

Bereavement

Support after death



Information and advice you need to help you love later life.

We're Age UK and our goal is to enable older people to love later life.

We are passionate about affirming that your later years can be fulfilling years. Whether you're enjoying your later life or going through tough times, we're here to help you make the best of your life.

Our network includes Age Cymru, Age NI, Age Scotland, Age International and more than 130 local partners.

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Date of publication: May 2018. © Age UK 2018
Next review date: May 2020

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This guide has been produced with the support of Rothesay Life.

What this guide is about

Bereavement is highly personal and there's no formula for how to deal with it. Even if you've been bereaved before, you won't necessarily deal with each loss in the same way.

However, there are recognisable reactions and emotions many of us experience when someone close to us dies. This guide gives you some idea about the range of experiences many people go through after they've lost someone.

As far as possible, the information given in this guide is applicable across the UK.

You may not feel ready to read this guide now and decide to come back to it at a different time. You may also want to look at it with someone close to you, or with a bereavement counsellor.

Key



This symbol indicates where information differs for Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

When someone dies

It can be devastating when someone close to you dies. You might feel a number of emotions all at once and it can be overwhelming. But it's important to remember that there's no right or wrong way to feel. Everyone will feel differently and will manage their feelings in different ways.

Grief is natural and can last a long time. Talking to those close to you can really help. You don't need to deal with it alone. Alternatively, there are a range of support groups that can help you deal with your loss. You can find many of these organisations listed at the end of this guide, and referenced throughout.

You might not want to do too much too soon, but there are things that need to be done in the first few days after someone dies.

- Get a medical certificate from a GP or hospital doctor in order to register the death.
- You'll need to register the death within 5 days (8 days in Scotland).
- Arrange the funeral, which can be done by a funeral director.

If the death was unexpected and a coroner is involved, this process may be delayed.

For more information

Read our guide *When someone dies* for more information on the practical things that need to be done after a death.

Feeling the effects

Grief is a natural response to losing someone close to you. While grieving, you will probably experience a range of intense emotions. Some people feel them more strongly than others. Sometimes they can be conflicting, and they may not occur in any particular order. Some days you may feel as if you're coping better but on other days struggle with overwhelming emotions.

There's no right or wrong way to grieve and the process will be different for everyone. But with time, and the right support, these feelings will become less intense and you can start to adjust and come to terms with your loss.

Initially many people talk of feeling a sense of numbness and disbelief, even if the death was expected. As you get over the shock and start to grasp what has happened you may experience other strong emotions.

Emptiness and sadness

The feeling of emptiness that occurs when someone dies may feel overwhelming or as if it will never go away. At this time, sadness can often come in waves – some days or weeks seem easier to cope with than others. But this is a natural response to bereavement. It is also during this period of sadness that some healing can take place.

But for some this sadness may become depression. If you feel as if you may be depressed, you're unable to think about anything but the person who has died or you're struggling with self-care such as eating and sleeping, you should see your doctor for help and advice.

If you start to feel that you might hurt yourself in some way or have suicidal thoughts, it's important to tell someone as soon as possible – ideally your doctor, who can tell you to get the help you need and explain how to get it.

Who can I contact?

Call Samaritans at any time of the day or night on 116 123 if you need someone to talk to (page 20). In Northern Ireland you can also contact Lifeline for support (page 19).

Anger

Some people feel angry after they have been bereaved. You may struggle to cope with the anger, or even work out exactly who you're angry with.

You may be angry at yourself, questioning whether you could have done more or thinking of regrets you may have. Some people are angry at the person who died for leaving them as they may feel frightened or abandoned. You may be angry at those around you for a lack of understanding. Those of faith can feel anger, and may even find themselves questioning their faith.

This is natural but there are ways of expressing your anger without hurting yourself or those around you. Some people write all their thoughts down on paper and then destroy the pages, for example. It could help to talk to someone about these feelings – whether it's someone you're close to or someone not emotionally involved in your loss.

Fear

Fear and anxiety are very natural emotions to feel after a bereavement. You may feel that you're struggling to control your thoughts and emotions. If you're feeling overwhelmed or anxious, it could help to talk to someone about how you're feeling.

Guilt

Some people experience feelings of guilt when someone dies. You may find yourself wondering whether you could have done more to help, or feeling guilty about something you said or didn't say to them when they were alive.

