



**Hanham
Health**

health matters...

What to do after a death

**A guide to the days
after a bereavement**

Staff at Hanham Health wish to express their condolences to you and your family at this sad time. We have provided this leaflet which you may find helpful.

Contents

This guide is divided into two parts

The first part will lead you through the immediate practical matters. The second part contains information which you may find useful during the coming weeks.

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What you should do now

Find support

In the first few days after a death it is often the responsibility of the person who is most distressed to make the necessary practical arrangements.

It is therefore wise to have a friend or relative to help you with these arrangements.

A Funeral Director will also be able to offer you support and guidance.

The guidance in this booklet is designed to help you with the practical steps you will need to take.

Each staff member of Hanham Health is committed to doing all they can to help you through the painful experience you are facing.

Throughout this booklet, the term 'your relative' is used to refer to the member of the family, significant other or friend who has died.

Contact a Funeral Director

Funeral directors can manage funeral arrangements and give advice and support.

Many people choose to use a professional Funeral Director but some people prefer to make their own arrangements as they consider this to be more personal and less expensive.

Factors that may affect your choice of funeral director include:

- The wishes of the deceased, is there a will, was there a pre-payment plan in place?
- If there isn't a will the next of kin should decide.
- location of the firm's premises;
- do they belong to a trade association?
- range of services provided;
- cost;
- recommendation of those who have used the service and trusted advisers;

- the way you are treated by the staff;
- ownership – are they a large or small firm, a family business or company?

Friends, family, clergy or your doctor may be able to recommend local funeral directors. Most local companies are also listed in the telephone directory.

Obtain the Medical Certificate

About the certificate

The Medical Certificate is an important legal document, showing the cause of death, which has to be signed by the doctor who was responsible for your relative when they died.

Please carefully read both sides of the detachable slip on the Medical Certificate.

In some cases there may be a delay in issuing the certificate should the death need to be referred to the Coroner, or the Doctor responsible for your relative is not immediately available. Any delay in receiving the certificate will not prevent you from making provisional funeral arrangements with a funeral director. If the death is referred to the Coroner, notify your funeral director and follow their advice.

Collecting the certificate

Once the certificate has been completed, the certificate will be made available for collection from Hanham Health.

Register the death

By law the Medical Certificate must be taken to the Registrar within five days of the death, unless it has been referred to the Coroner. The registrar cannot register the death until the coroner's decision is made.

People legally allowed to register the death

- a relative
- a person present at the death
- an official from the hospital or nursing home
- the person making the arrangements with the funeral directors

Documents and information you will need

When registering a death, you will need to take the Medical Certificate and (if available):

- birth certificate
- marriage/civil partnership certificates
- NHS Medical Card

You will also need to provide the registrar with:

- the deceased's birth and marriage certificate (if available)
- the deceased's passport (if available)
- the date and place of the death
- the full names and surname of the deceased together with any other names they have ever used
- the place of birth and age of the deceased (or date of birth)
- the maiden name of a woman who has married
- the occupation of the deceased
- the name and occupation of the deceased's husband or wife or surviving civil partner
- the deceased's home address, including postcode
- the date of birth of any surviving spouse
- the deceased's NHS number (from the medical card)
- details of any pensions or allowances paid from public funds to the deceased
- ID documents and proof of address for yourself (this helps avoid mistakes in recording spellings of names and addresses)

Documents you will receive

If a post-mortem is not being held, the registrar will issue you with:

- a form for the funeral director
- a form to send or take to the Department for Work and Pensions with any state pension or benefit books

You may request as many certified copies of the death certificate as you will need to deal with the deceased's affairs. There will be a charge for these certificates.

Where a post-mortem is required, the coroner will issue any necessary documents as quickly as possible afterwards.

If there is an error in a death record, details can be changed or added. Ideally the person who registered the death should arrange this with the office where the death was registered. You may be asked to provide documentary evidence to prove an error was made.

The Registrar's Office

The Bristol Register Office

The Old Council House
Corn Street
Bristol, BS1 1JG

South Gloucestershire Register Office

Civic Centre
Kingswood
Bristol BS15 9TR

Email:

<mailto:register.office@bristol.gov.uk>

Southglos.gov.uk

Telephone : 0117 922 2800.

01454 863140

Emergency out of hours 01454 868009

Arrange the funeral

Before going ahead with any arrangements, it is advisable to check whether the deceased left a will and any instructions for the funeral. If you are not the Next of Kin (Nearest Relative) or Executor, you should check with them that you have the authority to proceed.

Most funeral directors are members of one of two trade associations:

- National Association of Funeral Directors (NAFD)
- Society of Allied and Independent Funeral Directors (SAIF)

Member firms must provide you with a price list on request and cannot exceed any written estimate they give you without your permission.

Most people would probably require the funeral director to provide the following services as a minimum:

- make all necessary arrangements;
- provide appropriate staff;
- provide a suitable coffin;
- transfer the deceased from the place of death to the funeral director's premises;
- care for the deceased prior to the funeral;
- provide a hearse to the nearest cemetery or crematorium;
- arrange for burial or crematorium as appropriate.

