

# **Support After Sudden Bereavement During the Covid-19 Pandemic**

November 2020

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## About this resource

We have put this resource together to support you if you are grieving the sudden death of someone close to you, or if you are supporting someone going through sudden bereavement. We have tried to outline what might happen in the coming weeks and months; practically, around what processes and actions need to happen and emotionally, looking at the many different feelings you may experience.

We have signposted where you can get further support and specialist advice, on everything from inquests to how to talk to children about sudden death.

We are living through extraordinary times and it is easy to feel isolated. Please know that you are not alone. Support and advice services may be doing things a little differently, but they are there for you. Many services now offer easily accessible telephone- or internet-based support. Some face-to-face services still happen where it is safe to do so. But all of the services we have listed here are open and ready to help.

We are sorry for your loss and hope that you can find something here that might help you, either now or at some time in the near future.

### Thrive LDN

On behalf of Public Health England Office for London, **Thrive LDN** is coordinating the public mental health response to COVID-19 in London to support the mental health and resilience of Londoners.

For any queries about this pack, please contact Thrive LDN Suicide Prevention Lead, Gabriella Baker ([gabriella.baker@nhs.net](mailto:gabriella.baker@nhs.net)).

For general information about Thrive LDN's work please contact [info@thrivedn.co.uk](mailto:info@thrivedn.co.uk).



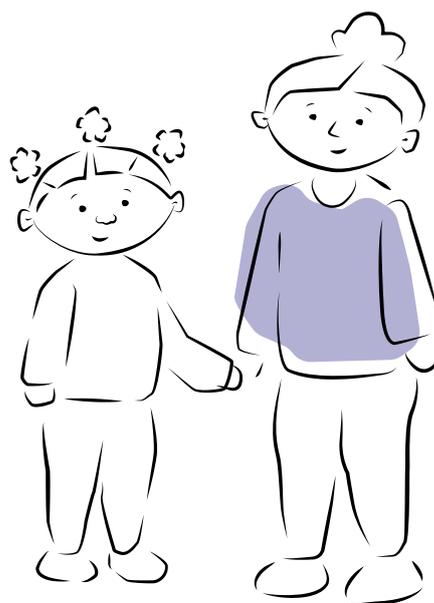
## Introduction

Bereavement is one of the most challenging things that we can experience, affecting every one of us. In some traumatic circumstances, we might need additional and more specialised support to help to cope with a bereavement.

If you have experienced loss during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, we offer our heartfelt condolences. It is immensely traumatic to be unable to say goodbye to your loved one in the usual way. You may have been isolated from your support network due to current restrictions on social gatherings. If the death was sudden, you might experience greater shock and find it more difficult to accept, due to limited time to prepare for life without the person who has died.

This has been developed to reassure you that help is available whenever you need it. It provides important information about how existing services have changed how they are supporting people. We have included dedicated support options for groups of people who may be particularly vulnerable, to help ensure you are aware of who can best understand your circumstances.

*If you are supporting someone who has recently been bereaved, it may be that they need some more dedicated or specialist support. LGBTQI+ people may feel excluded from family arrangements and older people may experience more isolation. Children and younger people will need support tailored to their age and understanding. This has information on how to access this specialist support.*



# How you might be feeling



## How you might be feeling

Let us start by saying that there is no one way to feel when you have been bereaved. Emotions do not follow each other neatly and there is certainly no set process for grief.

Sudden bereavement can bring about feelings of shock, disbelief, and difficulty accepting the loss of your loved one. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, these emotions may be further intensified by the uncertainty of changing regulations and being isolated from friends and family at a time when you need their support most.

We have outlined just some of the emotions that people have said they have experienced after a sudden death. Experiencing a wide range of different emotions is normal, although people have their own ways of expressing feelings. Knowing that these reactions are normal can help you to cope.



### Shock

You may feel bewildered about what has happened, and it can feel very difficult to continue with your usual daily tasks. The feeling of shock can last for a very long time and you may feel detached from what is going on around you before the reality of the person's death sinks in.



### Disbelief

Some people may struggle to accept that the person has died and will no longer be part of their lives. It can be frightening to imagine a future that is different from what you planned, as well as the impact this loss will have on others.



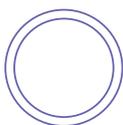
### Anger

You might feel angry that the current circumstances have restricted your ability to say goodbye how you would have wanted to. Maybe you were unable to be with your loved one as they died, or to attend the funeral. The practical matters you have been left to manage may even make you feel angry with the person who has died. This is a very normal reaction to losing someone suddenly and does not mean that you loved that person any less.



### Sadness and despair

Profound sadness can be one of the more frequent reactions to the death of a loved one. The prospect of living without the person who has died can feel hard to bear, bringing about a feeling of deep despair.



### Physical responses

People who have been bereaved suddenly may experience a variety of physical reactions, including intense headaches, upset stomachs, and feeling low. Your sleep and appetite may be disrupted, making it difficult to take care of yourself mentally and physically.