Guilt is a very natural feeling after a loss but it's important to try not to dwell on the past. Try not to be too hard on yourself or anyone else. With time, you're likely to reach some acceptance of the past, be able to move forwards and, if you can, focus on positive and happy memories.

However, if these feelings don't go away or become more powerful, then you should try and talk about them with someone close to you, or someone you don't know who specialises in bereavement support.

Relief

You may experience relief, especially if the person had been ill or in pain before their death. You may feel as if you shouldn't feel relieved, but it's very natural to feel this way. This is natural and understandable if you saw someone close to you in pain or discomfort.

Who can I contact?

Contact Cruse Bereavement Care for help and support with your bereavement (page 19).

Looking after your health

Bereavement can have a physical impact as well as emotional. These emotions can leave you feeling tired and drained.

You're likely to feel more exhausted if you'd been caring for the person before they died, or been through a particularly anxious time before their death. You may have trouble sleeping, whether it be difficulty getting to sleep or experiencing vivid dreams. But it's important to rest even if you can't sleep.

Some people feel tense and short of breath, or edgy and restless, while others feel slow and lethargic. Again, this will differ from person to person. You may lose your appetite but it's important to keep eating and drinking well.

Make sure you don't neglect your health. Continue to take any medication and keep regular doctor's appointments.

There are many practical things that need doing following a death and you may feel the need to be there for others experiencing the loss too, but it's important that you look after yourself during this difficult time.

To do next

Read our guide *Healthy living* for tips on keeping yourself in good health. In Scotland, see Age Scotland's guide *Eat well*.

Worrying about practical matters

You may worry about more practical matters after someone dies. These may be money worries, such as coping on a smaller income. You may be entitled to certain benefits, including additional pension payments, following the death.

You may also struggle to handle day-to-day tasks and find it hard to cope around the house. It's important to seek advice if you're struggling so you can get the help you need.

To do next

You can use our benefits calculator online at www.ageuk.org.uk/benefitscheck or contact your local Age UK to arrange a benefits check. The Department for Work and Pensions Bereavement Service carries out eligibility checks for surviving relatives to see what benefits they are entitled to (page 19).

For more information

Read our guide *More money in your pocket*. Age Cymru and Age NI have their own versions of this guide. In Scotland, see Age Scotland's guide *Benefits Maze*. For help with day-to-day tasks, read our guide *Getting help at home*. In Scotland, see Age Scotland's guide *Care at home*.



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Past bereavements

If you've experienced loss before you may have expected to know how you would cope if someone else you know dies. But different losses can affect people in different ways. Some emotions may be stronger following the death of certain people, or you may feel emotions you haven't felt with other losses in different circumstances.

Bereavement can trigger memories of past losses, when emotions may not have been discussed as openly as they are now, or your feelings as a child may have been overlooked.

Other losses, such as a miscarriage or the loss of a child, may have been particularly hard to cope with at the time. You may have thought you'd dealt with this, but perhaps you didn't realise how deeply you were affected. You may find memories of these unhappy times rushing back, which can be extremely distressing.

You may feel the need to mourn these losses and talk about your experiences before you can start to cope with your more recent bereavement.

There are specialist organisations you can contact such as Sands, which offers support to those who have lost a child during pregnancy or after birth (page 20). SSAFA, the armed forces charity, specialises in helping those who have served or lost someone who served (page 20).

To do next

Talk to friends and family about how you're feeling if you can. See your GP if you want to talk to a bereavement counsellor as you may prefer to talk with someone you don't know. Contact The Compassionate Friends for more support (page 20) or see the section 'Useful organisations' for other sources of help (pages 18-20).

Those around you

Knowing the right words

It can often feel difficult to talk to someone who has lost a person close to them. Many people don't know what to say or are worried they'll say the wrong thing and avoid the topic altogether. That's not to say they don't want to offer support. Sometimes it can be helpful if you're the one who brings up a bereavement in conversation as this shows the other person that it's OK to talk about it.

Offering support

Often the loss that is affecting you will also be affecting others close to you. If you feel you can, encourage them to share how they're feeling too and reassure them that they're not alone. Talking with each other, sharing stories of the person you've lost and being there to listen can be beneficial to you all.

