

Coping with Bereavement

during the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic



Bereavement can be extremely difficult under normal circumstances. But, in these unusual times, you may be struggling with the additional impact of social isolation, and being cut off from your friends, family and support network.

The aim of this leaflet is to provide information and advice that might help you, after losing a loved one during the Coronavirus pandemic.

Coping with death during the Coronavirus pandemic

Being bereaved and coping with grief during the Coronavirus pandemic is likely to be different to coping in normal circumstances.

Social isolation; lack of contact with your family and friends who would normally be able to spend time with you to discuss your concerns and anxieties; and, access to face-to-face professional support, may not be available until the pandemic has settled. This may mean that your period of grief is different and make you feel more concerned and unable to cope with what is happening in your life at this time.

This period of grief is likely to be different to grief you have experienced in the past. However, telephone support and FaceTime with family and friends may be helpful.

Some of your grief may be related to the following:

- You may be physically isolated, in the house you shared with the person who has died, and are unable to have visitors or leave the house (except for essential items or exercise).
- You may be self-isolating with family members who can provide support and comfort; but, emotional strains may be heightened as you may find it difficult to seek out time for yourself.
- You may be living with children or teenagers and feel unable to express your grief, due to the increased amount of time spent keeping them occupied during isolation.

You may also have concerns over the realities of your loved one's death:

- You may feel pressured to take on additional roles, as friends and relatives who may, otherwise, have supported you are asked to stay at home.
- Current restrictions may make it difficult to deliver the funeral they would have wished for.
- Access to support from doctors and other professionals may be limited, compared to at other times.

However, you may be able to get support from your friends and family via social media and the telephone. Your neighbours may start writing to you to offer their condolences and support with things, such as shopping. There is likely to be a greater sense of community.

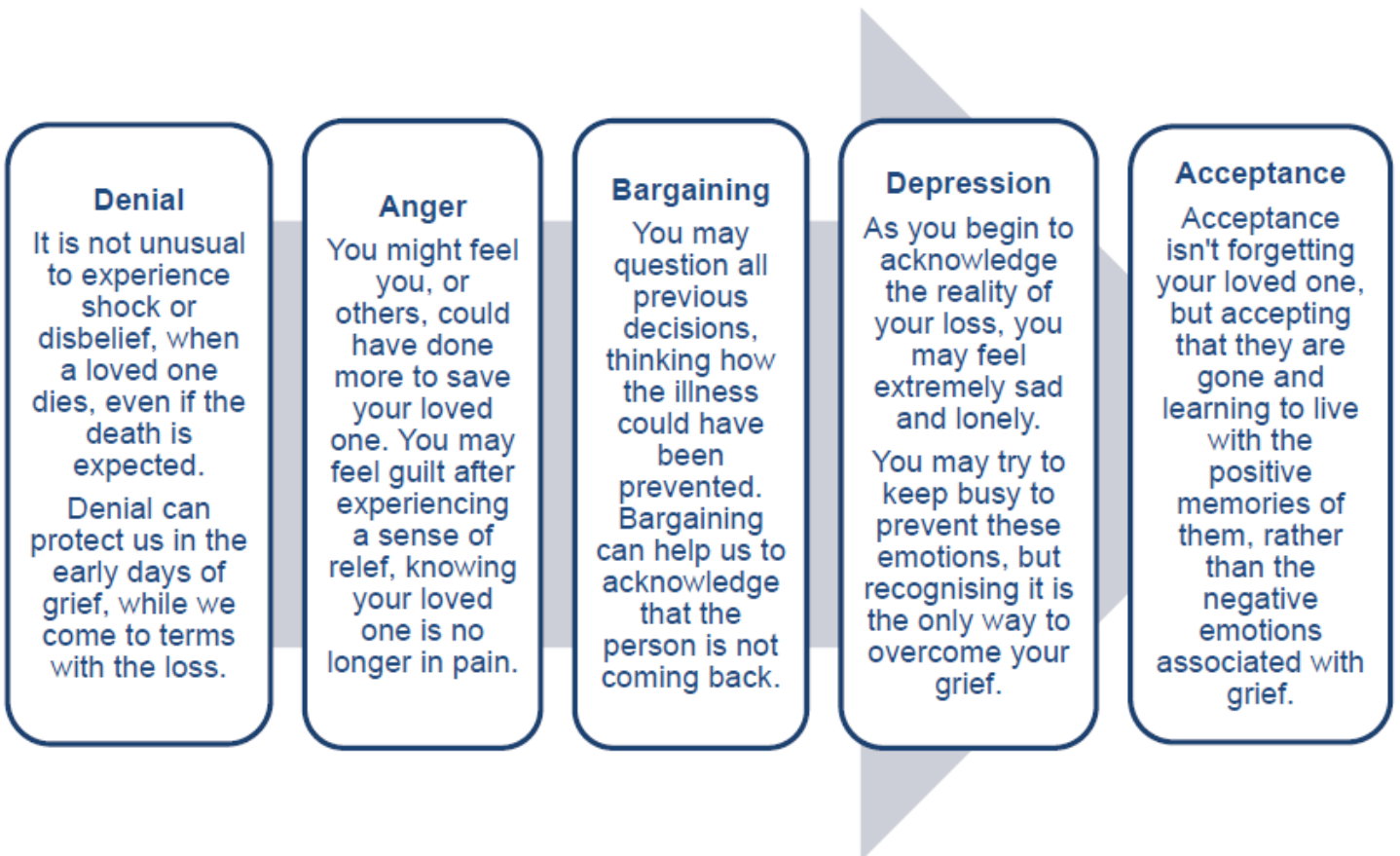
Due to the number of deaths relating to Coronavirus, you may have friends and other family members who are working through the loss of a loved one and may want to talk to you.