## What might help?

People who have been bereaved have suggested the following things that helped them to cope. We have added some more that may be more appropriate or accessible due to COVID-related social restrictions.



### Expressing your feelings

Find different ways to let your feelings out, either for yourself, or to let others know how you are doing. Some people say that drawing or writing helps them to deal with the things they would rather not talk about. Perhaps texting and online messaging can help when you really can't face a long conversation. Find what works for you, the most important thing is to try to communicate with those who care about you.



### Looking after yourself physically

Make sure that you prioritise your wellbeing by eating well and getting enough sleep daily. We know that this can be difficult, especially if you are looking after children or other relatives. But you can't help others until you have looked after yourself - your own wellbeing is incredibly important.



### Making opportunities to remember

Many people find comfort in memories, using pictures and visiting places that remind you of your loved one. You may need time before you are ready to do this, as memories can be painful at first. There is no time limit to how long you might need before you can start to remember someone without feeling this pain - everybody is different.



### Spending time outside

Getting out of your home and having a change of scene is vital, as is including gentle exercise in your routine. Being in nature, walking the dog, having time for your thoughts - these are all simple things that really do help us to cope in extremely difficult times.



### Developing 'rituals'

This could be as simple as lighting a candle or listening to piece of music that means something to your relationship with the person who has died. In time, you can create a more lasting memorial to mark the person's life.



### **Speaking with and reading the words of people with lived experience**

More than anything else, people who have been bereaved suddenly or in traumatic circumstances have found comfort from talking to others who have experienced the same loss. We have listed organisations in this toolkit to help you to locate local groups or online forums that can connect you to others.



### **Participating in activities**

You may not feel that you can ever enjoy the things you used to do before your loss. When you feel that you are able, slowly getting back to the activities you have previously enjoyed, such as sports, music and social events, can help enormously. Now that many activities are carrying on online, you may even find it easier to do from home where you can dip in and out as you feel ready and able.



### **Developing an emotional first aid kit**

You can ask a friend to help you to build an emotional first aid kit. Everyone finds comfort in different things, from music and poetry, to a warm blanket or a hot drink. Having this to hand when you are not coping can give you a small amount of comfort at a difficult time.

## What might not help?

We understand that it can feel difficult to put one foot in front of the other in the early days of bereavement. People who have been in your situation have also talked about what is not helpful when you are trying to get through this difficult experience.



### Avoiding talking about what has happened

Although it may be difficult, it really is best to keep communicating however you can. We have so many ways of communicating from our home now; face to face on Zoom, voice memos, texts, instant messaging. Find a way that you feel most comfortable with and talk to those you trust.



### Taking risks

When someone dies there may be a feeling of “what is the point”. When feeling desperate, we can take unnecessary risks, including with our own health and wellbeing. This can include using alcohol and drugs to try to blot out the pain. But this only prolongs your pain and delays how you can work through your grief, making you feel even worse.

If you are having suicidal thoughts, please talk to someone **now**.



### Not seeking help

You may feel helpless and worried about what others think, concerned about appearing ‘weak’ or not wanting to bother anyone. Please know that what you’re feeling is important and people will care about you and want to help.



### Hurrying to make big decisions

It is an overwhelming time, and you may have a great deal of administrative or legal tasks to deal with on top of your emotions. Let some time pass and gather your thoughts before making any big decisions.



# What may happen in the coming weeks and months

## What may happen in the coming weeks and months

While you are trying to cope with the emotional impact of your loss, there may be a number of legal and administrative tasks to deal with. You may not have expected to have to go through an inquest process for example, or to have contact with the police.

We have outlined some of the key people you may be in contact with in the weeks following a sudden death. The **Support after Suicide Partnership** have put together a more detailed **timeline** that provides helpful information and support over the days and months following a bereavement by suicide, which you may also find useful.

Just as with the emotional impact of sudden bereavement, there is support available to help you to navigate the systems and processes that need to be followed. The professionals you will be in contact with, such as coroners, police and funeral directors, are extremely experienced and aware of how difficult this time is for you.



### Police

When someone has died unexpectedly, the Police will investigate what has happened on behalf of the coroner to make sure that no-one else was involved. To do so, they may ask how the person who has died was acting in the days and weeks before their death. They may also ask you to help them confirm the person's identity. Occasionally, the police may need to take personal items away as part of their investigation, but these will be returned. You might want to note down the name and contact number of the officer in case you have any questions after they have gone.



### Coroners

All sudden and unexplained deaths will be reported (by the police) to the local coroner, who must complete a report on the death before it can be registered. The coroner's officer will contact the next of kin to explain why the death has been reported and what is likely to follow. The investigation may take time, for example in cases where there is to be an inquest. You could speak to the coroner's officer about how to make funeral arrangements and inform services about what has happened, as well as any other concerns and questions you may have.