Talking to children

Just like adults, bereavement affects all children differently. But again, like adults, it's important to talk, be open and answer any questions they may have. Try to encourage questions and answer them as honestly as you can, even if this may be difficult for you.

Talking to grandchildren or children can be difficult as their experience of grief can depend on their age and what they already understand about death and dying.

Who can I contact?

Organisations such as Winston's Wish offer support, information and guidance to people caring for a bereaved child or young person (page 20). Cruse Bereavement Care runs an initiative called Hope Again, aimed at bereaved young people (page 19).

If you've been left alone

If you have lost someone and have now been left feeling alone it can be particularly difficult. You may feel you don't have anyone you can talk to about how you're feeling, or you may now feel lonely and isolated.

However, there are helplines you can call if you need to talk to someone about how you're feeling, or you could talk to your GP.

If you feel you need companionship, there are befriending services available. Local Age UKs run befriending services where we arrange for someone to visit you to share a conversation and possibly a cup of tea. Age UK also offer a phone befriending service called Call In Time, which matches you with a telephone befriender who you can speak with regularly on the phone.

To do next

Visit the Age UK website or call 0800 434 6105 to sign up for Call in Time.

Who can I contact?

Contact your local Age UK to find out about their befriending services. You can also contact Cruse Bereavement Care for help and support with your bereavement (page 19).



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‘I started going to a day centre where I met other people, some of whom were in a similar situation to me.’

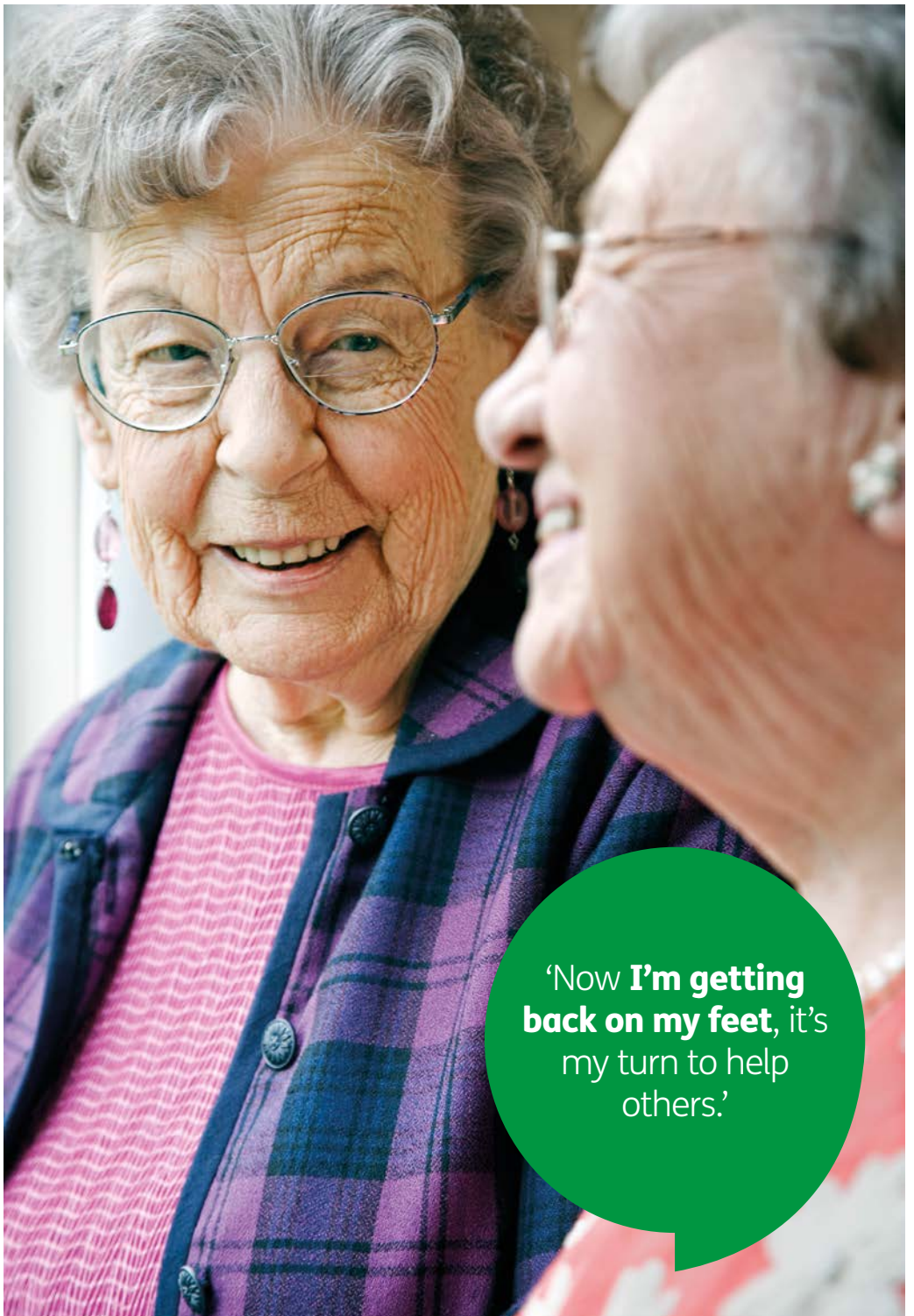
When Maria’s husband died, she found herself struggling to cope emotionally.

