

Coping with Bereavement

**Information to support you and your family
when a relative or friend has died**

We would like to express our deepest sympathy to you and your family on the death of your relative or friend.

When someone dies there are many decisions and arrangements that need to be made. These often have to be completed at a time of great personal distress.

The death of your relative or friend may have happened suddenly or have been long expected, either way it will still be a shock to you.

This booklet aims to give you help and guidance about what to do, particularly in the first few difficult days of your bereavement. It also contains information about some of the emotional and physical responses you may experience and contact details of support organisations are included.

This booklet contains information on:

Section 1: Practical Matters	Page no
Taking time when death occurs	4
Return of belongings	4-5
Organ and Tissue Donation	5
Arrangements after death has occurred	5
The Medical Certificate of cause of death	6
Post Mortem Examination	6-7
Registering your relative's death	7
Funeral arrangements	7-9
Repatriation of deceased	9
People to tell	10-11
Things to return	11
Collection of nursing or care equipment	11
Section 2: Coping with Bereavement	
Grieving	12-13
Helping bereaved children	13-14
Section 3: Information and local support	
Southern Trust Support Services	15
Practical Support	16
Organisations Providing Support and Information	17-21
Contact Us	22

Section 1: Practical Matters

Taking time when death occurs

At this difficult time it is important to take a few moments to gather your thoughts, to cry, to talk or to have some time alone. You may have to make some important decisions and it is likely to help you and your family, now and later, to know you had the opportunity to consider your options.

It is often helpful to have the support of family members and friends at this time. If you wish, the staff who cared for your relative or friend can also contact your Minister/Priest, Spiritual Leader or the Hospital Chaplain. However, you may prefer just to be on your own.

The staff who cared for your relative will do all they can to help and support you at this time. If, in the days or weeks ahead you wish to speak to the healthcare professionals who cared for your loved one at the time of their death, please contact the ward manager/lead community nurse to arrange an appointment.

Return of belongings *(when your relative has not died in their own home)*

The staff will ask you your wishes as they prepare to gather your relatives personal effects together. You can take the belongings immediately or if preferred, they can be collected later. Please confirm with the staff what you would like to do.

The Trust has policies in place regarding the return of valuables. Staff will discuss these arrangements with you, and will advise you if it is necessary to return to collect valuables or

money. In some instances legal requirements may prevent a swift return of belongings, but you will be kept informed through the process. The staff will act as quickly as possible, and your patience will be appreciated.

Organ and Tissue Donation

In some hospital areas, for example, the Intensive Care Unit, you may be specifically approached about organ or tissue donation.

Some people choose to join the donor register or carry an organ/tissue donor card. In the absence of this, the next of kin can consent to organs/tissues being donated when someone dies. If you know your relative wished to donate their organs or tissues, or this is something you wish to consider on their behalf, please inform the ward staff, GP or district nurse. Sometimes a medical condition or cause/place of death will mean a person cannot be a donor.

Arrangements after death has occurred

Depending on the circumstances and where the death occurred, at an appropriate time the deceased may be brought respectfully to a mortuary or room of repose. This is a special facility where the deceased can remain until the formal arrangements for release to funeral directors or post mortem examinations are complete. The mortuary staff will assist you to see and spend time with the person who has died.

When the Trust is legally able to do so, for example, when the medical certificate of cause of death has been completed, the deceased will be released to your chosen funeral director.

The Medical Certificate of Cause of Death

A medical certificate of cause of death is required to register your relative's death. This certificate must be completed by a doctor who has treated the deceased within the 28 days before the death occurred. This certificate is usually given to the person recorded as the deceased's "Next of Kin", person with parental responsibility or guardian.

If the deceased had not been seen by a doctor within the 28 days before the death occurred, or in circumstances such as a sudden or unexpected death, a medical certificate of cause of death cannot be issued. Such deaths, by law, are reported to the Coroner, an independent officer of the court who investigates sudden, violent or unexplained deaths.

Staff will provide you with information regarding this certificate.

Post mortem Examination

A post mortem (sometimes called an autopsy) is an examination carried out by a pathologist after a death, where it is necessary to establish the medical cause of death. There are two reasons why a post-mortem may be carried out:

1. Coroners post mortem

If the Coroner decides to investigate the cause of death, he may order a post mortem examination. The Coroner does not need the deceased family's consent to request a post mortem which will be carried out at the State Pathology Service in Belfast. When a Coroner directs that a post mortem takes place a police officer will be involved to gather information about the death etc to give to the Coroner. At some time the Coroners Service will also contact a nominated relative to explain when the remains will be released for burial/cremation. When the post mortem is complete the Coroners Service will provide a certificate to allow a funeral to take place. The doctor or general practitioner who cared for your relative will discuss this carefully with you and provide you with written in-

doctor or general practitioner who cared for your relative will discuss this carefully with you and provide you with written information on this process if you require it.