Sometimes the coroner will decide to request a post-mortem examination to be clear about how the person died. The process usually involves an examination of the organs carried out by a medical specialist known as a pathologist.



## Inquests

If it was not possible to find the cause of death from the post-mortem examination, or if the death was sudden, the coroner must hold an inquest. Therefore, there is always an inquest when someone may have died by suicide. The inquest may be held with a jury (depending on the circumstances of the death) but it is important to know that it is not a trial and its purpose is to discover the facts of the death, not to apportion blame. No one can be 'found guilty' and no one will be 'blamed' for the death.

### Changes to the inquest process due to COVID-19

- The coroner will advise you of the date of the inquest, however in the current circumstances this date is likely to be significantly delayed due to staffing shortages and other disruptions to investigations.
- No physical hearings will take place unless essential and urgent; those directly involved will instead attend remotely via audio-visual software. The court will contact you directly to make the necessary arrangements.
- As coronial hearings must be held in public, current guidance suggests an inquest may be conducted from a court with the coroner physically present, whilst access for members of the public or press can be facilitated via live audio or video link by contacting the court.
- A COVID-19-related death is not a reason in itself for involvement of the coroner, but they may investigate the death if, for instance, there are concerns about or delays in medical care in the lead up to the death, or the cause of death was unclear.

## Sources of support

### Guide to coroner's services

The Ministry of Justice have published a **[guide to coroner services](#)** to provide you with further information. Whilst the guidance is primarily for bereaved people, it may also be helpful for others who are involved in or affected by a coroner's investigation or are attending a coroner's inquest. Further detail on changes to the coroner's process during the COVID-19 pandemic is available via the **[Chief Coroner's guidance](#)**, see guidance no.34-39.

### The Coroners' Courts Support Service

The service provides practical and emotional support to families and other witnesses attending coroner's courts in the event of a sudden and unexplained death. In line with government guidelines, they are currently offering support with any aspect the inquest process via their national helpline: 0300 111 2141, 9:00am-7:00pm, Monday to Friday and 9.00am-2.00pm on a Saturday, or **[helpline@ccss.org.uk](mailto:helpline@ccss.org.uk)**. They also provide helpful leaflets for **[bereaved people](#)** or **[other witnesses](#)** attending inquests.

### Tell Us Once

Tell Us Once is a service that lets you report a death to a range of government services in one go. When you register a death, a registrar will give you a phone number and a unique reference number so you can access the service online or by phone. If you cannot register the death because an inquest is underway, you can still **[ask a registrar](#)** for a unique reference number. You will need to **[ask for an interim death certificate from the coroner](#)** holding the inquest beforehand.

Tell Us Once notify people such as the Passport Office, HMRC, DVLA, DWP and your local authority so that you don't have to make all those calls yourself. Other services, such as banks and utility companies, may also have dedicated staff to help people who have been bereaved with the necessary arrangements. For further information, try searching on the organisation's website for bereavement guidance, and a number for their bereavement team.





# Support specific to you

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## Finding local support in London

Every bereaved person should be able to find appropriate support for the nature of their bereavement, where and when they need it. Many organisations have developed online tools to help you find local support appropriate for the circumstances of your bereavement:

### AtaLoss

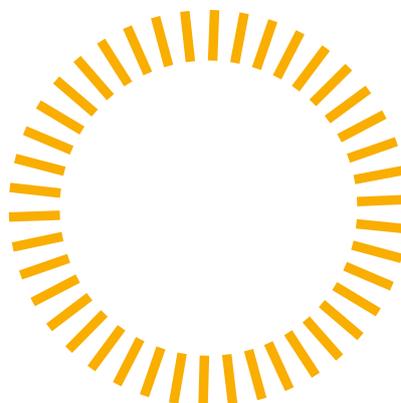
**AtaLoss** is the UK's signposting website for the bereaved which enables you to search for **services within your area**. Their website allows you to specify who you have lost and who in your family requires support, as well as your location, to help you find the support most appropriate to your needs.

### Child Bereavement UK

**Child Bereavement UK** provide support to children and young people, parents, and families when a child is grieving or when a child has died. They have an online search tool that can help you find **support in your local area** and allows you to specify when you need help for a bereaved child or if you have lost a child.

### The Listening Place

Sometimes grief can feel overwhelming, particularly if you are isolated from your usual support network or are having difficulty coming to terms with your loss. The Listening Place provide ongoing listening support to people in London who feel life is no longer worth living, to help relieve emotional pain and stress. During the pandemic, support has primarily been delivered via telephone sessions rather than face-to-face, however face-to-face sessions have now resumed and the service will revert to exclusively face-to-face support over time. To refer yourself for support, please visit their **website**.



## Local, specialised suicide bereavement services

Several London regions have specialist Suicide Bereavement Liaison Services which aim to support people bereaved by suicide and connect them with appropriate bereavement and mental health services.