Embalming, viewing of the deceased, or providing a limousine for mourners are optional. Discuss these fully with your funeral director and make sure you receive an itemised written quotation.

Funeral costs for the same services may vary considerably from one funeral director to another. Funeral directors should provide detailed price lists for you to take away.

Disbursements are fees paid to others, i.e. for doctor's certificates, a minister, newspaper announcements, flowers, and crematorium. Ask the funeral director for a written quotation detailing all these fees.

In addition, it should be remembered:

- when you arrange a funeral, you are responsible for paying the bill;
- funeral payments are normally recoverable from the deceased person's estate;
- check that the price includes what you require and whether there are any additional costs that will be added on.

Grief and other difficult feelings

Whoever has died, your loss is unique to you, and you will cope with it in your own way. But although bereavement is a highly personal and often traumatic event, many people go through a range of recognisable reactions and emotions when someone they are close to dies.

Sometimes people are shocked and upset by their changing and violent emotions when they are bereaved.

Realising that these feelings are quite normal may help.

Grief

Grief can knock you off balance emotionally, physically and mentally.

When you are bereaved you have to cope with a world which may seem like it's fallen apart. In practical terms, your life may have changed dramatically. You may be eating and sleeping alone for the first time, or be faced with household jobs which you used to share with the person who died. Losing a close family member or an old friend can mean that you have no one who shares your memories.

Yet the biggest changes are probably inside you. When someone close to you dies it can seem as though everything you took for granted has gone, that you have lost your sense of identity and self-worth. You may feel you have lost almost everything and haven't much left to fall back on or look forward to. You may feel like this even if you have loving friends and family around you.

Your feelings

At first you may be too shocked to feel anything much, even if the death had been expected. Many bereaved people say that, in their initial shock, they felt a sense of numbness and disbelief.

As you get over the shock and begin to grasp the reality of what has happened you may go through some of the most powerful feelings you have ever had, feeling high or excitable one minute, in despair the next. You may think you are going mad because you can't control your emotions, can't concentrate, can't organise yourself to do things. It may seem as though everything you knew has gone and that nothing will ever make sense again.

You may feel that you don't care whether you live or die because the person who died was so important to you that you cannot imagine existing without them. Your loss may feel overwhelming and you are likely to be reminded of it constantly. You are likely to miss the person who died in all sorts of ways, physically as well as emotionally.

Your thoughts

You may find it hard to concentrate, and feel confused and forgetful. Your thoughts may constantly return to the person who died, with painful questions and fears running through your mind. Alongside this, you may have a sense of relief if they died at what seemed the right time for them.

As you think more about the person and your relationship with them, as you talk about them and listen to what relatives, friends and acquaintances say, you are likely to start building a fuller picture of them than you had before. As it grows, you will probably find this picture becomes a part of your life, a source of comfort which is more than just a memory.

Your body

You will probably notice physical changes. You may have difficulty getting to sleep, and your sleep may be disturbed by vivid dreams and long periods of wakefulness. You may lose your appetite.

People react physically in many different ways – some feel tense and short of breath, others feel edgy and restless, others feel very slow and lethargic.

You are likely to feel exhausted, especially if you had been providing care for the person who died, or had been through an anxious time before they died. Strong emotions and dealing with all the things that need to be done after a death can also make you feel tired and drained.

The stress of grief makes enormous physical demands upon you. You may be more susceptible to colds or other infections, or become more accident-prone. It is very

important to take extra care of yourself – try to eat well and take extra rest even if you can't sleep. Take some gentle exercise if you can. Be kind to yourself – don't try to do too much while you are grieving.

Getting used to the death

Getting used to a death seems to happen in fits and starts and is often not as simple as it sounds, especially if you had shared your life with the person who died or had known them since childhood. Or you may have lost a younger relative, perhaps your daughter or son, or grandchild. When a young person dies it reverses the natural order of life and death and can seem particularly unjust.

Allowing your feelings to come out can help you to get used to your loss. Talking about the death and about the person who died, dealing with the practicalities of your new situation and trying to think of the present as well as the past can all help you get used to the reality of the death and get through some of the anguish you may feel.

As you do this you will probably, slowly, begin to find a way of living without the person alongside you but very much with you in your thoughts and memories.

Difficult times and feelings

Emptiness and depression

Feelings of depression and meaninglessness can hit you when the reality of the death begins to bite and you realise that the person who has died will not come back. And just when you think you have started to move on and are feeling better, you may hit rock bottom and life can seem endlessly bleak and empty. Surprisingly, although it may feel almost unbearable at the time, this seems to be a period when some inner healing takes place. Afterwards, people generally say they feel lighter, more in control of their lives and better able to look forward.

Depression is a natural response to bereavement, and usually lifts of its own accord. But if it doesn't, and life seems an endless, pointless struggle, you could be clinically depressed. Clinical depression can be treated and there are different ways of getting through periods of depression, both with and without antidepressant medication. Ask your doctor for help and advice.

If you have any thoughts of harming yourself, talk to your doctor or someone you trust. Remember you can phone the **Samaritans**, day or night, on **116 123**.