Coping with your emotions

Accepting the death of a loved one can take time. There will be some good days and some bad days; but, as time passes, you may no longer feel as overwhelmed by your emotions.

The Kübler-Ross model, also known as the Five Stages of Grief, helps to explain the different feelings you may experience following your bereavement.

You may experience all, some, or none, of these emotions; they may, or may not, present in the order shown below, and you may experience one or more of these reactions at the same time. However, it is important to note that whilst these are natural reactions to bereavement, which many people experience, your response to the loss is individual to you.



It can take time to realise how much has changed in your life and to begin to think a little less about your loved one and feel able to move on. Whilst it takes different amounts of time for each individual, it is important to remember that it is normal for you to recover and rebuild your life following the death of someone close to you. They would not want you to feel guilty.

How can I help myself?

- Accept your feelings, rather than struggle to remain calm or positive. They will likely appear and pass by themselves.
- Telephone, video call or write a letter to a friend or family member. Sharing your experiences with others who may be experiencing similar losses and difficulties, can help you to feel less alone. Whilst you may not be able to meet face-to-face, it is important to stay connected with people who are important to you.

- Seek support from a bereavement support service, charity or religious group. Speaking to someone you don't know, or a professional, might be easier.
- Look back at photographs or things you shared together. Remind yourself of the positive times you had, rather than focusing on their illness and death. Some people create a 'Memory Box' to keep all the special things that remind you of your loved one.

It is common to experience changes in your appetite and have difficulty sleeping following a bereavement. You may wish to stay inside and hide yourself away. However, this can make it more difficult to cope with your emotions.

- Try to eat meals at regular times during the day, whether you are on your own or living with others. Even if you are not hungry, try to eat something small.
- Try and go to bed at the same time every night and wake up at the same time every morning, as sticking to a routine can help. If your nights are disturbed, try and have a nap during the day. Feeling rested can help your mind and body to heal.
- Try and do a little bit of exercise each day. If you are able to, go for a walk. If you can't, do some exercise in your home, potter around the garden, if you have one, or do some gentle activities, such as housework. If you feel unable to go outside, try and get some fresh air and sunlight into your home by opening the curtains and window.
- Try to avoid turning to alcohol or cigarettes as a way of coping.

If you feel unable to cope, then it may be a good idea to telephone your local GP surgery. They may be able to advise you over the phone, or they may wish for you to book an appointment, if appropriate.

How can the hospital help?

If your loved one died in hospital, we can provide you with information about bereavement support services and practical advice about the things you may need to do following a bereavement. This could include:

- the collection of the death certificate;
- how to register the death; and,
- support any questions you may have about the care received.

Please let us know if we can be of any help regarding these or other issues. The Government information website (www.gov.uk/after-a-death) also provides practical information on what to do following a death.

To contact the **Bereavement team**:

Royal Shrewsbury Hospital

Tel: 01743 261384

Monday – Friday: 9.00am – 5.00pm

Princess Royal Hospital

Tel: 01952 641222 ext. 4741

Monday – Friday: 9.00am – 5.00pm

How can I help others who may be in a similar situation?

Unfortunately, you may have friends or family members that have experienced a bereavement during the Coronavirus pandemic. Reaching out to others can ensure no-one feels alone.

- Contact the person regularly. During this difficult time, it is important to make regular contact in ways that are easy for the person. Using video call may be beneficial (if you both have it), so you both feel more connected. Alternatively, call them on the telephone, text them, or write them a letter.
- The person who has been bereaved may wish to talk about their loved one. Simply listening may help to ease their pain. Alternatively, talk about other things to distract them from their thoughts.
- Encourage them to seek support from a GP, or other professional, if they are struggling to cope.
- Offer practical support if you are able to, such as doing their shopping or picking up their medicine, particularly if they are vulnerable to infection.

Useful Contacts

Bereavement Advice Centre

Practical support for people who have experienced loss

Phone: 0800 634 9494

Website: <https://www.bereavementadvice.org/>

Cruse Bereavement Care

Support for people who have been bereaved.

Phone: 0808 808 1677

Website: <https://www.cruse.org.uk/>

British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy

A list of counsellors in England and Wales.

Website: <https://www.bacp.co.uk/>

Mind

Support for people with mental health problems.

Phone: 0300 123 3393

Website: www.mind.org.uk

Samaritans

Support for people with feelings of distress or despair.

Phone: 116 123

Website: www.samaritans.org.uk

Carers UK

Support for carers.

Phone: 020 7378 4999

Website: <https://www.carersuk.org/>



Further information is available from:

Feedback

We appreciate and encourage feedback which can be shared in a number of ways through the hospital website. Scan the QR code to give feedback.

<https://www.sath.nhs.uk/patients-visitors/feedback/>

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

PALS will act on your behalf when handling patient and family concerns, they can also help you get support from other local or national agencies. PALS, is a confidential service.

Royal Shrewsbury Hospital, Tel: 0800 783 0057 or 01743 261691

Princess Royal Hospital, Tel: 01952 282888

Other Sources of Information

NHS 111

A fast and easy way to get the right help, whatever the time. NHS 111 is available 24 hours a day, 365 days of the year.

111 (free from a landline or mobile) www.nhs.uk

Self Help & Support Groups

A selection of websites providing access to good quality health information, local organisations and community groups is available from the library.

www.library.sath.nhs.uk/fnd/patients/

Information in Other Languages or Formats

If you require this information in a different way such as easy read, a different language, larger print, audio or braille please tell a member of staff or contact the Patient Experience Team;

sath.patientexperience@nhs.net or 01743 261000 ext. 2503.

Website: www.sath.nhs.uk

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