### North West and South West London

The services across North West and South West London are delivered by Brent, Wandsworth and Westminster Mind and led by a designated suicide bereavement liaison officer, who receives referrals for support from police and/or health care professionals. An officer may contact you directly if the police or coroner in your area have indicated they are able to offer support.

Alternatively, you can contact the service directly via email at [sbls@bwwmind.org.uk](mailto:sbls@bwwmind.org.uk) or via phone, with a number specific to where you live:

- Call or text 07436 191 667 if you live Harrow, Hillingdon, Hounslow, or Ealing
- Call or text 07436 139 510 if you live in Kensington & Chelsea, Westminster, Brent, or Hammersmith & Fulham
- Call or text 07753 650 951 if you live in Croydon, Merton, Kingston, Richmond, Sutton, and Wandsworth.

Further information about what the service can offer is also available in their leaflets for North West and South West London residents.



### North Central London

Rethink Mental Illness offer a Support After Suicide service which you can access if you live in North Central London or are affected by a suicide that happened in the area. The service operates via referral or self-referral, to support families and friends who have been bereaved, and anyone else who may have been impacted by the suicide such as healthcare professionals. The service offers both [\*\*121 support and peer support groups\*\*](#), so you can choose what works best for you.

If you live in Barnet, Camden, Enfield, Haringey or Islington, you can also contact the service via 07483 368 700 or email [supportaftersuicide@rethink.org](mailto:supportaftersuicide@rethink.org). To self-refer or for more information, you can also visit their [\*\*website\*\*](#).

## Nationally available support

If local services are difficult for you to get to or do not meet your needs, you can also contact national organisations who may also be able to offer you advice and help:

### Sudden

**Sudden** offer a phone-based case management service for people bereaved suddenly by suicide, COVID-19, or any other cause. Support officers can work with you to help establish coping mechanisms after a challenging bereavement, provide emotional support, and address urgent practical needs. Call 0800 2600 400, 10am-4pm Monday-Friday or email [help@sudden.org](mailto:help@sudden.org).

### National Bereavement Partnership

Skilled helpline volunteers at the **National Bereavement Partnership** can provide a listening ear to support the recently bereaved as well as further information and advice. Call 0800 448 0800, 7am-10pm 7 days a week, text 07860 022 814 (texts are charged at your standard rate), or email [Helpline@NationalBereavementPartnership.org](mailto:Helpline@NationalBereavementPartnership.org).

### Samaritans

When life is difficult, **Samaritans** are here. Whoever you are and whatever you're facing, they won't judge you or tell you what to do. They are here to listen so you don't have to face it alone. Call 116 123, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

### Cruse Bereavement Care

The Cruse Bereavement Care National Helpline is staffed by trained bereavement volunteers who can offer emotional support to anyone affected by bereavement. Call 0808 808 1677, Monday-Friday 9.30-5pm (excluding bank holidays), with extended hours on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday evenings until 8pm. For further advice and guidance, including help with grieving during the pandemic or in isolation, please visit their [website](#).

### Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide (SoBS)

**SoBS** provide support to individuals over 18 who have been bereaved by suicide, by connecting you with people who have been bereaved under similar circumstances. They have support groups across the country, including several within London. In line with government guidance, groups are now offering virtual meetings to provide vital peer-led support. You can find out if your local group is offering online meetings via their [website](#), or [contact their national office](#) to find a virtual group that can help, regardless of your geographical location. Alternatively, you can call their national helpline on 0300 111 5065, 7 days a week, 9am-9pm, email [email.support@uksobs.org](mailto:email.support@uksobs.org) or use their helpline online forum, where you can speak to others who have also been impacted by suicide.

## Children and young people

A sudden death brings shock and disbelief, which can be especially frightening and distressing for children and young people. The uncertainty and anxiety associated with the COVID-19 pandemic may exacerbate these feelings, meaning bereaved children show stronger reactions to grief or become more worried about themselves or others becoming ill.

If you are a bereaved parent, the current restrictions regarding social distancing and travel may have meant you could not express your love and care in person or be with your child in their last moments. Not being able to say goodbye in the desired way can be very upsetting for children, young people and parents alike.

Winston's Wish and Childhood Bereavement UK have put together some suggestions for **children and young people** and **families** on **how to say goodbye** when you cannot meet or attend a funeral as usual.

We've put together some information below, outlining specialist services that might be able to help you at any time following your loss. The organisations listed also provide online guidance on how to talk to children and young people about sudden loss according to their age and understanding.

## Support for bereaved children and young people

### Child Bereavement UK

The service provides support to children and young people, parents, and families when a child is grieving or when a child has died. Bereavement support practitioners at **Child Bereavement UK** are currently offering one-to-one booked telephone support as well as some online group sessions via Zoom. Email **support@childbereavementuk.org** to find out more about the support that's right for you and your family. Their helpline continues to operate as normal, providing confidential support, information and guidance to families and professionals: 0800 02 888 40, 9am-5pm, Monday-Friday. Live Chat is additionally available via their **website**.