2. A hospital consented post mortem

You may be asked by a doctor for permission to carry out this post mortem. It is an examination carried out with the consent of relatives, in order to more fully understand the illness, the cause of death and to enhance future medical care. It is your decision to grant permission for this. The doctor or general practitioner who cared for your relative may discuss this option with you and provide you with further written information on this process if you require it.

Registering your relative's death

Once the medical certificate of cause of death has been completed, the death will need to be registered with the Registrar of Births and Deaths. All deaths that occur in Northern Ireland must be registered in the council district in which the death occurred or in which the deceased person normally/usually resided. Your funeral director will be able to advise you if you are unsure.

Registration should take place within 5 days. Your funeral director will require the GRO form 21 which you will receive from the officer registering your relative's death; or a Coroner's Order before a cremation can proceed or a grave in a district council owned cemetery can be opened. More information about death registration is available on the NI Direct Website (<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/>)

Funeral arrangements

Unless there is a special religious or cultural reason for holding the funeral quickly, you can take some time to arrange your relative's funeral. It is likely that your Minister, Priest, Spiritual Leader or members of your community will be able to assist you with your decisions and planning.

Decisions to be made

- Your relative or friend might have planned their own funeral or voiced their views on what they would like included or what they would like happen to their body. Written instructions may be contained in their will, or these may have been discussed with you or another relative before they died. It might be appropriate to consider these wishes when making your plans.
- Your relative may have already paid for their funeral arrangements and therefore it may also be helpful to be aware of any paperwork concerning this.
- While it is possible to make all the arrangements yourself, you may find the support of a funeral director invaluable as they know all the issues that need to be considered. Friends, family or your spiritual leader may be able to help you choose a funeral director.
- Advice on burial options can be obtained through your funeral director, whether or not you are planning a formal funeral service. He/she will also help you organise the purchase of a grave if necessary. Your Minister/Priest or Spiritual Leader will be able to assist you regarding Church cemeteries. Information on council owned cemeteries can also be obtained from your district council.
- Cremations in Northern Ireland are undertaken in Roselawn Crematorium in Belfast. Further information on cremation can be obtained through your funeral director or by contacting the Crematorium directly on Tel: 028 9044 8288. The funeral director will be able to help you with the additional forms required to allow a cremation to take place. Cremations cannot take place until the cause of death is confirmed.

- Many funeral directors are members of an association such as:
 - The National Association of Funeral Directors (NAFD)
 - The Funeral Association of Northern Ireland
 - The Society of Allied and Independent Funeral Directors (SAIFD)
 - The Irish Association of Funeral Directors (IAFD)

Members of these associations practice to agreed standards. They should provide you with a price list on request and a written estimate, which should not be exceeded without your permission.

- The Social Security Agency's Bereavement Service Team can be contacted on Freephone 0800 085 2463 to report the death and they can check if you are entitled to benefits/ financial help towards funeral costs

Repatriation of Deceased

You may wish to have the body or cremated remains of your relative repatriated to another country. To remove a body from Northern Ireland, permission needs to be obtained from the Coroner. Arrangements for the reception and burial/cremation of the body in the country of destination need to be made prior to departure. The funeral director you choose will guide you through these arrangements.

If your relative died here while on vacation, the cost of repatriation may be included in their travel insurance policy. Otherwise, it is worthwhile checking the cost of repatriation before choosing this option. The relevant consulate or embassy of the country to which the body is to be repatriated can also provide you with advice and information. Trust mortuary staff have experience of repatriation in these circumstances and they will also support you at this time.

People to tell

There are a number of organisations or people to tell when someone dies. Your family General Practitioner will be contacted when your relative has died in hospital. In these circumstances, every possible step will also be taken to cancel future hospital appointments.

