources and supports on bereavement.

Visit: **www2.hse.ie/mental-health/life-situations-events/bereavement**

Leaflets on grief and bereavement developed by the HSE and Irish Hospice Foundation are available to order or download:

1. Visit: www.healthpromotion.ie
2. From the Search by topic list, select 'Bereavement'.

Bethany Bereavement Support

Provide a voluntary community and parish based service, which aims to support bereaved adults through the grieving process.

Visit: www.bethany.ie

Irish Hospice Foundation

Information and resources for coping with grief in children, adolescents and families, including:

- podcasts on grief and loss
- guided practices on grief
- videos on understanding loss and grief

Visit **www.hospicefoundation.ie**

Widow.ie

Provides information and self-help resources for widows, widowers and bereaved life partners.
Visit **www.widow.ie**

Organisations for bereaved parents and families

Anam Cara

Supports parents after bereavement by signposting to services and providing information evenings in the community throughout the country.
Visit **www.anamcara.ie**

Féileacáin

Provides support to anyone affected by the death of a baby during or after pregnancy.
Visit **www.feileacain.ie**

Pregnancy and Infant Loss Ireland

Provides information for bereaved parents and healthcare staff about pregnancy and infant loss.
Visit **www.pregnancyandinfantloss.ie**

FirstLight

Provides crisis intervention and free professional counselling services to bereaved parents and family members who have suddenly lost a child up to 18 years.
Visit **www.firstlight.ie**

A Little Lifetime Foundation

Provides information and support to bereaved parents and families.
Visit **www.alittlelifetime.ie**

Organisations for bereaved children

Barnardos

Specialist bereavement service where children and young people are supported to grieve. Provides information on grief in children, adolescents and families and free e-books.
Visit **www.barnardos.ie**

The Irish Childhood Bereavement Network

Information and resources for coping with grief in children, adolescents and families.
Visit **www.childhoodbereavement.ie**

Rainbows

Supports children and young people with bereavement or parental separation.
Visit **www.rainbowsireland.ie**

Spunout

Spunout is Ireland's youth information website. Provides information and links to local and national groups on bereavement for young people.
Visit: **www.spunout.ie/signpost/dealing-with-grief**

Supports for people bereaved by suicide

Health Services Executive (HSE)

The HSE provides a range of services, resources and supports for people who have been bereaved by suicide.
Visit:
www2.hse.ie/mental-health/life-situations-events/bereavement/after-suicide

HUGG

Information and support groups for anyone over 18 years who has lost a loved one to suicide. Services are provided by people who have been bereaved by suicide.
Visit **www.hugg.ie**

Pieta

Free individual counselling, therapy and support for people who have been bereaved by suicide and for people who are thinking about suicide.
Freephone 1800 247 247 any time
Text HELP to 51444 - standard message rates apply
Visit **www.pieta.ie**

The Suicide Bereavement Liaison Service

Free, confidential service that provides assistance and support after the loss of a loved one to suicide. The liaison officer can meet with a bereaved family as a group or individually.

They can answer questions about some of the difficult practical issues following a death by suicide. They also provide guidance or assistance in accessing a therapeutic service, or even just to talk with someone locally about what has happened.

This service is provided by these agencies:

- **www.pieta.ie** (nationwide)
- **www.vitahouse.org** (Roscommon)
- **www.thefamilycentre.com** (Mayo)

Counselling services

Talk to your GP about counselling services.

If you are over 18 years of age and have a medical card, they can refer you for free counselling through the Health Services Executive (HSE) **Counselling in Primary Care (CIPC).**

You can also access counselling privately.

You can find qualified counsellors who specialise in bereavement, loss and grief through:

- The Irish Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (IACP)
- The Irish Association of Humanistic and Integrative Psychotherapy
- The Psychological Society of Ireland (PSI)

Family resource centres

Many family centres throughout the country provide a range of support services and may offer bereavement counselling. You can find more information at **www.familyresource.ie**

Hospitals and hospices

The social work departments of hospitals and hospices usually offer bereavement support and counselling.

