

A practical guide to living with and after cancer

AFTER SOMEONE DIES – COPING WITH BEREAVEMENT





'Betty's never out of my mind. I find myself speaking to her sometimes, asking her questions. I like doing it.'

Bill, whose wife Betty died of pancreatic cancer in 2011

About this booklet

This booklet is about coping when someone close to you has died. It is for the relatives and friends of anyone who has died from cancer.

The booklet looks at some of the emotions you may have and the support that can help. It also gives you some practical information about what to do and what to expect when someone dies.

If your relative or friend has died recently, you may find it hard to cope with your emotions and the practical things you have to do. Even if they died some time ago, you might still be struggling with these things while getting used to life without your relative or friend.

We hope this booklet helps you deal with some of the questions or feelings you may have.

We have another booklet called **Preparing a child for loss**. It is for people who are supporting a child or young person when a relative is dying or has died of cancer.

For more information

If you have more questions or would like to talk to someone, call the Macmillan Support Line free on **0808 808 00 00**, Monday to Friday, 9am to 8pm, or visit **macmillan.org.uk**

If you would prefer to speak to us in another language, interpreters are available. Please tell us, in English, the language you want to use.

If you are deaf or hard of hearing, call us using NGT (Text Relay) on **18001 0808 808 00 00**, or use the NGT Lite app.

We have some information in different languages and formats, including audio, eBooks, easy read, Braille, large print, and translations. To order these visit **macmillan.org.uk/otherformats** or call **0808 808 00 00**.

How to use this booklet

The booklet is split into sections to help you find what you need. You don't have to read it from start to finish. You can use the contents list on page 3 to help you.

It is fine to skip parts of the booklet. You can always come back to them when you feel ready.

We have included quotes from people who have been bereaved, including Bill, who is on the cover of this booklet. Some quotes are from our Online Community (**community.macmillan.org.uk**). Others are from **Healthtalkonline.org** We hope you will find these helpful.

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'There was so much happening and so much for me to think about, I didn't really have time to think about what it would be like.'

Bill, whose wife Betty died of pancreatic cancer in 2011

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At the time of the death

There is no right or wrong way to feel when a relative or friend dies. Everyone reacts differently. You may feel shocked, numb, or as if everything is unreal. Or you may feel relieved that they are now at peace. You may have known that your relative or friend was dying and been preparing yourself for that. But sometimes a person dies unexpectedly, and this can be a huge shock. You may have many different feelings (see pages 32 to 44).

Your relative or friend may have died at home or in a hospital, hospice, or care home. If you are alone when your relative or friend dies, it may be helpful to have someone with you soon after the death to support you. This might be a relative, friend, religious adviser, or someone from the health or social care team.

It is important to do what feels right for you. Do not feel that you have to do anything straight away or rush to get things done. You can spend some time just sitting with the person who has died.

If your relative or friend is donating their body, organs, or body tissues, you should tell a doctor as soon as possible.

Many cultures and religions have ceremonies or rituals that are important when someone dies. A spiritual or religious adviser can help you with these.



If your relative or friend dies at home

If your relative or friend dies at home, you may be alone with them. You may not be certain that they have died, and you may be unsure of what to do next.

You can take your time, as you may find it difficult to think clearly at first. You may have some written information from the GP, district nurse, or palliative care team about what to do. Follow that advice if you can. If you are on your own, you may want to call a family member or friend to be with you.

You will need to tell the person's GP or district nurse what has happened. They will come as soon as they can to confirm the death. If the person dies when the GP surgery is shut, you should call the out-of-hours doctor.

If the death is expected, the person's GP will confirm the death and write a medical certificate of cause of death (MCCD). The GP will also give you a form called a Notice to informant, which tells you how to register the death (see pages 13 to 15).

If a district nurse or out-of-hours doctor comes, they will confirm the death. But only a GP who has seen the person alive in the last 14 days (or 28 days in Northern Ireland) can complete the MCCD. If the GP has not seen the person in this time, you will need to get the MCCD and Notice to informant form from your GP surgery. This may take a few days. You can call the GP surgery to find out when the forms will be ready for you to collect.

When a nurse or doctor has confirmed the death, you can contact the funeral director (undertaker). You do not need to do this straight away if you would like to spend some time with your relative or friend. Funeral directors are available 24 hours a day. They will explain what you need to do (see page 19).

When you have the MCCD, you need to take it to the local registrars' office to register the death.

It can be a shock to see the MCCD, as this will probably be the first time you see the details in writing. Some people describe feeling as if they are being told all over again that their relative or friend has died. You may want to have someone with you when you read it.

If you have questions about what is written on the MCCD, you may be able to ask your GP at the time. Or you could arrange to speak to them later.

From 2018, in some areas, a medical examiner will need to see and agree with the MCCD before the GP gives it to you. Your doctor can tell you more about this.

If your relative or friend dies in hospital or a hospice

Your relative or friend may be in a hospital or hospice when they die. You may or may not be with them. Even if their death was expected, you may feel shocked and numb and unsure what to do next. The care staff should support and guide you through the next few hours.

A doctor or nurse will confirm the death. If the death was expected, they will give you a medical certificate of cause of death (MCCD). You will need this to register the death (see pages 13 to 15). You may have to collect the certificate from the hospital the next working day. The nurses will tell you what you need to do.

After you have left the hospital or hospice, your relative or friend's body may be moved to a mortuary. If you want to see your relative or friend, you will be told who to contact. The undertakers will collect the body from the hospital or hospice.

'I knew the moment she had gone. I rang the bell and the night staff came in. And I said, 'My mum's gone.' They checked her pulse and said, 'Yes, she has.' And they left me for a while and I just sat there holding her hands. It was very, very calm.'

Georgina

If the death was not expected

If your relative or friend dies unexpectedly, you may be totally unprepared. You may find it difficult to believe what has happened. The ward staff or GP will talk to you about what has happened and try to answer any questions you have.

If the death was not expected, or if the person dies at home and had not been seen by their GP in the last 14 days (in England, Scotland, and Wales) or 28 days (in Northern Ireland), the death will be referred to:

- the coroner (a doctor or lawyer who investigates unexpected deaths) in England, Wales, or Northern Ireland
- the procurator fiscal in Scotland.

This is a standard procedure.

Most deaths that are reported to the coroner or procurator fiscal are natural. Sometimes the cause of death is not clear. The coroner will decide if an examination of the body (post mortem) is needed to find the cause of death. If a death is referred to the coroner or procurator fiscal, the funeral may sometimes be delayed.

You can find more information about what to do after a death at:

- **gov.uk** in England and Wales
- **gov.scot** in Scotland
- **nidirect.gov.uk** in Northern Ireland.

The Bereavement Advice Centre has information on what to do when someone dies (see page 67).

