

When someone has died – information for you



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

It explains:

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

What you need to do

- You will need to tell close family and friends what has happened.
- You will need to get the Medical Certificate of Cause of Death (sometimes called 'the death certificate' or 'Form 11') from the doctor. [See page 5 for more information about this.](#)
- You must register the death – you will need the death certificate to do this. [See page 8 for more information about this.](#)
- You should think about the funeral. If you wish, you can contact a funeral director before you register the death. [See page 13 for more information about this.](#)
- You should look for the will of the person who has died. If you can't find this, but know that a will was written, their solicitor may have a copy.

How you may feel

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

A spiritual, faith leader or celebrant may be able to help you or tell you where you can find help.

You can also get advice from a funeral director, your family doctor, a health care professional or a solicitor. Some organisations, for example Citizens Advice Scotland, may also be able to help. You will find contact details for some of these organisations in the 'How can I find out more?', [sections on pages 22-23](#).

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

- If the person died in hospital and you would like to come back to see them, you can ask the ward staff to arrange this for you. Due to the nature of a mortuary department, if your relative has been moved from the ward by this time, staff may suggest or recommend that you wait to see them when they are with the funeral directors.
- You can ask a funeral director to arrange for you to see the person at the funeral home.
- A funeral director can usually arrange for the person who has died to be at home before the funeral, if this is what you wish.

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

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

How will I get the Medical Certificate of Cause of Death?

- The doctor will normally give you the Medical Certificate of Cause of Death (MCCD or Form 11) just after the death or the next day. Sometimes it may take longer, for example if the doctor needs to find out more about why someone died.
- The MCCD gives information about the person who has died, including what caused their death.
- You should read the MCCD and ask the doctor to explain anything you don't understand. You should do this before you go to the registrar's office.
- You need the MCCD to register the death at an office of the Registrar of Births, Marriages and Deaths.

What happens if there is a hospital post-mortem?

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

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

- When a death is sudden, unexplained or caused by an industrial illness, it must be reported to the Procurator Fiscal.
- Doctors, registrars or the police usually report such deaths, but anyone who is concerned about a death can contact the Procurator Fiscal.
- If the Procurator Fiscal decides to investigate a death, the police will often speak to the doctor or relatives of the person who has died. This is to gather information that will help the Procurator Fiscal reach a decision.
- The Procurator Fiscal may also order a post-mortem examination to confirm the cause of death. However, the Procurator Fiscal will always consider your wishes in making such decisions.

- The Procurator Fiscal will try to answer any questions you may have.
- They will complete their investigations as quickly as possible.

See page 27 for more information about the Procurator Fiscal.

Death Certification Review Service

- Following the introduction of the Certification of Death (Scotland) Act 2011 a random sample of certificates (MCCDs) will be selected for review, through the registration system.
- These reviews are designed to check the quality and accuracy of certificates and to improve how this information is recorded.
- Reviews will be conducted by a team of medical reviewers, all of whom are experienced doctors.

See page 27 for more information about this Review service.

Registering a Death

- In order to register a death you must take the MCCD to a registrar. A death cannot be registered without the MCCD.
- A death may be registered in any registration office in Scotland and must be registered within eight days.
- It is important that you try and register the death at the earliest opportunity. Most registration offices operate an appointment system so you should contact your local office as soon as possible.

See page 25 for more information about how to find a registration office.

When do I need to do this?

- You must register the death within 8 days.
- You should phone the registrar's office before you go as you may need to make an appointment to register the death.

Who can register the death?

- A close relative or partner should normally register the death. An executor, someone who was present at the death, or the occupier of the property where the person died can also do this.
- Anyone who has the information that is needed can register the death. So if you feel too upset, you can ask someone else to do this.

What will I need?

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

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

What will the registrar give me?

- When you register the death, the registrar will give you:
 - a certificate of registration of death (Form 14) – you should give this to the funeral director or the burial or cremation authority if you are making the arrangements yourself.
 - a green Social Security registration or notification of death certificate (Form 334/S1) – you will need this if the person who died received a state pension or any social security benefits, and
- An abbreviated extract (i.e. excluding cause of death and parentage details) of the death entry. You can also buy copies of the full extract of the death entry. Some organisations may ask for this, for example insurance companies or banks. You may also need a full certificate if the funeral is going to take place outside Scotland.