### Winston's Wish

The helpline team at **Winston's Wish** offer emotional and practical bereavement support to children, young people and those who care for them by phone, email and **online chat**. If a young person you know is finding it hard to cope with their grief, call 08088 020 021, 9am-5pm, Monday-Friday for guidance on how you can best support them following the death of a loved one, or email **ask@winstonswish.org**.

### Grief Encounter

Face-to-face support services for bereaved children and their families have been replaced by a virtual service offering, in line with current government guidelines. **Grief Encounter** has expanded their helpline team to ensure bereaved individuals can still access their vital advice and support, via 0808 802 0111, 9am-9pm Monday-Friday. You can also email **griefftalk@griefencounter.org.uk** or log on to their **live chat** for confidential support.

## Support when a child or young person dies

### The Compassionate Friends

**The Compassionate Friends** offer support to bereaved parents and their families who have lost a child. Their helpline is staffed by trained volunteers who are all bereaved parents, who can offer emotional support and connect you with support groups in your area. Call 0345 123 2304, 7 days a week, 10am-4pm and 7-10pm, or email [helpline@tcf.org.uk](mailto:helpline@tcf.org.uk).

### The Lullaby Trust

Confidential bereavement support for anyone affected by the sudden or unexpected death of a baby or young child is available via **The Lullaby Trust's** helpline: 10am-5pm, Monday-Friday, 6pm-10pm on weekends, or email [support@lullabytrust.org.uk](mailto:support@lullabytrust.org.uk). The service can also provide you with an opportunity to be connected to someone with similar personal circumstances, who can empathise with your loss and may be of comfort.

### Child Bereavement UK

Booked telephone support appointments are available for bereaved parents, parents whose baby or child of any age is approaching the end of their life, or parents supporting a recently bereaved child or young person. Pre-arranged calls can be organised monthly, with a consistent specialist bereavement support practitioner, at a mutually agreed date and time. The service is free and available UK-wide, with no set number of sessions. Call their helpline on 0800 02 888 40, 9am-5pm, Monday-Friday for more information.



## Older people

Older people have been advised to stay at home and limit social contact with others during the pandemic. Coping with a loss whilst isolated from your usual support network may mean you experience an especially intense or prolonged period of grief. In turn, the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on people in later life means you are more likely to have lost someone close to you, or to have concerns about your own physical health. All of this is at a time when you may still be unable to come together with friends and family in the usual way.

The services we have outlined below can provide you with an opportunity to talk and to get help, when it may feel as if you are having to cope by yourself.

### The Silver Line

The helpline team at The Silver Line can offer information, friendship and advice to older people if you are feeling especially isolated at this time and link you to local groups and support services. Call 0800 4 70 80 90, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Additional social support is available via facilitated group phone calls, which connect people with shared experiences and interests. Visit their [website](#) for further information.

### Age UK

[Age UK](#) have a [free online bereavement guide](#) for people in later life, produced in partnership with older people and carers, to help you cope with a recent bereavement. They also provide advice and information via their helpline: 0800 678 1602, 8am-7pm, 7 days a week. You can call Age UK Advice to find out whether there is a local Age UK near you, and order free copies of their information guides and factsheets, including their bereavement guide.

### The Good Grief Trust

Due to current government restrictions on social gatherings, [The Good Grief Trust](#) have replaced their usual Pop Up Cafes with weekly virtual café events for people who have lost someone they love. They provide an opportunity to come together and share your experiences of bereavement with others who will understand what you are going through, and just to have a chat over a cup of tea. Further information is available via their [website](#), or email [Hello@thegoodgrieftrust.org](mailto:Hello@thegoodgrieftrust.org) to book your place.

### Gransnet

Gransnet, a social networking site for the over 50s, has a dedicated [Bereavement Forum](#) which may be helpful for connecting individuals who have lost a loved one.

## LGBTQI+ communities

When faced with the loss of a loved one, many LGBTQI+ people may face additional challenges such as familial estrangement or a lack of acknowledgement of their relationships, alongside the universal experiences of sadness and distress. Sometimes, bereavement support services developed and delivered specifically for LGBTQI+ people are better positioned to understand what you are going through and to offer the right help.

At this time, we also understand that there is growing evidence of the disproportionate impact COVID-19 is having on both the mental health and physical health needs of London's LGBTQI+ community.

Alongside the national services we have signposted, we would urge you to contact the specialist services below, all of which understand what you are going through and will address your very specific needs.