Anger

Some people feel angry after a bereavement, if you do it can be the hardest feeling to cope with. You may feel anger at the injustice of your loss; anger at the lack of understanding in others; anger at the person who died because of what they are putting you through.

Bereaved people are usually angry because they feel hurt and unhappy. You probably feel angry at yourself and at the person who died – the person you need most, who has left you to feel abandoned, frightened and alone.

These feelings are normal and you can probably get rid of your anger in a way which doesn't hurt you or someone else. Some people have a shouting session, dig the garden or write their thoughts on paper and then destroy the pages.

Don't bottle up your feelings – try to think about the reasons for your anger. If you don't do this, whatever is upsetting you will almost certainly continue to trouble you; it won't disappear. It can help to talk about your feelings with someone who isn't emotionally involved in your own loss.

Fear

You may feel fearful and anxious. This is very natural – your familiar world has been turned upside down and you are likely to feel you have little control over your life or over the thoughts and feelings churning inside you. Feeling out of control is likely to leave you feeling vulnerable and afraid. But you will probably notice that as you get used to coping, and start to get on top of life again, you will become more confident and less afraid.

You may also have fears about important practical issues. How will you cope with less money coming in? How will you manage household tasks? If you have worries like this it usually helps to get some practical advice. The organisations listed at the end of this booklet may be able to help you.

Mixed feelings

It is usual to have mixed feelings when someone dies. You may find yourself thinking of times you wish had been different, or wondering what might have happened if you, or the person who died, had made different decisions. Mixed feelings of regret, guilt or anger are not easy to deal with.

The important thing is to try to reach a point where you are realistic about the past and can accept it for what it was. This can be hard if the relationship had turned sour or was always a mixture of good and bad.

When a difficult relationship ends with death the problem is that any chance of mutual understanding or reconciliation has gone. But if you try to avoid dealing with upsetting thoughts and feelings you run the risk of becoming angry, bitter or depressed. In a situation like this it usually helps to get a better understanding of the relationship you had with the person who died, of what was good about it and what was not, to work out what each of you contributed to it.

Don't be too hard on yourself or anyone else. No one is perfect and most people try to do the best they can with the situation they are in. Eventually you are likely to reach some acceptance of the past and move towards a more fruitful present.

Memories of other losses

Bereavement may trigger memories of earlier losses which you thought you had got over. Perhaps you did not realise at the time how much you were affected, or circumstances made it difficult for you to talk about your feelings. You may now remember these unhappy times with great clarity and this can be extremely distressing.

You may feel that you need to mourn for these losses, and talk about your experiences, before you can come to terms with your more recent loss.

Grief in children and adolescents

Generally children do not understand the meaning of death until they are three or four years old. Even with this being the case, they feel the loss of a close friend or relative in much the same way as adults. Even in infancy it is clear that children grieve and feel great distress.

Children experience the passage of time differently to adults and can therefore appear to overcome grief quite quickly. It is important that the grief of a young person is not overlooked

Sources of help and support

Organisation	Telephone number	Website	What they do
Age UK	0800 055 6112	Ageuk.org.uk	Provide services for older people giving advice as well as befriending services.
Bereavement Advice Centre	0800 634 9494	Bereavementadvice.org	Offers practical advice on what to do when someone dies.
Citizens Advice Bureau		Citizensadvice.org.uk	To find your local office please visit the website.
The compassionate Friends	0345 123 2304	Tcf.org.uk	Parents who have been bereaved themselves offer friendship and support to other bereaved, parents, grandparents and their families.
Cruse Bereavement Care	0808 808 1677	Cruse.org.uk	Offers free information, advice and support to bereaved people.
Facing Bereavement		Facingbereavement.co.uk	Offers advice on dealing with bereavement.
Institute of civil funerals	01480 861 411	locf.org.uk	Helps you to find someone to conduct a non-religious funeral.
Much Loved		Muchloved.com	You can leave a free online memorial to someone who has died.
National Association of Widows		Nawidows.org.uk	Offers support and information to those who have lost a partner.
Natural Death Centre	01962 712 690	Naturaldeath.org.uk	Offers advice on arranging a funeral.
Probate and Inheritance tax		Gov.uk/wills-probate-inheritance	Advise on obtaining probate and inheritance tax

Samaritans	116123	Samaritans.org.uk	Offers a safe place to talk about whatever is bothering you. You don't have to be feeling suicidal. Lines are open 24 hours a day.
Veterans UK		Gov.uk/government/organisation/veterans-uk	Administers pensions and payments for those injured or bereaved through service.
War Widows Association	0845 241 2189	Warwidowsassociation.org.uk	Offers advice, help and support to war widows and their dependants.

Tissue donation

Many people can be considered for tissue donation after death. Your relative may have carried an organ donor card, be on the organ donor register or may have discussed donation with you during their lifetime.

To ensure that tissue transplants are as successful as possible, organs can only be donated in certain circumstances.

- Eyes for corneal transplantation can be donated up to 24 hours after death
- Heart valves can be donated up to 48 hours after death

Where your relative has left an advance directive to donate tissues, or should you choose to enable this, please be assured that your relative will be cared for with dignity and respect and that their appearance will be restored following any procedure. Tissue donation will not delay any funeral plans.