Health Services Executive (HSE)

Your local HSE office may provide a bereavement service and the community mental health team may also offer counselling. Call HSELive for contact details of services on 1800 700 700 from 8am to 8pm Monday to Friday and 10am to 5pm on Saturday and Sunday. You can call +353 1 240 8787 from outside of Ireland.

Colleges and education centres

Many colleges have student counselling services and some have bereavement groups. See college websites for further information. For example;

University of Galway:
www.universityofgalway.ie/counsellors/

Technological University Dublin:
www.tudublin.ie/for-students/student-services-and-support/student-wellbeing/counselling-service/

Trinity College Dublin:
www.tcd.ie/Student_Counselling/

University College Dublin
www.ucd.ie/studentcounselling/

Mental Health Information Line

Tel: 1800 111 888

Visit: **www.yourmentalhealth.ie**

Provides information on how to mind your mental health, support others, or to find a support service in your area.

Homicide

AdVic – Advocates for Victims of Homicide

Tel: 1800 852 000

Visit: **www.advic.ie**

Offers counselling if you someone close to you has died by homicide.

Support after homicide

A voluntary organisation which provides emotional support and practical information to people whose lives have been affected by homicide. It is a free confidential service provided by trained volunteers nationwide.

Tel: 087 983 7322 – 7 Days a Week

Visit: **www.supportafterhomicide.ie**

Sudden Cardiac Death or Sudden Arrhythmic Death Syndrome (SADS)

Sudden Cardiac Death in the young support group

c/o Irish Heart Foundation

Tel: 01 6685001; 1890 432787 or 087 3232552

Visit
www.irishheart.ie/heart-and-stroke-conditions-a-z/sudden-arrhythmic-death-syndrome-sads/#section-definition

Email: info@irishheart.ie

Cardiac Risk in the Young (CRY)

CRY is a registered charity providing a free counselling service and support for families and friends affected by sudden death or cardiac conditions.

Visit: **www.cry.ie**

Support Organisation for those affected by road traffic collisions

Irish Road Victims Association

IRVA is a non-governmental organisation that provides free information and support to those bereaved or injured by road traffic collisions.

Visit: **www.irva.ie**

Information Services

Citizens Information Board

The Citizens Information Board provides information on the practical concerns you may have when someone close to you dies including information on accessing money, getting help with funeral expenses, dealing with legal and tax matters and other practical issues.

The Citizens Information Board provides this information through its website, a telephone helpline and face-to-face in centres:

- Citizens Information Online **www.citizensinformation.ie** and specifically on the following section **www.citizensinformation.ie/en/death**

- Citizens Information Phone Service is a nationwide service that can be reached on 0818 07 4000, Monday to Friday, 9am to 8pm. If you are calling CIPS from outside Ireland, dial +353 21 229 8178.
- Citizens Information Centres provide free, impartial information, advice and advocacy.

The booklet 'Bereavement: A Practical Guide' developed by the Citizens Information Board has more information about money matters such as loans, tax and accessing bank accounts and legal matters such as wills and probate that you may have to deal with.

MABS (Money Advice and Budgeting Service)

The Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS) is a free, independent, confidential and non-judgmental money advice and budgeting service. MABS provides information on managing money, bills and loans when someone dies.

Visit: **www.mabs.ie/managing-money/unexpected-life-events/bereavement-and-debt**

Books and resources

Books on Bereavement

Your local library or bookshop may be able to order books for you.

General

Tell me the truth about loss (2020) by Niamh Fitzpatrick
A psychologist for many years, Niamh documents her own journey through loss, grief and the hardest of times, finding hope along the way.

Irish Stories of Loss and Hope, 2007, edited by Dr. Susan Delaney, The Irish Hospice Foundation.

Understanding Your Grief – Alan Wolfelt (2004). *Explores the need to acknowledge death and embrace the pain of loss. Also explores factors that make each persons grief unique.*

The Other Side of Sadness: What the New Science of Bereavement Tells Us About Life After Loss
by George A. Bonanno (2019) New York: Basic Books
The author a psychologist and bereavement researcher argues that grief is far from predictable, and that all of us share a surprising ability to be resilient.