Caring for the body

The funeral director will arrange for your relative or friend's body to be taken to the funeral home (see page 19). Some people like to keep the person's body at home before the funeral. The funeral director can give you information about how long the body can be at home and what you need to do.

The funeral director will take care of your relative or friend's body. They will carefully wash and dry them, and close their eyelids and mouth. They will tidy and sometimes wash their hair. If you would like to, you can help the funeral directors wash and dress your relative or friend. Let them know as soon as possible so they can arrange this.

They will also ask what you would like them to be dressed in. This could be an outfit or jewellery that had special meaning to them.

You can tell the funeral director if there are any cultural or religious practices you would like to be followed.

Some people want to be embalmed. This is when the body is disinfected and treated with chemicals to help preserve it. The funeral director can give you more information about this.

Registering the death

The doctor will usually give you information about how to register your relative or friend's death when they give you the medical certificate of cause of death (MCCD) (see pages 8 to 11).

The person who can register the death varies in different parts of the UK. You can find more detailed information about this at [gov.uk/register-a-death](https://www.gov.uk/register-a-death)

You will register the death with the Registrar of Births, Marriages and Deaths. This has to be done within 5 days (in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland) or 8 days (in Scotland), unless it has been referred to the coroner or procurator fiscal (see pages 11).

Some registrars' offices have an appointment system, so call and check before you go.

You can get the telephone number for the registrars' office:

- on the envelope the MCCD is in
- in the phone book
- online
- by calling the Bereavement Advice Centre on **0800 634 9494**.



Things to take with you to the registrar's office include:

- the MCCD – you must bring this with you
- your relative or friend's birth certificate, and their marriage certificate if they had one
- details of any state benefits they were getting
- their NHS medical card, if they had one
- the **National Insurance** number of the person who has died, and of their surviving husband, wife or civil partner, if they have one.

The registrar will enter the details of the death in the register and give you a certificate for burial or cremation. You need to give this to the funeral director. If you need a certificate of registration of death for social security purposes, the registrar will give you one.

Before you go to the registrars' office, it is helpful to think about how many copies of the death certificate you might need. These are original, certified copies and not photocopies. You can buy certified copies for a small charge at the time of registration. You can also buy certified copies at a later time, but they may cost more.

You usually need one certified copy for each life insurance policy (or similar) that you need to claim. You may need copies for other official agencies and organisations (see page 17). They will usually return the copy of the death certificate once they have seen it.

You can get more information about registering the death from:

- **gov.uk** in England and Wales
- **gov.scot** in Scotland
- **nidirect.gov.uk** in Northern Ireland.

Telling people about the death

Telling other people about your relative or friend's death can often be difficult. You may get very upset and be unsure who to tell and what to say.

Telling other relatives and friends

You may feel that you want to tell people yourself. But this can be tiring and emotional, so do not feel you have to do it all. You could contact close relatives and friends and ask them to tell other people.

You could start by writing a list of people you would like to contact, and think about how to do it. Use address books, mobile phones or social networking sites to help you make a list.

You might also find it helpful to think about what you want to say and write it down before you contact people. There is no right or wrong way to tell people, but this might be a starting point: 'I am sorry to say I have some very sad news. (Name of person) has been ill for some time/was suddenly taken ill and died earlier today/this week'.

Telling official agencies and organisations

When someone dies, there are a lot of official agencies and organisations that need to be told. These include:

- employers
- the tax office
- banks and building societies
- insurance companies
- gas, electricity, or phone companies
- the local council.

Many of these organisations will need a certified death certificate and other information such as full names, addresses, and account numbers.

Contacting all these organisations can take a lot of time, and you may not feel emotionally ready to do this. You do not have to contact everyone at once. You can also ask a relative or friend to help you. Many organisations and companies have staff who are trained to deal with calls from relatives and friends when someone dies. You can ask to speak to the bereavement team if they have one.

Some people find it helpful to write a list of all the organisations they need to contact and gradually work through it over a few weeks. Others prefer to contact them all at once.

It is important to tell insurance companies straight away, as insurance policies become invalid as soon as someone dies.

The Bereavement Advice Centre has a useful checklist of the organisations you need to contact (see page 67).

Tell Us Once

Tell Us Once is a service available in some local authorities in England, Scotland, and Wales. It allows you to report a death to most government organisations at the same time. The local registrar will tell you if the Tell Us Once service is available in your area and how to use it. They will give you a unique reference number to access the service.

You can find more information about the Tell Us Once service at [gov.uk/after-a-death/organisations-you-need-to-contact-and-tell-us-once](https://www.gov.uk/after-a-death/organisations-you-need-to-contact-and-tell-us-once)

'It is a process, when someone dies. There are a lot of papers that need to be signed. There is a lot of formality. There are a lot of small things, like phone and electricity bills and bank statements.'

Poppy

Funeral arrangements

Funerals and memorial services allow relatives and friends to get together to remember the person who has died. They can be a celebration of the person's life as well as a chance to say goodbye to them.

Planning the funeral

You can plan a funeral yourself, but most people prefer to use a funeral director. If you are worried about the cost of the funeral, you can talk to different funeral directors before deciding who to use.

You can get contact details of funeral directors from your local phone book or online. The National Association of Funeral Directors (NAFD) and the National Society of Allied and Independent Funeral Directors (SAIF) also have lists of funeral directors – see page 71.

If you are planning a cremation rather than a burial, you should contact your relative or friend's GP. They can arrange for a cremation form to be completed. This form needs to be signed by two GPs, one who knew your relative or friend and one who did not know them. They may contact you for more information before the form is completed.

You may have very clear ideas about the funeral service and what you would like to include. You can also get ideas from books, online, or from the funeral director. On pages 20 to 23 we have listed some things to think about when planning a funeral.

Choosing the type of funeral your relative or friend would have wanted

Your relative or friend may have talked about the type of funeral they wanted. They may even have planned their funeral in advance. Some people leave instructions in their will or have a pre-paid funeral plan.

If they have not left instructions, you might like to think about what they would have wanted while you plan. The funeral director can give you advice about things to consider. Talk to other people who knew them and get ideas from them too. Do not feel you have to make all the decisions yourself.

Deciding whether to have a religious or non-religious ceremony

Some people have a strong religious or spiritual faith. You can ask their faith leader to conduct the funeral or religious service.

Some people have no religious beliefs, and live their lives as humanists, agnostics, or atheists. A relative or friend can lead the funeral service, or you can ask a humanist official to conduct a non-religious ceremony. Your funeral director can give you more information about this.

Deciding where to have the funeral service

Some people have a clear idea of where they want to have the funeral or memorial service. A funeral, religious service, or spiritual service can be held wherever you like. Services are often held in a place of worship, at a funeral home, or at a crematorium. They can be held in other places if you prefer, such as in your relative or friend's home, or a favourite place they liked to visit.