A list of other agencies you may need to contact is provided below. This is not comprehensive, and there might be others you need to contact. You may not need to contact all these departments in person, but it is helpful to keep a list so you know who has been informed. Important offices include:

- Solicitor
- Other hospitals the person attended
- Social Security Office (to cancel direct payments such as benefits or attendance allowance)
- Home care services e.g. district nursing, home help, day care centre etc.
- Banks/building societies/credit card companies/post office
- Insurance company, pension provider and/or financial advisor
- Inland revenue
- Car company and car/house insurance
- Telephone (landline and mobile)
- Employer
- Utilities companies (gas and electric)
- Housing executive

The NI Direct website provides helpful advice for families dealing with the death of a relative - www.nidirect.gov.uk

Things to return

- Registration documents of car (if a change of ownership is to be recorded)
- Driving Licence
- Passport
- Library books and tickets

Collection of nursing or care equipment

Your relative might have been receiving district nursing or other community services before they died. The district nurse will contact the family post-bereavement and may also arrange with you a suitable time for equipment within the home to be collected. You can also contact the person or service who supplied the equipment or Community Equipment Store, Manor Drive, Lurgan. Tel: 028 38341316.

Section 2: Coping with Bereavement

Grieving

Everyone will experience bereavement at some time in their life. Grief is what we feel following a loss. While often a painful and emotional time, it is a very natural process. Everyone's response to a loss is individual but there are some common experiences that people share:

- Many people describe shock soon after the death of a loved one, especially when the death has been sudden;
- Feelings of numbness, panic, disbelief, anger, guilt, crying or being unable to cry, emptiness, anxiety, agitation, depression, and sometimes relief;
- For some, sleeping or eating might be difficult.

Everyone grieves differently and there is no set way in which to get through this time. It can be hard to accept your loved one has died and it is not unusual to think you have seen or heard them. All these reactions are natural. Mixed emotions and complicated feelings are understandable at this difficult time.

In the days, weeks and months following a bereavement

Bereavement is always a difficult time but there are things you can do to help yourself through it. Seek ways that are helpful for you to cope with your loss. For example:

- Talk to people about how you feel. Don't bottle things up.
- Make sure you look after your own health. This is a time when you may become prone to illness. Eat well, rest properly and

take extra care;

- Often family, friends, spiritual leaders or your local community are able to provide the support you need. For others, talking to someone outside your family might be helpful. Your General Practitioner is a useful point for first contact, or you may prefer to contact one of the organisations listed at the back of this booklet for advice or support;
- If your health is not good consult your doctor;
- Do not rush to make major decisions, such as moving house or disposing of possessions, until you have had time to adjust to the death;
- Special dates, such as birthdays and anniversaries can be particularly emotional times. Deciding in advance how you will mark these occasions can be helpful.

Helping Bereaved Children

It is never easy to break the news of a death to children. Adults often feel the need to protect children from the facts about death. They may feel that children will not understand, or that they will be too upset. However, we often underestimate a child's ability to cope. Children often find it more difficult to cope when they do not know what is happening. They could imagine something that is worse than knowing the truth.

Breaking the news

- A parent or someone known and trusted by the child may break the news about the death soon after it has occurred, consoling the child in the best way appropriate.
- Using simple factual words such as 'dead' or 'has died' may help to avoid confusion in the child's mind.

- Answering a child's questions as truthfully as possible is best. You may become emotional but shedding tears is normal and indicates to the child how much the deceased meant to you.
- Each child will respond differently when someone dies; their understanding of death and the questions they ask may be related to their age. Further information on how you can assist them at this difficult time can be found through contacting some of the organisations mentioned at the back of this booklet;
- Informing the child's school of the death will help the teacher support the child when they return to school.

Seeing the deceased and attending the funeral

Like adults, children, even young ones can be helped to make choices about seeing the deceased and attending the funeral;

- With gentle preparation and if they feel comfortable, a caring adult should accompany the child. This may give the child the opportunity to say goodbye or place a flower, letter or toy in the coffin.
- It may be helpful to involve children in the preparations for the funeral, such as selecting readings or poems.
- The booklet "When someone close to you dies, a guide for talking with and supporting children" is available on the bereavement information page on the Trust website under Bereavement Information <http://www.southerntrust.hscni.net/services/2397.htm>

Section 3: Information and Local Support

Each year the Trust holds a special service to remember patients who have died. This is advertised in the local press and you can call the Bereavement Co-ordinator for information about this service.