See page 25 for more information about how to contact National Records of Scotland.

Following Registration

- Once registration is complete you will be given a Certificate of Registration of Death (Form 14). This is the document that confirms that the death has been registered and is required before a burial or cremation can go ahead.
- If the death you are registering is selected for review you may not immediately be able to complete the death registration. The registrar will explain the review process and timescales, and will contact you when the review is complete.
- You can still make initial funeral arrangements while the review is underway. However, the funeral itself cannot take place until the review is completed and a Certificate of Registration of Death (Form 14) is produced. This can be collected from the registrar or sent to you or sent direct to the person arranging the funeral to allow the funeral to go ahead.
- If you need the funeral to go ahead quickly, in special circumstances you may be granted advance registration.
- You can read more about how to apply for advance registration from Health Improvement Scotland. [Find out how to contact them on page 27.](#)

Who else needs to know?

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

How do I arrange the funeral?

- You can speak to a funeral director as soon as you feel ready.
- You do not have to wait until the death has been registered.
- However, do not feel you have to rush. Taking your time may make planning the funeral easier.
- You can find the contact details of local funeral directors in the phone book.
- You do not have to use a funeral director.
- If you wish to make some of the arrangements yourself, The Natural Death Centre can provide support and information about this. [Find out how to contact them on page 26.](#)
- You do not have to organise a 'traditional' funeral, there are other options. For example, some families opt for a direct cremation and a separate memorial event to celebrate the life of the person who has died.

How do I plan the funeral?

- It might help if you ask yourself a few questions:
 - Did the person who has died make any requests or leave instructions for their funeral?
 - Who should be involved in planning the funeral? You could speak to family and friends about this.
 - Will it be a burial or cremation? Where will it take place?
 - Who will conduct the ceremony? If the person died in hospital, the Health Care Chaplaincy service/Spiritual Care Team can give you advice and support, or put you in touch with representatives of religious and non-religious organisations. Ward staff can contact the Spiritual Care Team for you.
 - Will you put a death notice in any newspaper? What would you like it to say?
- You can ask a funeral director, consult friends or go on-line for advice. The Scottish Government has also produced a leaflet called "Arranging a Funeral? Here's some ideas about what to do and who can help" [You can find a link at page 22.](#)

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

- Funeral costs vary and you may wish to ask several funeral directors about the service they provide. You may be surprised by how much a funeral can cost. There are charges for the burial or cremation as well as charges for the funeral director's services, if you use one.
- Funeral directors should explain their costs and give you a written estimate. They may also ask for a deposit before the funeral is confirmed.
- If you are organising the funeral, you should also think about how to pay for this. You should try to do this before meeting the funeral director.
- Find out if the person who died:
 - made arrangements to pay for their funeral – for example with a life assurance policy or a prepaid funeral plan, or
 - left enough money to pay for their funeral.
- If no money is available, and you are on a low income and get Income Support or other means-tested benefits, you may be able to apply for a contribution towards the costs of the funeral from the Social Fund. You should:
 - ask someone at your local Jobcentre Plus if you qualify for this, or
 - speak to the DWP Bereavement Service who can help you apply;

- tell the funeral director as soon as possible if you want to apply.
- If your wife, husband or civil partner has died, you may be able to apply for a benefit called Bereavement Payment.
 - You should ask someone at your local Jobcentre Plus if you qualify for this.
 - You can find out more about this benefit on the internet: go to www.direct.gov.uk and look for the Bereavement Payment section.

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

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

How can I deal with my feelings?

As you try to cope with the emotions of a death consider the following:

Take your time

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

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

Do it your way

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

Take care of yourself

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

Remember

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

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

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

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

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

Finally, it is important not to expect too much of yourself, and know when to ask for help. The death of someone close is a major event in anybody's life and there are no quick ways of adjusting. It can be helpful to find someone you trust that you can talk to – for example, a friend, your doctor, or religious leader. If after a while you feel that you are still not coping you may want to speak with your doctor. You can also get help from some organisations in the 'How can I find out more section' of this leaflet on pages 22-23.

How do children cope with their feelings?

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

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

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

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

How can I find out more?