Grieving: A Beginner's Guide, 2006, Jerusha Hull McCormack, Darton, Longman & Todd. *Helpful for the newly bereaved.*

Bereavement: Studies of Grief in Adult Life by Colin Murray Parkes and Holly G. Prigerson (2013), London: Routledge *This text by bereavement professionals is written for bereaved people, their friends and for professionals who work in bereavement.*

Through Grief: The Bereavement Journey, 1999, Elizabeth Collick, Darton, Longman & Todd.

You'll Get Over It – The Rage of Bereavement, 1997, Virginia Ironside, Penguin. *Addresses issues related to anger associated with bereavement.*

Living After a Death, 2000, Mary Paula Walsh, Veritas.

Facing Grief: Bereavement and the Young Adult, 2003, Susan Wallbank, Lutterworth Press. *Aimed at young adults in the 18+ age group who are coping with the loss of a family member or friend.*

Living When a Loved One has Died, 1995, Earl A. Grollman. Beacon Press. *Easy to read series of reflections on different themes related to grieving.*

Spouse or partner

The Courage to Grieve, 1997, Judy Tatelbaum, Vermilion.

Secret Flowers: Mourning and the Adaptation to Loss, 1998, Mary Jones, The Women's Press.

A Grief Observed, 1961, C. S. Lewis, London: Faber and Faber Ltd.

A Man's Grief: Death of a Spouse, 2002, Colin Thatcher, Pan Macmillan. *Written after the sudden death of the author's wife.*

Diary of a Grief, 1998, Peter Woods, William Sessions. *Written following the death of the author's wife after 53 years of marriage.*

The Empty Bed - Bereavement and the Loss of Love, 1992, Susan Wallbank, Darton, Longman and Todd. *Explores the loss of love and sexuality after the death of a partner. Includes discussion relevant to younger, older, gay and straight, married and not married couples*

Gay Widowers: Life after the Death of a Partner, 1997, Michael Shernoff, Haworth Press.

Adolescent Grief

When a friend dies: A book for teens about grieving and healing By Marilyn Gootman (2005)

Still here with me: Teenagers and children on losing a parent By Suzanne Sjöqvist (2006) *Winner of the Young Minds Book Prize 2007 this book is a moving and thoughtful anthology of the experiences of thirty-one children and teenagers who have lost a parent.*

Healing your grieving heart for teens By Alan D. Wolfelt (2001) *Acknowledging that death is a painful, ongoing part of life, the author explains how people need to slow down, turn inward, embrace their feelings of loss, and seek and accept support when a loved one dies.*

Adults whose parent has died

When Parents Die: Learning to Live with the Loss of a Parent, 1999, Rebecca Abrams, Routledge. *A book for young people grieving a parent written by a woman whose father died when she was 18 years old.*
When Your Parent Dies, Insights for Bereaved Adults, 2002, Caroline Morcom & Patricia Scowen, Cruse Bereavement Care Publications, www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk

When Parents Die: A Guide for Adults, 1997, Edward Myers, Penguin. *Aimed at adults who have been bereaved.*

Bereaved parents and children

The Bereaved Parent, 1978, Harriet Schiff Sarnoff, Penguin.

Living on the Seabed – A Memoir of Love, Life and Survival, 2005, Lindsay Nicholson, Vermilion.

Death: Helping Children Understand, 1996, Barnardos.

Someone to Talk to – a Handbook on Childhood Bereavement, 2002, Pat Donnelly, Barnardos.

Helping your Child Through Bereavement, 2000, Mary Paula Walsh, Veritas.

A Child's Grief: Supporting a Child when Someone in their Family has Died, 2001, Julie Stokes & Diana Crossley, Winston's Wish.

The Grieving Child: a Parent's Guide, 1992, Helen Fitzgerald Simon and Schuster.

Straight Talk About Death for Teenagers: How to Cope with Losing Someone you Love 1993, Earl A. Grollman, Beacon Press.