Bereavement Information is also available under “Our Services” on the Southern Trust website:
<http://www.southerntrust.hscni.net/2397.htm>

Southern Trust Support Services

Bereavement Information

The Bereavement Co-ordinator can be contacted for advice on bereavement support in the Southern area. Information on bereavement support is available on the Trust Website

Tel: (028) 37560085

Email: Bereavement.Coordinator@southerntrust.hscni.net

Web: <http://www.southerntrust.hscni.net/2397.htm>

Northern Ireland Bereavement Network:

Web: <http://www.hscbereavementnetwork.hscni.net/>

Southern Trust Protect Life Co-ordinator

Support for families bereaved through suicide

Tel: (028) 37564461 Mobile: 0782 5627 133

Email: orla.murtagh@southerntrust.hscni.net

Practical Support

NI Direct - Website

Official Government website which provides helpful advice for families dealing with the death of a relative eg funeral arrangements, registration of death etc.

www.nidirect.gov.uk

District Registrars Offices :

Armagh	The Palace Demesne, Armagh, BT60 4EL	028 37529615
Banbridge	Downshire Road, Banbridge BT32 3JY	028 40660614
Craigavon	Civic Centre, PO Box 66, Lakeview Road, Craigavon BT64 1AL	028 38312400
Dungannon	15 Circular Road, Dungannon BT71 6DT	028 87720329
Newry and Mourne	Newry Town Hall, Bank Parade, Newry BT35 6HR	028 30261512

Social Security:

Social Security Bereavement Service Team	Freephone 0800 085 2463
Social Security Benefits	Freephone 0800 022 4250

Bereavement Register:

Registering a relative's details with this site will stop unwanted direct mail being sent to those who have died.

Web: www.thebereavementregister.org.uk

Kevin Bell Repatriation Trust

Aims to relieve the financial hardship of bereaved families repatriating the body of loved ones who have died abroad in sudden or traumatic circumstances back to Ireland

Web: www.kevinbellrepatriationtrust.com

Organisations Providing Bereavement Support and Information

The list below is intended to act as a guide to the range of support and information available both locally and regionally. Inclusion in this list does not necessarily constitute or imply any endorsement or recommendation by the Southern Health and Social Care Trust of that organisation or services.

Care in Crisis

Confidential counselling service for bereavement, pregnancy related issues eg miscarriage, stillbirth, stress, marriage and relationship problems.

41 Union Street, Lurgan BT66 8DY
Tel: (028) 3832 9900 Web: www.careincrisis.org.uk

Cruse Bereavement Care

Provide a range of bereavement services for children and adults regardless of how and when the death occurs

Northern Ireland Regional Office, 8 Prince Regent Road, Belfast BT5 6QR
Tel: (028) 90792419 Email: northern.ireland@cruse.org.uk
Web: www.cruse.org.uk

Local Offices:

Armagh/Dungannon:, Merrion House, 46 The Square Moy BT71 7SG
Tel:(028)87784004

Newry/Mourne: 9, Enterprise House, WIN Business Park, Canal Quay, Newry BT35 6PH Tel: (028) 30252322

Cancer Focus NI

Provides counselling service to patient and relatives pre and post bereavement.

Cancer Focus Counsellor Southern Trust, Craigavon Area Hospital,
68 Lurgan Road, Portadown BT63 5QQ Tel: (028) 38613645

40-44 Eglantine Avenue, Belfast BT9 6DX Tel: (028) 90663281
Email:care@cancerfocusni.org Web: www.cancerfocusni.org

Family Trauma Centre – Belfast Trust

Regional service providing specialist treatment of children, young people and families following severe trauma. Referral to the service from General Practitioner, Health Visitor, School, Social Work etc.

Tel: (028) 90204700

LIFELINE 0808 808 8000

Counsellors available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week who are experienced in dealing with issues such as depression, anxiety etc to give you help and support, in confidence.

Meningitis Now

Provides specific services for those who have been bereaved as a result of meningitis.

Wellington Park Business Centre, 3 Wellington Park, Malone Road, Belfast BT9 6DJ

Tel/Fax 0345 1204680 Email: lesleyb@meningitisnow.org

Web: www.meningitisNow.org

Southern Area Hospice

Provide bereavement support for those whose loved one received hospice care.

Courtenay Hill, Newry BT34 2EB

Tel: (028) 30287711

Web: www.southernareahospiceservices.org/

STEP (South Tyrone Empowerment Programme)

STEP is a community development and training organisation. It offers migrant support including advice and guidance through face to face appointments with bi-lingual staff

The Junction, 12 Beechvalley Way, Dungannon BT70 1BS

Tel:(028) 87750211 Email: info@stepni.org Web: www.stepni.org

The Samaritans

Provides confidential emotional support 24 hours per day. They are there for you if you are worried about something, feel upset or confused, or you just want to talk to someone.

Craigavon: Tel: (028) 38333555 Newry: Tel: (028) 30266366

National Helpline: 116123 Web: www.samaritans.org.uk

Supporting Bereaved Parents:

Anam Cara

An organisation that supports bereaved parents. Monthly meetings held in Armagh.