### London Friend

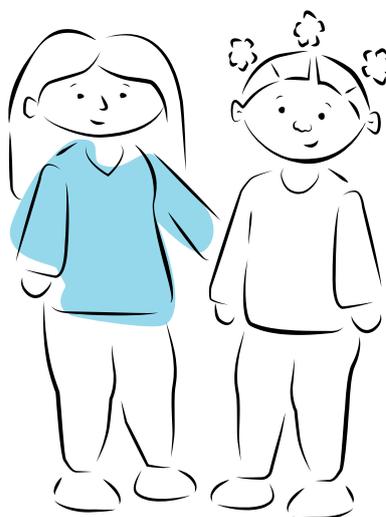
London Friend are currently offering one-to-one video counselling sessions to LGBTQ people in place of their usual face-to-face counselling services, which can help you to cope with a difficult bereavement. For further information or to make a referral, call 020 7833 1674 or email [counselling@londonfriend.org.uk](mailto:counselling@londonfriend.org.uk). They additionally offer free **individual** or **group** online support sessions, also via **referral**, designed to help you manage more general mental health concerns. Full details are available via their [website](#).

### Switchboard

Switchboard connect LGBTQI+ people looking for community, support or information and can provide direct support or link you with other specialist organisations who can help you, depending on your needs. The **Switchboard LGBT+ helpline** is open daily from 10am-10pm on 0300 330 0630 or email [chris@switchboard.lgbt](mailto:chris@switchboard.lgbt).

### LGBT Foundation

Helpline hours have been extended to offer more LGBTQ+ people the emotional support and advice they need during the coronavirus pandemic. Call 0345 3 30 30 30, 9am-9pm, Monday-Friday, or 10am-6pm on weekends.



## Key workers

If you are a key worker, the COVID-19 pandemic is extremely challenging. While most of the country stayed home, you have been leaving your house to go to work and face enormous pressure.

If you work in health or emergency services for instance, you may face more death and bereavement at work than prior to the pandemic, which can be very difficult to cope with. If you are an educator, children you work with may have been bereaved during the pandemic, and it can be difficult to know what to say or how to support them.

When you are trying to adjust to stressful new circumstances, it can feel challenging to look after your own mental health. We have put together some resources below which may help you understand and manage any difficult feelings you may be experiencing and find support when you need it. It is so important to also focus on maintaining your wellbeing, whilst you are supporting others through the provision of essential services.

### Our Frontline

**Our Frontline** is a partnership between Shout, Samaritans, Mind, Hospice UK and The Royal Foundation to help support the mental health of key workers during the pandemic. The collaboration of these services enables them to provide support for a range of difficulties you may be facing, from feeling overwhelmed or stressed at work, through to coping with bereavement. Our Frontline can offer you one-to-one support, via call or text, from trained crisis volunteers, plus resources, tips and ideas to look after your mental health and wellbeing:



**Health workers:** text FRONTLINE to 85258 any time, call 0800 069 6222, 7am-11pm if you're in England, or call 116 123 any time if you're elsewhere in the UK.



**Emergency service staff:** ambulance staff in England can call 0300 131 7000, 7am-11pm, for all other emergency services staff, text BLUELIGHT to 85258 for a text conversation or call 116 123 for a phone conversation at any time.



**Social care staff:** text FRONTLINE to 85258 any time, call 0300 131 7000, 7am-11pm if you're in England, or call 116 123 any time if you're elsewhere in the UK.



**Any other essential workers:** text KEYWORKER to 85258 for a text conversation or call 116 123 for a conversation in confidence, with a trained crisis volunteer, at any time.

### Hospice UK

Hospice UK provide a free counselling and trauma helpline for frontline workers, staffed by the 'Just B' team at St. Michael's Hospice and specialist counsellors who are experienced in providing bereavement, trauma and emotional support. The service is responsive to faith, individual, cultural, and community needs, including providing a Tagalog speaking therapist service to support the large numbers of NHS and social care staff from the Philippines. Call 0300 303 4434, 8am-8pm, 7 days a week.

## Twinkl and Mind

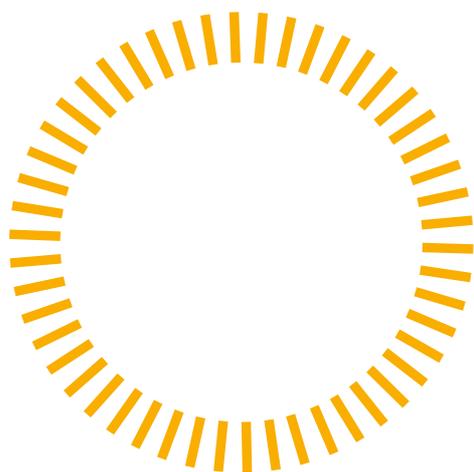
Twinkl have partnered with Mind to support educators to cope with new ways of working, including **resources** designed to aid stress management and self-care. Selected resources are available via the Mental Health at Work **webpage for educators**, including **guidance for how to talk about death and grief** if you, a colleague, or a learner have been bereaved during the pandemic.

## Grief Encounter

Grief Encounter have extended their free services to frontline staff during the COVID-19 pandemic. NHS, social care, and all other frontline workers can call 0808 802 0111, 9am-9pm, Monday-Friday, or log on to their **live web chat** for help with managing grief, how to talk to families experiencing sudden loss, and coping mechanisms to help you deal with multiple patient deaths. You can also email **[griefftalk@griefencounter.org.uk](mailto:griefftalk@griefencounter.org.uk)**.