Building continuing bonds for grieving and bereaved children
By Brenda Mallon (2018)
This book emphasises the importance of listening to children and helping them to create positive bonds that can sustain them as they go through their lives.

A parent's guide to raising grieving children
By Phyllis R. Silverman (2009)
This book offers guidance on virtually every aspect of childhood loss, from very young children to teenagers.

Helping Children Cope With Grief: Facing a Death in the Family 1992, Rosemary Wells, Sheldon Press, UK.

Talking to Children about Death

Always in My Heart: A book for children about grieving (2023).
This booklet was developed by the social work team in St Francis Hospice, Dublin to help children aged about 9-12 years old.
Order free on www.sfh.ie/shop

Finding Your Way Through Grief: A Guide for Teenagers and Young Adults
by the Social Work Team, St Francis Hospice (2021).
Order free on www.sfh.ie/shop

Talking about death: A dialogue between parent and child
By Earl A. Grollman (2011)
This book is a compassionate guide for adults and children to read together, featuring a read-along story and answers to questions children ask about death.

Talking with children and young people about death and dying
By Mary Turner (2006)
This resource is designed to help adults talk to bereaved children and young people.

How do we tell the children? A step-by-step guide for helping children and teens cope when someone dies
By Dan Schaefer and Christine Lyons (2010)

Books for bereaved children

The Irish Childhood Bereavement Network (ICBN) provides information for parents and those working with bereaved children and young people, and their families.
Visit their website to find a book for a grieving child or young person: **www.childhoodbereavement.ie/bookshelf**

The Huge Bag of Worries, 1998, Virginia Ironside, Hodder & Stoughton.

Water Bugs and Dragonflies, 1996, Doris Stickney, Mowbray.

When Someone Very Special Dies: Children can learn to cope with Grief, 1991, Marge Heegaard, Fairview Press. *This is a workbook which can be used to help children 7-11 years to express their thoughts and feelings.*

Badger's Parting Gifts, 1992, Susan Varley, Picture Lions. *For children 4-8 years.*

It Isn't Easy – Coping with the Hardest Thing of all - the Death of a Child, 1999, Margaret Connolly, Oxford University Press. *This is a story for children 7+ about a boy whose brother dies in an accident*

Noodle loses dad, By Sarah Corbett Lynch (2019)
Young Limerick author, Sarah Corbett Lynch (13) has written this self – affirming book exploring loss, bereavement, blended families and grief.

After the Funeral, 1995, Jane Loretta Winsch, Paulist Press.
Simply talks about some of the thoughts and feelings the characters in the book had after someone they loved died. For children 5+ years.

Alice's Dad – the loss of a parent after a long illness, 1999, Bill Merrington, Kevin Mayhew Ltd.

The Invisible String – Patrice Karst (2018)

Bereaved by suicide

The HSE provides a range of services, resources and supports for people who have been bereaved by suicide.
Visit: **www2.hse.ie/mental-health/life-situations-events/bereavement/after-suicide**
The 'You are not alone' booklet developed by the HSE is the National Suicide Bereavement Support Guide which provides

information and support for people who have been bereaved by suicide. Order the 'You are not alone' booklet from www.healthpromotion.ie or download it from **www.healthpromotion.ie/products/you-are-not-alone-suicide-bereavement-support-guide**

A Voice for Those Bereaved by Suicide, 2001, Sarah McCarthy. Veritas. *Written by a woman whose husband died by suicide.*

A Special Scar: the Experience of People Bereaved by Suicide, 2001, Allison Wertheimer, Brunner Routledge. *This book is a discussion of suicide from an adult perspective. It is an invaluable resource for those helping children and families bereaved by suicide.*

Beyond the Rough Rock: Supporting a Child who has been Bereaved through Suicide, 2001, Diana Crossley & Julie Stokes,Winston's Wish.

After suicide: Help for the bereaved
By Sheila Clark (1995)
This book is intended to help people bereaved by suicide to understand the emotions they may face, provides suggestions for practical help and assists them to build a new life again.