‘When my husband died two years ago, it was as if my whole world fell apart. We’d been married for over 50 years and I couldn’t imagine my life without him. He’d been ill for a while so, while his death wasn’t unexpected, it still came as a huge shock to me. My daughters live abroad so when they left, after a couple of weeks, I felt very alone.

‘I remembered seeing a sign in my library saying that my local Age UK offered a befriending service, and I thought it couldn’t hurt to contact them. I got in touch and they arranged for someone to visit me once a week, just for a chat and a cup of tea.

‘It made such a difference to know someone was coming round. When I was feeling more confident, I started going to a day centre where I met other people, some of whom were in a similar situation to me. It was good to talk to them and realise that my feelings were normal.

‘Now I’m getting back on my feet, it’s my turn to help others. I’ve volunteered as a befriender and soon I’ll be going out to see people who need a bit of comfort and support at a difficult time.’



‘Now **I’m getting back on my feet**, it’s my turn to help others.’

What you can do

Naturally, you may feel yourself becoming more withdrawn, avoiding social situations and staying at home following a loss. However, when you feel ready, there are things you can do that may help.

Stay in touch

It may be hard to stay in touch with friends and family, and you may feel you need some time to yourself. However, a simple call or text to ask them over for a cup of tea, or to see if they want to come with you to the shops, can not only help you, but can show friends that you want their support.

Local community centres

These centres are another way to meet new people, some of whom may be in a similar position to you. Here you can chat and take part in activities. You may have someone you could encourage to come with you if you'd feel more comfortable.

Local place of worship

Some people find their faith a great comfort, while others may find themselves questioning their faith when someone close to them dies. If you have a faith or spiritual beliefs, your local place of worship may be of great importance to you. Remaining or becoming an active member of this community can help socially and emotionally.

Volunteering

Volunteering can be a great way to meet new people and help a cause that may mean a lot to you. It's also often flexible, so you can start out doing only what you feel able to and possibly build on this over time.

Who can I contact?

Visit www.do-it.org to find a local volunteering opportunity.

Looking ahead

It may be difficult to look forward, but there's no rush – do everything at your own pace and as you feel comfortable. Looking after yourself and talking about how you're feeling can help and build the foundations for the future.

Looking ahead and finding enjoyment in life is not a betrayal or substitution for the life you had with the person who has died. The grief may remain, but with time you can find things to give life meaning again.

Spend time with those close to you. It might be a time to focus your thoughts on learning something new, taking up a new hobby and make new friends.

Give yourself things to look forward to. This might not seem suitable at first, but booking a weekend away or day trip when you feel ready can give you time to gather your thoughts and remind you of what life still has to offer.

Birthdays, anniversaries or dates that are significant to you can be particularly difficult, and you might find it helpful to consider how you will deal with them in advance. You may want to use them to celebrate the memory of the person you have lost, for example by sharing stories or raising a toast, or you may prefer to have a quiet time on your own to remember the person.