Deciding whether to have a burial or a cremation

After the memorial service, the person's body is cremated or buried.

A cremation takes place in a crematorium. Your relative or friend may have talked to you about what to do with their ashes. You can collect the ashes and follow their wishes when you are ready.

A burial is usually in a cemetery or other official burial place. It is also possible for people to be buried in other places, such as a garden or woodland. If you want to bury someone on a property you own or in a place they loved, you can get information from the Natural Death Centre (see page 71).

'My mum was very organised. She had life insurance and a will. She told me what she wanted – what flowers and that nobody was to wear black. Everybody said it did her proud.'

Lynne

Paying for the funeral

If you are arranging your relative or friend's funeral, you will be responsible for organising payment of funeral costs. Your relative or friend may have had a pre-paid funeral plan or an insurance policy that covers the cost of their funeral. Or if they have left money, this can be used to pay for the funeral. Sometimes, banks and building societies will allow you to use money to pay for the funeral before probate is granted (see pages 24 to 25). But they do not have to do this. You may have to pay the funeral costs while you are waiting for probate.

The Social Fund is a government fund that makes payments to people in need. To be eligible for most Social Fund payments, you need to be receiving certain benefits when you apply.

These payments include a Funeral Payment to help with the cost of arranging a funeral. It will not cover the cost of the whole funeral bill. You may have to pay the government back from any money you get from the person's estate, such as their savings.

The fund is run by the Department for Work and Pensions. If you live in England, Scotland or Wales, visit **gov.uk** or contact your local Jobcentre Plus office for more information on Funeral Payments. If you live in Northern Ireland, visit **nidirect.gov.uk** or contact your nearest Social Security Agency office for more information. You will find its number in the phone book or on its website, **dsdni.gov.uk**

After the funeral

The days and weeks after the funeral can be very difficult. After being busy organising the funeral, it can feel very quiet. It is a good idea to try not to do too much too soon. It is important to take time to look after yourself.

You will need time to get used to your relative or friend not being there and the changes this brings. Some cultures have rituals or practices that people do at these times, to help them cope with a person's death.

You may feel very emotional at this time. Some people may try to keep busy to avoid their feelings. But you should not be afraid to show your emotions. It is natural to feel sad or cry when you are thinking about your relative or friend. We have more information about feelings and how to cope with them (see pages 32 to 44).

'There was so much happening and so much for me to think about, I didn't really have time to think about what it would be like. It is not until after the rest of the family goes home that it really hits you.'

Bill

Wills and probate

A **will** is a legal document that gives instructions from the person who died about who they wanted to leave their money and belongings to.

When someone dies, what they leave is called their estate. This is worked out from any money or possessions the person owned and any debts they may have had when they died.

Probate is the process of proving what someone owned and owed when they died. In Scotland, probate is called **confirmation**.

When someone dies, the person who deals with their estate (their executor) needs to apply for probate or confirmation before the will can be followed. This can be done by applying to the local probate court in England and Wales, the probate registry in Northern Ireland or the sheriff court in Scotland. It usually takes several weeks. Probate or confirmation may not be needed in some situations, for example if the person who died owned everything jointly with their spouse.

If a person dies without making a will, this is called **dying intestate**. If this happens, you should apply for letters of administration in England, Wales, or Northern Ireland, or for an appointment of executor dative in Scotland. The probate process usually takes longer for people who die intestate. You should not sell or give away any of your relative or friend's property until probate is granted.

If you have questions about probate, it might be helpful to discuss these with a solicitor or your local Citizens Advice (see page 70).

It is important that the executors of the will understand what they have to do and tell close family or friends what is happening. If you are likely to be left something in the will (you are a beneficiary), remember that probate can take a long time.

If your relative or friend has not left detailed instructions in their will, you may have to decide what to do with their property. There may be pieces of jewellery, furniture, pictures, or personal items. Deciding what to keep and what to pass on can be very upsetting.

Try to do it at a time that feels right for you. Think about whether you would prefer to sort through their personal things alone or have help from others. Do not feel you have to make all the decisions yourself if other people offer to help.

You can find more information about wills and probate at [**gov.uk/wills-probate-inheritance**](https://www.gov.uk/wills-probate-inheritance)



Financial help

If your husband, wife or civil partner has died, you may be entitled to a Bereavement Payment or Bereavement Allowance. You may also be entitled to extra pension payments from their pension or National Insurance contributions.

If you live in England, Scotland, or Wales, you can find out more at [gov.uk/browse/benefits/bereavement](https://www.gov.uk/browse/benefits/bereavement)

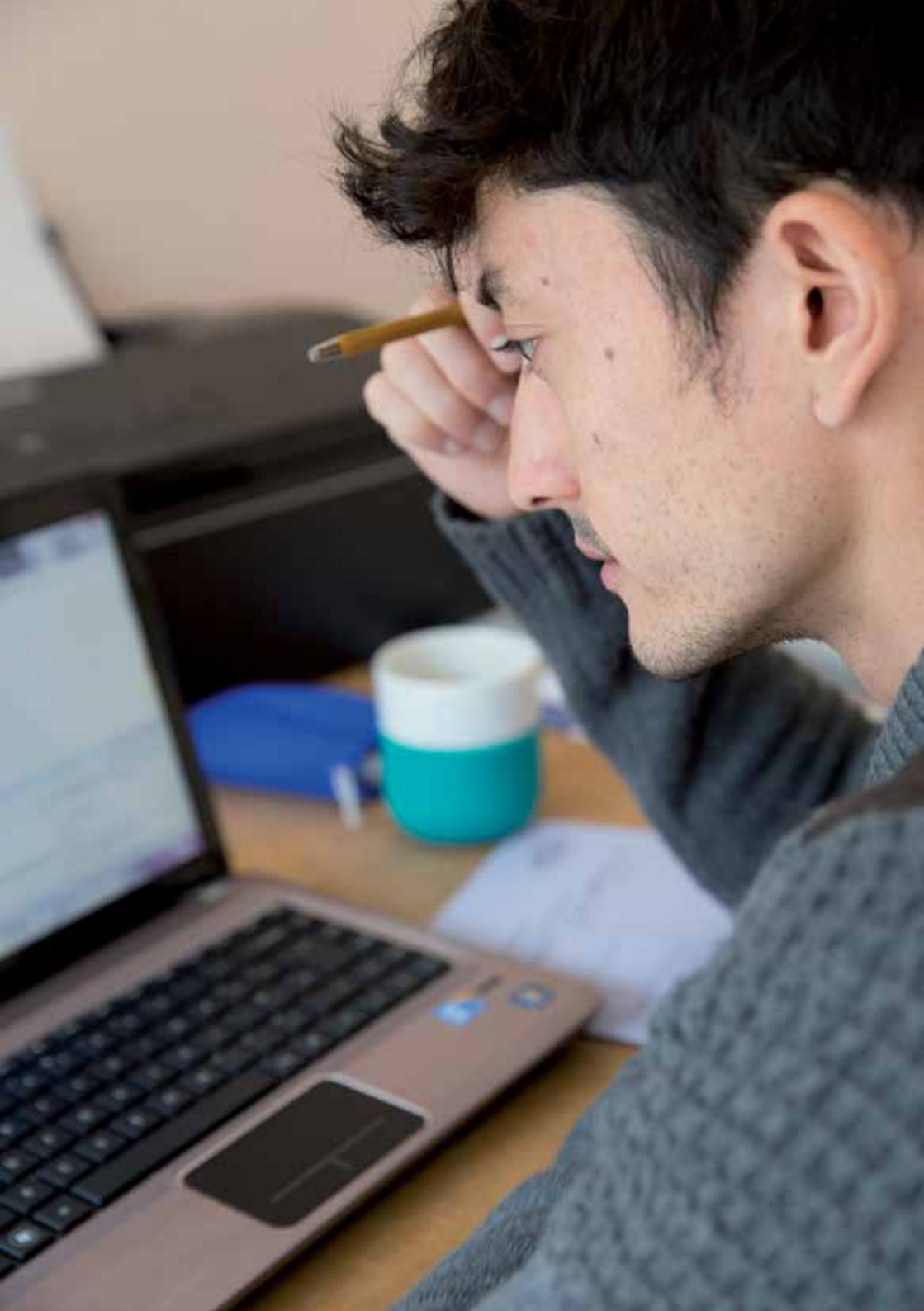
If you live in Northern Ireland, contact your local Social Security Agency benefits office by visiting [dsdni.gov.uk](https://www.dsdni.gov.uk)