Echoes of suicide
By Siobhan Foster-Ryan (2001)
This collection of experiences and perspectives on suicide aims to address some of the questions arising for people bereaved by suicide.

All Kinds of Feelings, 2003, Emma Brownjohn. Tango Books,
This is a short "lift the flap" book that is helpful to teach children that there are lots of different feelings and that all feelings are okay. It lists different feelings (e.g. happy, sad, and angry) but does not go into detail; it is a useful starting point to encourage children to talk about their feelings.

Finding a Way Through When Someone Close Dies, 2001, Pat Mood and Lesley Whittaker, Jessica Kingsley.
This is a workbook for children and teenagers who have experienced the death of someone close to them. This book discusses feelings and provides tips on how to cope. It is also helpful for adults in relation to how to support children going through bereavement.

I Miss You, a First Look at Death, 2000, Pat Thomas, Hodder Wayland.
This reassuring picture book explores the difficult issue of death for young children. Children's feelings and questions about this sensitive subject are looked at in a simple but realistic way. This book helps them to understand their loss and come to terms with it. Books in the series give advice and promote interaction between children, parents and teachers on a wide variety of personal, social and emotional issues.

Red Chocolate Elephants, 2010,Dr. Diana Sands. Karridale Pty Ltd, Sydney.
This is a wonderful activity book and DVD to help children bereaved by suicide. In a world where children are often forgotten mourners, this unique combination of text, pictures, and voices, all in the words of bereaved children themselves, creates a treasured safe haven for young people to hear their fears, questions, and difficulties put into words by other children just like them.

Up on Cloud Nine, 2003 Ann Fine, Corgi Books, London.
A story about the friendship between two boys, one of whom is in hospital after a serious 'accident', the implication is that this has been a suicide attempt. The subject is handled with warmth and appropriate humour.

Young People bereaved by suicide: What hinders and what helps. 2005. David Trickey, Childhood Bereavement UK.

A Voice for Those Bereaved by Suicide, 2001,Sarah McCarthy, Veritas books.
This is an honest, moving and valuable book. Suicide has been denied and hidden for too long; Sarah McCarthy's decision to tell her story provides a voice for all those bereaved in this tragic way.

Cry of Pain: understanding suicide and the suicidal mind, 2014, Mark Williams. Piatkus Books.
A sensitive and thoughtful consideration of suicidal behaviour from various perspectives: social, historic, biological and psychological.

No Time to Say Goodbye: surviving the suicide of a loved one, 1999, Carla Fine, Broadway.
A powerfully written, honest account of the author's experiences after her husband died by suicide and the experiences of many other people, written to open up awareness and discussion of suicide bereavement.

Overcoming Grief : A Self-Help Guide Using Cognitive Behavioural Techniques, 2008 Sue Morris, Little, Brown Book Group. *This is a practical, helpful book that outlines realistic expectations about bereavement and gives advice on how to manage challenges such as dealing with grief triggers*

Silent Grief: living in the wake of suicide revised edition 2007, Christopher Lukas and Henry Seiden, Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
Lukas draws on his own experiences (several members of his family died by suicide) as well as those of many other bereaved people to explore the experience of being bereaved by suicide.

Suicide: the 25 most commonly asked questions by the suicide bereaved, 2019, Pauline Cahillane, Independently published.
This book explores the tormenting questions that bereaved families struggle with in the aftermath of suicide. The author's hope is that anyone who has lost a loved one to suicide might get some answers here.

The Web of Life, 2018, Phil Robinson, Independently published.
A collection of poems, meditations and prayers that will inspire and console readers, with emotional, sensitive and at times jovial content, providing food for thought.

Notes

Notes

This guide is available to order on **www.healthpromotion.ie** and has been produced by HSE National End of Life and Bereavement Care Office, HSE National Acute Operations, Unit 4A The Dargan Building, Heuston South Quarter, Dublin 8, D08 NN9V and the HSE Health Promotion Office.

Did you find this information useful?
If you have any feedback about the information in this booklet, please email us at healthinfo@hse.ie

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