## Mental Health at Work

A range of toolkits are available from **Mental Health at Work** which include specialist resources to support the mental health of key workers during the pandemic, from a variety of sectors. To access these resources, please visit their **website**.





# Helping others who have been bereaved

## Helping others who have been bereaved

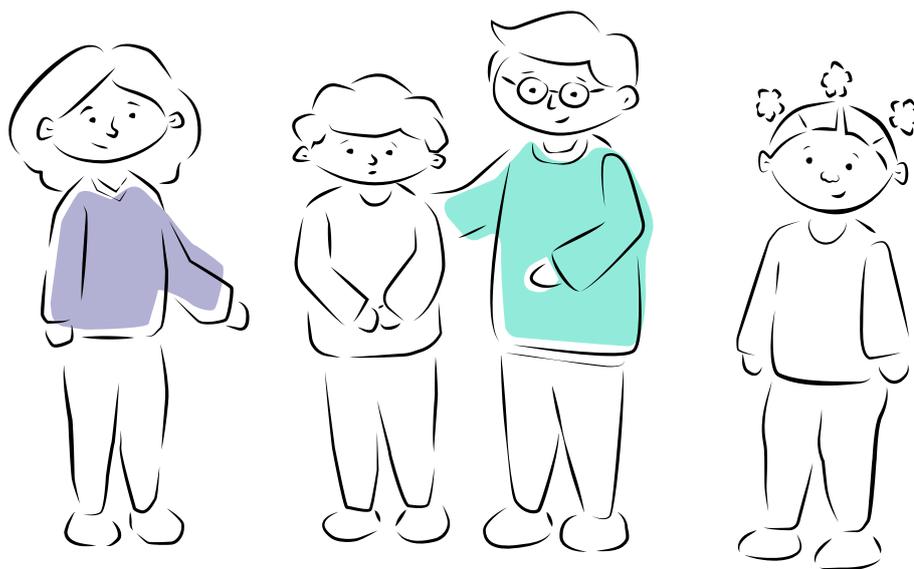
If you are supporting someone who has been bereaved suddenly, this section is specifically for you.

A sudden bereavement can be very challenging, as those affected will only have had limited time to prepare for life without their loved one. They may be experiencing intense feelings of shock and disbelief, while trying to reimagine their future without the person they have lost. If their loved one may have died by suicide, those affected may also have painful feelings of shame or guilt, feeling that they could have done something to prevent the death. The stigma of suicide in society might make them avoid the subject, for fear of being judged.

If someone you know has recently been bereaved suddenly, they may be finding it hard to explain how they are feeling and to ask for help. They still need your love, kindness, and support. While you may feel unsure about how best to reach out to someone, it is always better to say something, than nothing.

Regular offers of help and making yourself available to listen are incredibly important. Someone might not feel ready for your support when you first ask but might want someone to talk to, or some practical help, a bit further down the line. It is important to provide an opportunity for your friend or relative to talk about how they are feeling when they are ready, and for you listen without making judgements. We have outlined below some ways to offer someone support which we hope you will find helpful.

Sometimes, your friend or relative who is bereaved may need additional, specialised support to help them to cope. It is also important to recognise this and help put them in touch with the services we have listed in this resource when they feel ready.



**“I’m so sorry, I’m not sure what to say. But I am here for you.”**

## Offering your support

### 1. Finding the words

It isn't always easy to find the right words to say to someone who is grieving, especially if their loss has been sudden or traumatic. You might be worried about saying the wrong thing, even making things worse.

It can be helpful to ask open questions, and to let the person you're supporting lead the conversation. Remember that saying something is much better than saying nothing at all. You could say "I'm so sorry, I'm not sure what to say. But I am here for you."

*If you are talking about suicide, use expressions such as "died by suicide" or "took his own life." The common phrase "committed suicide" dates back to when suicide was a crime and may be upsetting.*

### 2. Listening and accepting

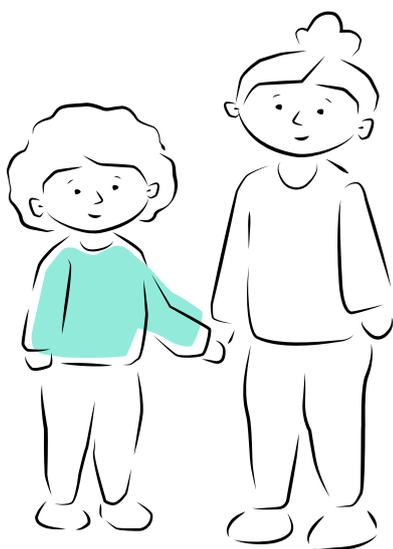
In our section on [How you may be feeling](#), we talk about the wide range of emotions that someone experiencing sudden bereavement may go through; from shock and despair, to anger and disbelief. It's important to listen without judgement, as many of these reactions are very normal in sudden bereavement. There is no one expected way to feel or behave. However, if you are worried that the bereaved person is really struggling to cope, please do contact any of the services listed in this resource.