You can also contact the Macmillan Support Line on **0808 808 00 00**.

Online accounts

Your relative or friend may have online accounts such as email, online banking, Facebook, Twitter, or other social media. You may not be sure what you want to do with these accounts.

You can find information online about closing or deactivating accounts or making memorialised accounts on social media websites (see page 52).





Precious Memories Of
ELIZABETH JEAN BURNETT
BETTY
DIED JOHN JULY 2010
A DREAM WIFE - MAM - GRAN,
SISTER AND DAUGHTER
Sadly Missed But
In Our Hearts Forever

EMOTIONAL INFORMATION AND SUPPORT

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Grief

Grief is a word for some of the feelings you may have after the death of someone close to you. Some people describe being overcome or frightened by their feelings. Others say they feel numb or cannot believe what has happened.

The thoughts and feelings you have will vary. Sometimes they may be very intense and stop you doing things. At other times they may be in the background and you can still do your day-to-day activities.

How you feel and react may depend on different things, such as:

- the relationship you had with the person who died
- whether their death was expected
- how they died
- any previous experience of death you have had.

There is no right or wrong way to feel. Your feelings may change from day to day or even hour to hour. You may have the feelings soon after the person has died, and for some weeks or months afterwards. One day you may feel you are coping, but the next day you may be overcome by sadness or loneliness. It is quite normal to have ups and downs like this.

If you had a difficult relationship with the person who has died, you may not feel any of the emotions we describe here. Or you may be surprised at how strong your feelings are.

How you may feel after a bereavement

We talk here about some of the more common feelings and experiences people describe. We also have information about what may help you deal with these feelings (see pages 45 to 49).

We have included quotes from people who have been bereaved, to help show how intense and deep the feelings may be. We hope this will help you know that you are not alone in your feelings, and that what you are going through is normal and understandable. These quotes are from the bereavement groups on Macmillan's Online Community (community.macmillan.org.uk) and from healthtalkonline.org

Shock and numbness

Many people describe feeling shocked and numb in the days and weeks after a relative or friend has died. This can happen even if the death was expected. People sometimes talk about 'going through the motions' as they make arrangements for the funeral and start to sort out practical things.

'I think in times of great shock, the brain 'shuts down' to protect us. Dealing with the practicalities that follow the death of a loved one does divert you and somehow forces you to carry on.'

Sam

Anger

Anger is a common feeling following the death of a relative or friend. Some people describe being shocked at how angry they feel. Try not to worry about it, as it is a normal feeling to have. Anger may be directed at different people. You may feel angry with:

- the doctors for not being able to cure your relative or friend
- your relative or friend for leaving you on your own with so much to sort out
- the people around you for not understanding how you feel.

'I was very angry, but I was very polite. I think being very organised and keeping myself very busy got me through it.'

Cassie

Guilt

People feel guilty for different reasons after the death of a relative or friend. You may think that if you had said or done something differently, they might not have died. There may be things you wish you had been able to talk about or do with them while they were still alive.

Some people feel guilty because they are relieved that their relative or friend has died (see page 41).

If you are feeling like this, you might find it helpful to talk to the doctor or a nurse who was caring for your relative or friend. You could also talk to your GP.

'The guilt is difficult to deal with. But one thing I have come to understand over the past year is that it is perfectly normal. For me, it emphasises just how much I loved my other half and that if I could, I would have changed places with them.'

Fiona

Loneliness

Many people describe feeling very lonely following the death of a relative or friend. This is understandable, particularly if the person who has died is someone you shared your life or your home with for a long time.

Loneliness is often described as a constant feeling that does not go away. People describe feeling lonely even when they are going about their everyday lives and are surrounded by family and friends. This is not unusual. It will take time to get used to the person not being around.

You may sometimes think you see or sense the person and then remember they are no longer here. You may find yourself talking to the person who has died. It is fine to do this and you may find it helpful.

'She would want me to get on with things, but I feel lost and unable to know where to go. I don't feel like I have anyone to turn to any more. Mum was my best friend as well, and I feel so lost and lonely without her.'

Alison

Fear

Fear is another common and natural feeling after the death of a relative or friend. For example, you may worry about having to do things on your own and how you are going to manage. Or you may worry about going back to work or going out socially. Some people are frightened by how strong their feelings are. Many people are scared they may have cancer themselves and feel anxious every time they feel unwell.

These feelings are understandable and usually get better with time.

'I have developed a fear that I am going to get cancer. I worry I am going to have to go through it all again, but this time it is going to be me, without my mum by my side to go through it with me.'

Allison

Sadness

The sadness you feel after the death of a relative or friend can be overwhelming. Some people describe it as a physical pain. It can stop you wanting to do things like going out with friends, going to work, or even getting out of bed. Some people become very depressed and stop looking after themselves properly. If this happens, you may need extra support (see page 54).

'I am living life, but not really living it. I feel really sad out of the blue, which catches me out. I am just trying to put one step after the other every day.'