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

You may find the following information helpful:

- **What to do after a death in Scotland**

Information about all the legal matters, including registering a death and dealing with wills. You can get this information from the Scottish Government website. Visit www.gov.scot or you can ask the registrar for a copy.

- **Arranging a Funeral**

A leaflet that provides some ideas about what to do and who can help. Visit: <http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0049/00492092.pdf>.

- **Talking about bereavement**

A leaflet that helps to understand the thoughts and feelings of grief. You can get this information from the NHS Health Scotland website. Visit www.healthscotland.com or ask someone at the local hospital for a copy.

- **We're sorry to hear ...**

Useful information and advice about looking after yourself following a death. You can get this information from Cruse Bereavement Care Scotland. Visit www.crusescotland.org.uk or phone **01738 444 178** and ask for a copy.

- **Living through grief**

Coping with the thoughts and feelings of grief over the weeks and months following a death. You can get this information from Cruse Bereavement Care Scotland. Visit www.crusescotland.org.uk or phone **01738 444 178** and ask for a copy.

You can get emotional support from:

- **Breathing Space (Scotland)**

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

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

Visit www.breathingspacescotland.co.uk.

- **ChildLine**

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

Freepost 1111 Glasgow G1 1BR

Freephone number **0800 1111** anytime

Email **scotland@childline.org.uk**

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

- **Cruse Bereavement Care Scotland**

Information and support for people who have been bereaved.

To find out about one-to-one counselling in your area

Phone: **0845 600 22 27**.

Email: **info@crusescotland.org.uk**

Website: **www.crusescotland.org.uk**.

- **Bereaved relatives or friends living in England, Wales or Northern Ireland** can contact Cruse Bereavement Care UK.

Phone **0844 477 9400**

Email **helpline@cruse.org.uk**

Website **www.cruse.org.uk**

- **Bereaved children and young people** can phone **0808 808 1677** (Monday to Friday between 9.30am and 5pm) or look on the internet (**www.hopeagain.org.uk/**).

- **Samaritans**

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

Phone: **116 123** (24 hours a day)

Email: jo@samaritans.org

Website: www.samaritans.org.uk

- **The Compassionate Friends**

Support for bereaved parents and their families.

Phone: **0845 123 2304** (every day between 10am to 4pm and 7 to 10pm)

Website: www.tcf.org.uk

- **Winston's Wish**

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

Phone **08452 03 04 05** (Monday to Friday between 9am and 5pm and Wednesdays 7pm to 9.30 pm)

Website: www.winstonswish.org.uk

Practical Advice section

- **The National Records of Scotland (NRS)**

NRS is responsible for the arrangements in registering deaths in Scotland.

Telephone: **0131 535 1314** (General Register House switchboard)

Website: <http://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/>

- **Tell us Once**

A service that lets you report a death to most government organisations in one go.

Telephone: **0800 085 7308**

Website: **<https://www.gov.uk/after-a-death/overview>**

- **NHS inform**

Scotland's national health information service.

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

Website: **www.nhsinform.scot**

- **Citizens Advice Scotland**

Free, confidential, impartial and independent advice about almost anything, including NHS services and your rights.

To find your nearest branch, look in your phone book or on Citizens Advice Scotland's website (**www.cas.org.uk**).

- **The Natural Death Centre**

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

Phone: **01962 712 690**

Website: **www.naturaldeath.org.uk**

- **Down to Earth**

Support with funeral costs.

Phone: **020 8983 5055** (10am-4pm.)

Website: <http://www.quakersocialaction.org.uk/Pages/Category/down-to-earth>

- **Healthcare Improvement Scotland Death Certification Review Service**

For further information about the review service, you can:

Email: dcrs@nhs24.scot.nhs.uk

Telephone: **0300 123 1898**

Website: www.healthcareimprovementscotland.org/deathcertification

- **Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service**

The Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service is Scotland's prosecution service.

Telephone: **01389 739 557**

Website: www.crownoffice.gov.uk

To get this leaflet in another language or format, phone your local NHS board. If you need help to do this contact the NHS inform Helpline on 0800 22 44 88 (textphone 18001 0800 22 44 88; the helpline also provides an interpreting service).

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Health information you can trust