If someone is not ready to talk, that's ok too. Just being with that person can be enough to comfort them.

### 3. Talking tips

Talking about death and loss is difficult. The following tips and suggestions have come from bereaved people and those who have supported them. We hope that they will give you some confidence to open up conversations with those who need your support.

- Try not to ask for details about how the person died, such as the method of suicide they used. Also, try not to push them about why the person may have died.
- If it seems appropriate, you can ask about the person's life, not just focus on their death. For example, 'can you remember that time they...?' or 'can you think of any of your favourite things about them?' "can you remember a time they really made you laugh?"
- Try not to mention religion and phrases such as "they are with God now" or "It will get better/time heals" or "they are in a better place", unless you are certain the person would be comforted by this.
- Regularly checking in by text message – a simple 'Thinking of you' – lets someone know that you are there.



## Offering practical support

Alongside the emotional upheaval around loss, there will likely be a number of legal and administrative tasks that need to be taken care of. Sometimes, a sudden or unexpected death will lead to an inquest process, for example.

Our section on [What may happen in the coming weeks and months](#) has more detail on these processes, as well as links to support and advice services.

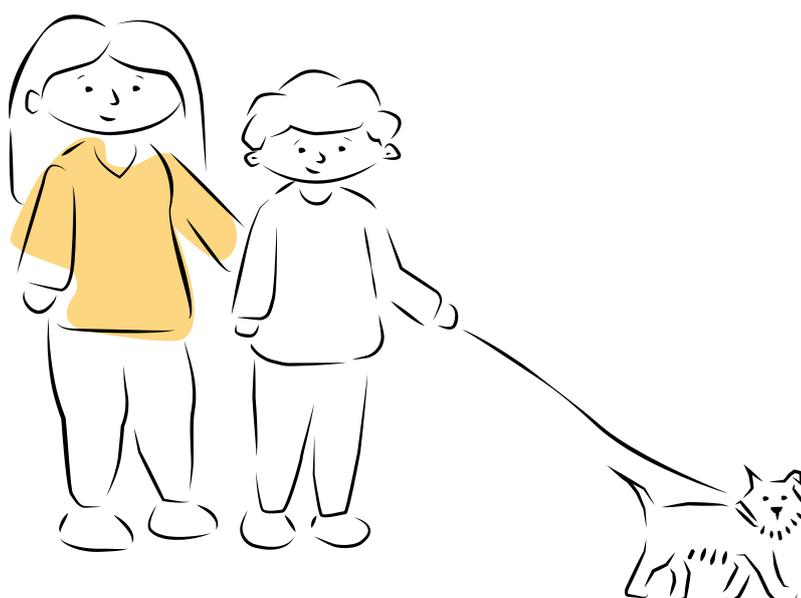
If you can take on some of these administrative tasks it can really help, especially if the person you are supporting has other dependents or responsibilities. But there are many other things, big and small, that you can help with – walking the dog, picking children up from school and helping to prepare healthy meals for the family may all be hugely appreciated.

## Helping whilst social distancing

Experiencing bereavement at a time when we cannot all be together can make it even more difficult to cope. People who are grieving often value face-to-face support and physical support from their support network. If you are not in the same household as the person you want to help, this type of support may not be possible.

Providing support by phone, video call and online messaging may be the only options available to you. This can still be a comfort to someone who is bereaved and will help them feel less isolated. To help ensure the person feels supported, you could try to arrange specific times to talk and mention how long you will be available for.

You can also arrange more than one way of talking to each other in case your preferred method does not work. This will help ensure the person is not left waiting to hear from you or is disappointed when you have to leave a call.



## Bereavement by suicide

Losing someone to suicide can be one of the most difficult and lonely experiences a person can have. You may find the person you are supporting isn't eating properly, doesn't want to face the day or get out of bed, is struggling to cope, and may even be feeling suicidal themselves. They may be experiencing a tsunami of emotion, or they may appear to be completely fine, or numb, to their loss. Know that these are all common reactions in such difficult circumstances.

Often, people can fear that asking the person about their loss will do more harm than good. It can be more difficult to express your condolences or let someone know that you are there for them when the person who has died may have taken their own life. It might not feel like the 'right' thing to say or that your words are enough. This is not the case; people bereaved by suicide need the support of those around them now more than ever. Whilst you may not be able to support them physically due to social distancing, it is important to stay in touch virtually or by phone, to help the person feel they are not alone.

The Support After Suicide Partnership provide a free support guide called **Finding the Words** which contains thoughts and ideas on how to support friends, family or colleagues who are recently bereaved or affected by suicide.

You can also access **Help is at Hand**, which provides valuable practical and emotional advice for anyone experiencing loss by suicide and can help you to understand what that person might be going through.

## With particular thanks to:



November 2020