Ros

Longing

Some people describe an intense longing to see, speak to or hold the person who has died. They wish the person could come back again. This can make it difficult to get on with doing other things. Some people dream about the person who has died. This can be very upsetting when they wake up and realise the person is no longer here.

For some people, the longing is so intense, it feels that life without that person is unbearable. If you feel like you cannot continue, ask for extra help and support (see page 54).

'It is very hard. I so much want to see my wife sitting next to me again and talk to her. I miss her voice so much. A year has gone past now, but I just cannot let go of that feeling. She was everything to me – my whole point of being alive and happy.'

Gerry

Crying

Many people find that they cry easily after the death of a relative or friend. Crying can be a response to all the emotions we describe here. People often say they suddenly start crying when they least expect it, even months or years later. You may start crying if you hear a song on the radio, or visit a place that has happy memories for you and your relative or friend. Try not to worry about how often you cry. It is a healthy response to your feelings.

Some people find they cannot cry, and this may worry them. There is no need to worry if you don't cry. It does not mean you do not feel the loss. Crying cannot usually be forced. Just do what feels right for you.

'For six months after she died, I was regularly in tears. But I just assumed that was normal. It was very difficult – it is just the pain of the loss. But I am three and a half years on now, and even though I feel quite emotional at the moment, things have moved on.'

David

Relief

Some people describe feeling relieved when their relative or friend dies. This may be because they were very ill for a long time, needed a lot of care, or had symptoms that were difficult to control. When someone is suffering, it is natural to wish for their suffering to end. There is no need to feel guilty about this.

'I thought nothing could be worse than watching someone you love suffer so much. I think I felt relieved when he slipped peacefully away.'

Debbie

Physical symptoms of grief

Many people have physical symptoms after the death of a relative or friend. These can be frightening. Some people say the symptoms are so strong that they worry they are seriously ill. But physical reactions are quite common. They can include:

- feeling sick
- difficulty sleeping
- feeling very tired (exhaustion)
- poor concentration
- your heart beating fast (palpitations)
- dizziness
- a poor appetite
- losing weight.

If you are worried about any of these symptoms, you should talk to your GP.

My concentration and co-ordination were poor. Nobody tells you about the physical effects – only the emotional effects. This physical reaction took me completely by surprise.'

Denise

Your feelings

There are many words people use to describe the emotions and physical symptoms they feel after the death of a relative or friend. You may have some or all of these feelings. You may have them at different times and in different ways. But you may not have any of them, and you may experience your grief differently.

Although these feelings can be very difficult and painful, they are all natural. No one can take away the pain you might feel, but there are things that may help.



The words on this page describe some of the feelings people told us they had had after the death of a relative or friend. These are words used by people on Macmillan's Online Community (macmillan.org.uk/community). The size of each word shows how often it was used.

Unbearable Scared
In shock Numb
Nightmare Lost confidence
Alone Stressed
Emotional wreck
Guilty Exhausted Flashbacks
Painful Empty
Sad Heartbroken Robbed
Angry Brain fog
Distracted

Things that may help

There is no one type of support that will suit everyone. Just as people have many different emotions, they will find different types of support helpful.

Talking to the person who has died

Even though your relative or friend has died, you may find it comforting to talk to them. Some people like to go to a special place to do this. This could be the cemetery or a place that has special memories. Others find it helpful to do this at home as they go about their day-to-day business.

If you find it difficult to talk to them, you may prefer to write a letter or set up a memorialised account on a social media site (see page 52).

Talking to family and friends

Some people find it helpful to talk to family and friends about how they are feeling. You may talk regularly or just when you feel ready.

Sometimes it may be difficult and painful. You may cry or feel upset. But at other times, you may find you can share stories about your relative or friend and smile at happy memories. As time goes on, it often gets easier to talk about times you shared together.

Try to remember that the way you are feeling is normal, and that sharing your feelings with family and friends can help.

Health professionals

Sometimes it is easier to talk to someone who is not part of your family or friendship group. There is support available to you after someone dies. It is important to ask for help or talk to your GP if you feel you are not coping. They may refer you to a counsellor or therapist who can help.

You can call our cancer support specialists for free on **0808 808 00 00**. They can tell you more about counselling and about services in your area.

Support groups

You may find it difficult to share your thoughts and feelings with family and friends. They may also be grieving, and you may feel you need to support them. You may not have any close family or friends, or you may just want to keep your feelings to yourself.

You may feel that only others who have experienced the death of a relative or friend can really understand how you are feeling.

There are organisations that offer support and can put you in touch with other people who are grieving (see pages 67 to 70). They may offer one-to-one or group support. Some organisations also offer telephone support.

Your local hospice or hospital may run a bereavement support group, or have details of a local one.

Macmillan has bereavement groups on its Online Community, which many people find very helpful. Visit **community.macmillan.org.uk** and search for bereavement under 'groups'.

You can also phone the Macmillan Support Line on **0808 808 00 00** for information and support.

'After we lost Betty, our Macmillan nurse Tony used to pop in to see how we were coping. And I know he is always at the end of a phone if I need him. Without Macmillan, it would have been one hell of a bad journey.'

Bill

Religious and faith groups

If you have a religion or faith, you may find this comforting following the death of your relative or friend. Or you may find that the death makes you ask questions about your faith or beliefs. Some people find meaning in a faith or belief they have not previously had.

Faith leaders are often available to listen and to offer support. They will not mind you crying or being angry. They may be able to tell you about other sources of support in their faith communities. Many faith leaders will offer support even if you have different beliefs or no beliefs.

Writing down your feelings

Some people find that it helps to write down how they feel. Keeping a diary, journal, or blog can be a way of expressing your feelings without having to talk about them.

If you are not sure where to start, try using our table on the next page. You can use this to write down how you feel and what makes this feeling worse or better. We have written one feeling as an example.

**How I'm
feeling today**

I'm feeling angry

**What makes this
feeling worse**

Sitting on my own
and thinking

**What makes this
feeling better**

Going out for
a long walk

Starting to move on

You may continue to have days when you feel overcome by grief. But as time goes on, most people find they start to have times when their feelings are less intense and they can begin to look to the future. Life will not be the same again following the death of your relative or friend. But you can start to enjoy life in different ways.

As time passes, most people are able to remember their relative or friend and talk about them without being overcome by their feelings. They start to enjoy things again, feel more comfortable at work and feel able to join in different activities.

Things might continue to be difficult at times, and you may sometimes feel very emotional again. This is not unusual, but it tends to happen less as time goes on.

Returning to work

Deciding when to return to work will be different for each person. Some people feel able to carry on working and take very little time off, while others need longer. Sometimes people who return to work quickly find they need to take some time off later on. Some people may have to go back to work as they do not get paid if they are not working.