Tel: 353 (0)1 4045378 / Northern Ireland Tel: (028) 95213120
Web: www.anamcara.ie Email: info@anamcara.ie

Child Death Helpline

A Freephone service for all those affected by the death of a child

Helpline: 0800 282986 / 0808 800 6019
Web: www.childdeathhelpline.org.uk

Compassionate Friends NI

Support and friendship after the death of a child at any age:

Local Helpline: (028) 87788016 National Helpline: 0345 1232304
Web: www.tcf.org.uk

Life After Loss

Provide support and information to anyone affected by the loss of a baby.

Web: www.lifeafterloss.org.uk

The Lullaby Trust

Provides specialist support for bereaved families and anyone affected by sudden infant death

Helpline: 0808 8026868 Email: support@lullabytrust.org.uk
Web: www.lullabytrust.org.uk

Miscarriage Association

Support and information for anyone affected by pregnancy loss

17 Wentworth Terrace, Wakefield WF1 3QW Tel: 01924200799
Email: info@miscarriageassociation.org.uk
Web: www.miscarriageassociation.org.uk

SANDS (Stillbirth and Neonatal Death Charity)

Supporting anyone affected by the death of a baby and promoting research to reduce the loss of babies' lives. Support Group meetings held across NI.

Regional Office: Magharee House, 82 Thomas Street, Portadown BT62 3NU

Tel: (028) 38392509 NI Helpline 07740993450

Web: www.sandsni.org

Supporting Children:

Barnardos Child Bereavement Support Service

Provides advice and support to adult children, young people, their families and carers who have been bereaved

Advice Line: (028) 90668333

Web: www.barnardos.org.uk/childbereavementservice

Barnardos Nova

Nova is a Barnardos NI trauma support service providing therapeutic support for children and families affected by psychological trauma

Tel: (028) 40628758 Email: ni.nova@barnardos.org.uk

Web: www.barnardos.org.uk/nova

Childhood Bereavement UK

Supports families and educates professionals when a baby or child is dying or when a child is facing bereavement

Helpline: 0800 02 888 40 Web: www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk

Winston's Wish

Childhood bereavement charity offering practical support and guidance for bereaved children, their families and professionals

Helpline 0845 2030405 Email: info@winstonswish.org.uk

Web: www.winstonswish.org.uk

Supporting people bereaved through Suicide:

The Niamh Louise Foundation

Provides peer support for people bereaved through suicide.

32 Coalisland Road, Killybrackey, Dungannon, Co. Tyrone BT71 6LA
Tel: (028) 8775 3327 Email: info@niamhlouisefoundation.com
Web: www.niamhlouisefoundation.com

PIPS Hope and Support (formally Newry and Mourne)

Provides bereavement support services in the Southern Trust area.

50 Mill Street, Newry BT34 1AG Tel: (028) 30266195
Email: info@pipshopeandsupport.org Web: www.pipsnewryandmourne.org

PIPS Upper Bann

Provides bereavement support services in the Southern Trust area.

Flat 17, Mount Zion House, Edward Street, Lurgan BT66 6DB
Tel: (028) 3831 0151 Email: pipsupperbann@hotmail.co.uk
Web: www.pipsupperbann.com

Supporting people with Learning Disability or Dementia:

Alzheimer's Society

Works to improve the quality of life of people affected by Dementia.

Unit 4, Balmoral Business Park, Boucher Crescent, Belfast BT12 6HU
Tel: (028) 90664100 Email: nir@alzheimers.org.uk
Web: www.alzheimers.org.uk

Mencap

Supports people with a learning disability and their families in Northern Ireland.

Web: www.mencap.org.uk

Mencap Northern Ireland: Tel: (028) 90691351
The Northern Ireland Learning Disability Helpline: 0808 808 1111

Macmillan "Easy Read" Resources

Provides accessible information in simple language and pictures about dying, death and bereavement.

Web: <http://www.macmillan.org.uk/information-and-support/resources-and-publications/other-formats/easy-read.html>

Contact Us

We welcome your comments, suggestions, compliments or complaints and we will use them to assist us in improving our services. To make your views known, please contact:

Corporate Complaints Officer

Southern Health and Social Care Trust
Beechfield House
Craigavon Area Hospital
68 Lurgan Road
Portadown
BT63 5QQ

Tel: 028 37564600

Email: complaints@southerntrust.hscni.net

Have Your Say!

The Trust is committed to involving service users, carers and other stakeholders in the planning, development and evaluation of its services. There will be times when the Trust will have opportunities for you to become involved. Register your interest with the Personal and Public Involvement Team on

Tel: 028 37564471

NOTES

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