Most importantly, remind yourself there is no magic formula and you may have unexpected feelings. These feelings are natural. Losing someone is an incredibly emotional time. This is a time that's highly personal and everyone experiences in their own way. But, if you find yourself struggling to cope or feel you need to talk to someone – there's help and support available.

Useful organisations

Age UK

We provide advice and information for people in later life through our Age UK Advice line, publications and online.

Age UK Advice: 0800 169 65 65

Lines are open seven days a week from 8am to 7pm.
www.ageuk.org.uk

Call Age UK Advice to find out whether there is a local Age UK near you, and to order free copies of our information guides and factsheets.

In Wales, contact

Age Cymru: 0800 022 3444
www.agecymru.org.uk

In Northern Ireland, contact

Age NI: 0808 808 7575
www.ageni.org

In Scotland, contact

Age Scotland: 0800 124 4222
www.agescotland.org.uk

The evidence sources used to create this guide are available on request. Contact resources@ageuk.org.uk

Cruse Bereavement Care

Provides emotional support and information across England, Wales and Northern Ireland through local services offering face-to-face support and a national helpline.

Tel: 0808 808 1677

www.cruse.org.uk

In Scotland, contact **Cruse Bereavement Care Scotland**

Tel: 0845 600 2227

www.crusescotland.org.uk

Department for Work and Pensions Bereavement Service

Carries out eligibility checks on surviving relatives to see what benefits they are entitled to. Also takes claims for bereavement benefits and Funeral Payments.

Tel: 0800 731 0469

Textphone: 0800 731 0464

In Wales, call 0800 731 0453

Textphone: 0800 731 0456

In Northern Ireland, call 0800 085 2463

Do-it

National volunteering database of volunteering opportunities across the country.

www.do-it.org

Lifeline

Provides support for people in distress and despair in Northern Ireland. It can also provide follow-up support, including counselling and complementary therapy.

Tel: 0808 808 8000

www.lifelinehelpline.info

Samaritans

Confidential support for people in distress, 24-hours a day.

Tel: 116 123

Email: jo@samaritans.org

www.samaritans.org

Sands

Offers support to parents, grandparents and their families when a baby dies during pregnancy or after birth. They can be contacted in the weeks, months or years after the loss.

Tel: 0808 164 3332

Email: helpline@sands.org.uk

www.sands.org.uk

SSAFA – the Armed Forces charity

Offers support and advice to anyone who has served in the armed forces or anyone who has lost someone who served.

Tel: 0800 731 4880

www.ssafa.org.uk

The Compassionate Friends

National self-help organisation. Parents who have been bereaved offer friendship and support to other bereaved parents, grandparents and their families.

Tel: 0345 123 2304

Tel: 0288 77 88 016 (Northern Ireland helpline)

Email: helpline@tcf.org.uk

www.tcf.org.uk

Winston's Wish

Offers support, information and guidance to people caring for a bereaved child or young person.

Tel: 08088 020 021

www.winstonswish.org

Supporting the work of Age UK

Age UK aims to enable all older people to love later life. We provide vital services, support, information and advice to thousands of older people across the UK.

In order to offer free information guides like this one, Age UK relies on the generosity of its supporters. If you would like to help us, here are a few ways you could get involved:

1 Make a donation
To make a donation to Age UK, simply complete the enclosed donation form, call us on **0800 169 8787** or visit **www.ageuk.org.uk/get-involved**

2 Donate items to our shops
By donating an unwanted item to one of our shops, you can help generate vital funds to support our work. To find your nearest Age UK shop, visit **www.ageuk.org.uk** and enter your postcode into the ‘What does Age UK do in your area?’ search function. Alternatively, call us on **0800 169 8787**

3 Leave a gift in your will
Nearly half the money we receive from supporters come from gifts left in wills. To find out more about how you could help in this way, please call the Age UK legacy team on **020 3033 1421** or email **legacies@ageuk.org.uk**

Thank you!

What should I do now?

For more information on the issues covered in this guide, or to order any of our publications, please call Age UK Advice free on **0800 169 65 65** or visit www.ageuk.org.uk/healthandwellbeing

Our publications are also available in large print and audio formats.



The Age UK Group offers a wide range of products and services specially designed for people in later life. For more information, please call **0800 169 18 19**.

If contact details for your local Age UK are not in the box below, call Age UK Advice free on **0800 169 65 65**.