Tell your employer how you are coping and talk to them about the best way for you to return to work. You may find it easier to work from home or work part-time for a while, if possible. It can also be helpful to talk to your employer about telling the people you work with. You can tell your employer if you are happy for them to contact you while you are off.

There are many organisations that can support you at this time (see pages 67 to 71).

Special dates

You may find anniversaries, birthdays, and special occasions very difficult after the death of your relative or friend. They may be particularly difficult during the first year. People describe starting to feel better and then feeling shocked about the strength of their emotions again.

With time, these feelings will often get less intense. Some people find it helpful to do something special to mark an anniversary or birthday. Or they make time at a celebration to remember their relative or friend.

For example, you could:

- sit quietly in a place that has special memories for you
- share memories and stories at a family celebration
- post on a memorial page on a social media site
- organise an event in memory of your relative or friend.

Social events

Social events can be very difficult after the death of your relative or friend. It can be hard if it is your partner who has died and you are not used to going to events on your own.

Going out with family or friends can also bring back memories of times when your relative or friend was with you. This can be upsetting.

You may find it helpful to start by going to social events for an hour or two, instead of staying for the whole thing. You could also ask if you can take a relative or close friend with you. People will want to help you, so it is okay to ask for support.

Some people find it helpful to join a support group (see pages 46 to 47). Other people join a club, do some volunteering or start a new hobby.

Social media and memorialised accounts

Your relative or friend may have had a Facebook or other social media account. When someone dies, it is possible to convert some of these accounts into memorialised accounts. This allows you and other family members and friends to share memories. You can get information about these accounts from most social media websites.

You can also create a new group on a social media site, where you and other people can share memories of your relative or friend.

In-memory events

Some people find it helpful to remember or celebrate the life of their relative or friend by donating to or raising money for charity.

It is one way that people can:

- express their grief
- channel their energy
- focus on moving forward.

If you would like to raise money for Macmillan Cancer Support, you can find out more about how to remember someone in this way at [macmillan.org.uk/donate/remember-someone](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/donate/remember-someone)



Prolonged grief

Some people continue to find life very difficult following bereavement. They are still overwhelmed by their feelings for months or years after their relative or friend has died. They may find it difficult or impossible to return to work or socialise with friends. Some people may not sleep well or even find it hard to get out of bed in the morning. They may stop washing and taking care of their appearance. They may also not eat properly. Some people may start to comfort eat or drink a lot of alcohol. Others may have suicidal thoughts.

There is no right or wrong way to grieve. And there is no set period of time to grieve for. But if you continue to be overwhelmed by your feelings, it is important to get the right help and support. You should talk to your GP or another health or social care professional.

They will talk with you about how you are feeling and may suggest some extra support for you. This may include:

- referring you to a bereavement support group
- referring you to a bereavement counsellor, psychologist, or psychotherapist
- prescribing you medication to help with the way you are feeling.

If you would like more information about life after the death of a relative or friend, you can call the Macmillan Support Line free on **0808 808 00 00**.





IF SOMEONE ELSE HAS BEEN BEREAVED

Supporting someone who is grieving

58

Supporting someone who is grieving

If you are supporting someone who is grieving, it can sometimes be difficult to know what to do and say.

Reading this booklet may help you understand some of the thoughts and feelings they may have. It is important to remember that everyone will experience grief in their own way. Often the most helpful thing you can do is to just be there and listen.

The following things may also be helpful:

- **Encourage them to talk and show their feelings.**
Don't worry if they cry or get angry. These are normal emotions after the death of a relative or friend. Remember they may need to do this on many occasions over a long period of time.
- **Don't feel you have to give answers or solutions.**
Just listening is often very helpful.
- **Allow the person to grieve in their own time.** Some people will need a short time, while others will need months or even years.
- **Contact them at difficult times.** Or ask the person to tell you when they think they will need support. This might be on special anniversaries and birthdays.
- **Offer practical help.** This could be with things like cooking, shopping, gardening, or cleaning. Ask the person if there is anything they would like you to do, or offer them suggestions.

You may be concerned that the person you are supporting is not coping. Or they may not be looking after themselves properly. Try to encourage them to speak to their GP. They may need some extra help (see page 54).

You can find information about supporting someone who is grieving at dyingmatters.org and goodlifedeathgrief.org.uk



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About our information

We provide expert, up-to-date information about cancer. And all our information is free for everyone.

Order what you need

You may want to order more leaflets or booklets like this one. Visit **be.macmillan.org.uk** or call us on **0808 808 00 00**.

We have booklets on different cancer types, treatments, and side effects. We also have information about work, financial issues, diet, life after cancer and information for carers, family, and friends.

Online information

All of our information is also available at **macmillan.org.uk/information-and-support**. There you'll also find videos featuring real-life stories from people affected by cancer, and information from health and social care professionals.

Other formats

We also provide information in different languages and formats, including:

- audiobooks
- Braille
- British Sign Language
- easy read booklets
- eBooks
- large print
- translations.

Find out more at **macmillan.org.uk/otherformats**

If you'd like us to produce information in a different format for you, email us at **cancerinformationteam@macmillan.org.uk** or call us on **0808 808 00 00**.

Help us improve our information

We know that the people who use our information are the real experts. That's why we always involve them in our work. If you've been affected by cancer, you can help us improve our information.

We give you the chance to comment on a variety of information including booklets, leaflets, and fact sheets.

If you'd like to hear more about becoming a reviewer, email reviewing@macmillan.org.uk You can get involved from home whenever you like, and we don't ask for any special skills – just an interest in our cancer information.



Other ways we can help you

At Macmillan, we know how a cancer diagnosis can affect everything, and we're here to support you.

Talk to us

If you or someone you know is affected by cancer, talking about how you feel and sharing your concerns can really help.

Macmillan Support Line

Our free, confidential phone line is open Monday to Friday, 9am to 8pm. Our cancer support specialists can:

- help with any medical questions you have about cancer or your treatment
- help you access benefits and give you financial guidance
- be there to listen if you need someone to talk to
- tell you about services that can help you in your area.

Call us on **0808 808 00 00** or email us via our website, **macmillan.org.uk/talktous**

Information centres

Our information and support centres are based in hospitals, libraries, and mobile centres. There, you can speak with someone face to face.

Visit one to get the information you need, or if you'd like a private chat, most centres have a room where you can speak with someone alone and in confidence.

Find your nearest centre at **macmillan.org.uk/informationcentres** or call us on **0808 808 00 00**.

Talk to others

No one knows more about the impact cancer can have on your life than those who have been through it themselves. That's why we help to bring people together in their communities and online.

Support groups

Whether you are someone living with cancer or a carer, we can help you find support in your local area, so you can speak face to face with people who understand. Find out about support groups in your area by calling us or by visiting [macmillan.org.uk/selfhelpandsupport](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/selfhelpandsupport)

Online Community

Thousands of people use our Online Community to make friends, blog about their experiences and join groups to meet other people going through the same things. You can access it any time of day or night. Share your experiences, ask questions, or just read through people's posts at [macmillan.org.uk/community](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/community)

The Macmillan healthcare team

Our nurses, doctors and other health, and social care professionals give expert care and support to individuals and their families. Call us or ask your GP, consultant, district nurse, or hospital ward sister if there are any Macmillan professionals near you.

'Everyone is so supportive on the Online Community, they know exactly what you're going through. It can be fun too. It's not all just chats about cancer.'

Mal

Help with money worries

Having cancer can bring extra costs such as hospital parking, travel fares, and higher heating bills. If you've been affected in this way, we can help.

Financial guidance

Our financial team can give you guidance on mortgages, pensions, insurance, borrowing, and savings.

Help accessing benefits

Our benefits advisers can offer advice and information on benefits, tax credits, grants, and loans. They can help you work out what financial help you could be entitled to. They can also help you complete your forms and apply for benefits.

Macmillan Grants

Macmillan offers one-off payments to people with cancer. A grant can be for anything from heating bills or extra clothing to a much-needed break.

Call us on **0808 808 00 00** to speak to a financial guide or benefits adviser, or to find out more about Macmillan Grants. We can also tell you about benefits advisers in your area. Visit **[macmillan.org.uk/financialsupport](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/financialsupport)** to find out more about how we can help you with your finances.

Help with work and cancer

Whether you're an employee, a carer, an employer or are self-employed, we can provide support and information to help you manage cancer at work. Visit **[macmillan.org.uk/work](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/work)**

My Organiser app

Our free mobile app can help you manage your treatment, from appointment times and contact details, to reminders for when to take your medication. Search 'My Organiser' on the Apple App Store or Google Play on your phone.

Other useful organisations

There are lots of other organisations that can give you information or support.

Emotional support organisations

Bereavement Advice Centre

Tel 0800 634 9494

(Mon to Fri, 9am to 5pm)

www.bereavementadvice.org

A national organisation offering advice on all aspects of bereavement, from registering a death and finding a funeral director to probate, tax, and benefit queries.

Child Bereavement Network

Tel 020 7843 6309

Email cbn@ncb.org.uk

www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk

Search for a local organisation to help you provide support to a bereaved child or young person.

Cruse Bereavement Care

Tel 0808 808 1677

(Mon and Fri, 9.30am to 5pm,

Tue to Thu, 9.30am to 8pm)

Email info@cruse.org.uk

www.cruse.org.uk

Provides bereavement counselling, information, and support to anyone who has been bereaved, with a network of branches across the UK.

Cruse Bereavement Care Scotland

Tel 0845 600 2227

(Mon to Wed, 10am to 8pm,

Thu, 10am to 9pm, Fri, 10am to 4pm)

Email support@crusescotland.org.uk

www.crusescotland.org.uk

Provides bereavement support to people throughout Scotland.

Dying Matters

Tel 08000 21 44 66

www.dyingmatters.org

Promotes public awareness of dying, death and bereavement in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland.

Good Life, Good Death, Good Grief

Tel 0131 272 2735

Email office@

palliativecarescotland.org.uk

www.goodlifedeathgrief.org.uk

An alliance of organisations and individuals in Scotland that work together to raise public awareness of ways of dealing with dying, death, and bereavement.

Hope Again

Tel 0808 808 1677

(Mon to Fri, 9.30am to 5pm)

Email hopeagain@cruse.org.uk

www.hopeagain.org.uk

Hope Again is Cruse Bereavement Care's website for young people. Cruse is a national charity that provides support, advice and information to children, young people, and adults when someone close to them dies.

Samaritans

Tel 116 123

Email jo@samaritans.org

www.samaritans.org.uk

Provides confidential, non-judgemental emotional support, 24 hours a day, for people who are experiencing feelings of distress or despair, including those that could lead to suicide. Service provided by phone, email and letter.

The Loss Foundation

Tel 0300 200 4112

Email info@thelossfoundation.org

www.thelossfoundation.org

Provides support to people who have lost someone to cancer. Has support groups in London and Oxford, and information on its website for people who live in the rest of the UK.

WAY Widowed and Young

Tel 0300 012 4929

Email enquiries@widowedandyoung.org.uk

www.widowedandyoung.org.uk

National self-help group for people under 50, whose partner has died. Run by a network of volunteers who

were bereaved at a young age. Offers practical and financial support.

Counselling

British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP)

Tel 01455 883 300

Email bacp@bacp.co.uk

itsgoodtotalk.org.uk

Promotes awareness of counselling and signposts people to appropriate services across the UK. You can search for a qualified counsellor on their website.

UK Council for Psychotherapy (UKCP)

Tel 020 7014 9955

Email info@ukcp.org.uk

www.psychotherapy.org.uk

Holds the national register of psychotherapists and psychotherapeutic counsellors, listing practitioners who meet exacting standards and training requirements.

General cancer support organisations

Cancer Black Care

Tel 020 8961 4151

Email info@cancerblackcare.org.uk

www.cancerblackcare.org.uk

Offers UK-wide information and support for people with cancer, as well as their friends, carers, and families, with a focus on those from BME communities.

Cancer Focus

Northern Ireland

Helpline 0800 783 3339

(Mon to Fri, 9am to 1pm)

Email nurseline@cancerfocusni.org

cancerfocusni.org

www.cancerfocusni.org

Offers a variety of services to people affected by cancer in Northern Ireland, including a free helpline, counselling and links to local support groups.

Cancer Support Scotland

Tel 0800 652 4531

(Mon to Fri, 9am to 5pm)

Email info@

cancersupportscotland.org

www.cancersupportscotland.org

Runs cancer support groups throughout Scotland. Also offers free complementary therapies and counselling to anyone affected by cancer.

Riprap

www.riprap.org.uk

Developed especially for teenagers in the UK who have a parent with cancer. Has an online forum where teenagers going through similar experiences can talk to each other for support.

Practical support organisations

Citizens Advice

Provides advice on a variety of issues including financial, legal, housing, and employment issues. Use their online webchat or find details for your local office in the phone book or by contacting:

England

Helpline 03444 111 444

www.citizensadvice.org.uk

Wales

Helpline 03444 77 2020

www.citizensadvice.org.uk/wales

Scotland

Helpline 0808 800 9060

www.citizensadvice.org.uk/scotland

Northern Ireland

Helpline 0800 028 1181

www.citizensadvice.co.uk

Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)

Bereavement Service

Tel 0800 731 0469

www.gov.uk/after-a-death/tax-and-benefits

Call to find out if any bereavement benefits are due. If you do not use the Tell Us Once service, call to notify the DWP about the death.

HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC)

Tel 0300 200 3300

www.gov.uk/browse/births-deaths-marriages/death

Help with tax, probate, and benefits after a death.

National Association of Funeral Directors (NAFD)

Tel 0121 711 1343

Email info@nafd.org.uk

www.nafd.org.uk

Gives help and advice on what to do after a death. Advises on arranging funerals and has information on what you should expect from a funeral director.

The National Society of Allied and Independent Funeral Directors (SAIF)

Tel 0345 230 6777

(Mon to Fri, 9am to 5pm)

Email info@saif.org.uk

www.saif.org.uk

Association whose members are all independent funeral directors. Helps people understand the role of a funeral

director and explains some of the procedures and terms you may encounter when arranging a funeral. Links to bereavement counselling providers.

Natural Death Centre

Tel 01962 712 690

www.naturaldeath.org.uk

Supports people dying at home and their carers. Helps people arrange inexpensive, family-organised, and environmentally friendly funerals.

Tell Us Once

Tel 0800 085 7308

www.gov.uk/after-a-death/organisations-you-need-to-contact-and-tell-us-once

A free service in England, Scotland, and Wales that lets you report a death to most government and local council departments in one go.



You can search for more organisations on our website at macmillan.org.uk/organisations or call us on 0808 808 00 00.

Disclaimer

We make every effort to ensure that the information we provide is accurate and up-to-date but it should not be relied upon as a substitute for specialist professional advice tailored to your situation. So far as is permitted by law, Macmillan does not accept liability in relation to the use of any information contained in this publication, or third-party information or websites included or referred to in it. Some photos are of models.

Thanks

This booklet has been written, revised and edited by Macmillan Cancer Support's Cancer Information Development team. It has been approved by our Senior Medical Editor, Dr Vivien Lucas. With thanks to: Charlotte Argyle, Macmillan Carers Support Programme Manager; Yvonne Black, Macmillan Psychological Therapist; Kathy Burns, Cognitive Behavioural Therapist, St Christopher's Hospice; Pauline Love, End of Life GP; Anne McGee, Macmillan End of Life Project Manager; and Jane Saunders, Counselling and Bereavement Manager.

Thanks also to the people affected by cancer who reviewed this edition, and to those who shared their stories.

We welcome feedback on our information. If you have any, please contact **cancerinformationteam@macmillan.org.uk**

Sources

We have listed a sample of the sources used in the publication below. If you would like further information about the sources we use, please contact us at: **cancerinformationteam@macmillan.org.uk**

Bereavement Advice Centre. bereavementadvice.org/topics/death-certificate-and-coroners-inquest/when-a-coroner-is-not-involved (accessed January 2018).

Block S et al. www.uptodate.com/contents/grief-and-bereavement-in-adults-clinical-features (accessed October 2017).

National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE). End of life care for adults. March 2017.

National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE). www.nice.org.uk/guidance/csg4/resources/improving-supportive-and-palliative-care-for-adults-with-cancer-pdf-773375005 (accessed October 2017).

Natural Death Centre. naturaldeath.org.uk/ (accessed November 2017).

Money Advice Centre. www.moneyadviceservice.org.uk/en/articles/help-paying-for-a-funeral (accessed January 2018).

Can you do something to help?

We hope this booklet has been useful to you. It's just one of our many publications that are available free to anyone affected by cancer. They're produced by our cancer information specialists who, along with our nurses, benefits advisers, campaigners and volunteers, are part of the Macmillan team. When people are facing the toughest fight of their lives, we're there to support them every step of the way.

We want to make sure no one has to go through cancer alone, so we need more people to help us. When the time is right for you, here are some ways in which you can become a part of our team.



Share your cancer experience

Support people living with cancer by telling your story, online, in the media or face to face.

Campaign for change

We need your help to make sure everyone gets the right support. Take an action, big or small, for better cancer care.

Help someone in your community

A lift to an appointment. Help with the shopping. Or just a cup of tea and a chat. Could you lend a hand?

Raise money

Whatever you like doing you can raise money to help. Take part in one of our events or create your own.

Give money

Big or small, every penny helps. To make a one-off donation see over.

Call us to find out more

0300 1000 200

macmillan.org.uk/getinvolved

Please fill in your personal details

Mr/Mrs/Miss/Other _____

Name _____

Surname _____

Address _____

Postcode _____

Phone _____

Email

Please accept my gift of £ _____

(Please delete as appropriate)

I enclose a cheque / postal order /
Charity Voucher made payable to
Macmillan Cancer Support

OR debit my:

Visa / MasterCard / CAF Charity
Card / Switch / Maestro

Card number

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Expiry date

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Issue no

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Security number

□□□

Signature _____

Date / / _____

Don't let the taxman keep your money

Do you pay tax? If so, your gift will be worth 25% more to us – at no extra cost to you. All you have to do is tick the box below, and the tax office will give 25p for every pound you give.

- I am a UK tax payer and I would like Macmillan Cancer Support to treat all donations I make or have made to Macmillan Cancer Support in the last 4 years as Gift Aid donations, until I notify you otherwise.

I understand that if I pay less Income Tax and/or Capital Gains Tax than the amount of Gift Aid claimed on all my donations in that tax year it is my responsibility to pay any difference. I understand Macmillan Cancer Support will reclaim 25p of tax on every £1 that I give.

Macmillan Cancer Support and our trading companies would like to hold your details in order to contact you about our fundraising, campaigning and services for people affected by cancer. If you would prefer us not to use your details in this way please tick this box.

In order to carry out our work we may need to pass your details to agents or partners who act on our behalf.



If you'd rather donate online go to macmillan.org.uk/donate

Please cut out this form and return it in an envelope (no stamp required) to:
Supporter Donations, Macmillan Cancer Support, FREEPOST LON15851,
89 Albert Embankment, London SE1 7UQ

This booklet is about coping when someone close to you has died. It is for the relatives and friends of anyone who has died from cancer.

The booklet looks at some of the emotions you may have and the support that can help. It also gives you some practical information about what to do and what to expect when someone dies.

If you have more questions or would like to talk to someone, call the Macmillan Support Line free on **0808 808 00 00**, Monday to Friday, 9am to 8pm, or visit **macmillan.org.uk**

Would you prefer to speak to us in another language? Interpreters are available. Please tell us in English the language you would like to use. Are you deaf or hard of hearing? Call us using NGT (Text Relay) on **18001 0808 808 00 00**, or use the NGT Lite app.

Need information in different languages or formats? We produce information in audio, eBooks, easy read, Braille, large print and translations. To order these visit **macmillan.org.uk/otherformats** or call our support line.

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CANCER SUPPORT**