



**St Oswald's
Hospice**



Bereavement and funeral services during the Coronavirus Pandemic

Coping with grief and the loss of a loved one

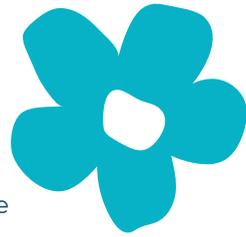
When someone you love dies, it always difficult and distressing. We experience a massive range of powerful emotions, quite often all at once! In fact, sometimes it is hard to know what we are actually feeling at any one time as our minds and hearts are just so full. Grief is a very individual journey and sometimes it can make us feel very lonely and isolated even when we are surrounded by people.

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The Coronavirus pandemic has impacted on our humanity in ways nobody could have foreseen. We are hearing that those of you who have experienced a bereavement during lockdown have been hit particularly hard and that your experience of grief and loss has made you feel even more isolated and alone. Emotionally and physically.



Those of you who are shielded or self-isolating may not have been able to be with your loved one before they died. Or hospital restrictions on visiting may have limited your contact. This may have caused you to experience terrible guilt on top of everything else. Even though, rationally, you know that it was beyond your control, you may still be left thinking that you could have done more.

Once someone we love has died there are certain things we do naturally, like spending time with our nearest and dearest, looking at photos and sharing memories of the person. Crying together, laughing together. But social distancing has stopped this happening and therefore interfered with our grieving processes.

We just wanted to acknowledge these feelings and reassure you.

There is no right or wrong way to grieve, it's unpredictable. There are highs and lows and setbacks. Grief is individual to us all and everyone grieves differently. It's often hard to believe that this person that you loved is no longer with us and grief can break over you in waves of distress.

There is often an intense yearning or pining and a feeling of emptiness. You may have feelings of anger, guilt and extreme sadness where it's difficult to accept the death has really happened, and you can become overwhelmed by a great sense of loss.



Grief is not an illness and all of these feelings are a natural response to the loss of a loved one and the new unwanted future ahead of you.



Even if people are not able to understand exactly how you feel, know they care about you and want to help. The most important thing you can do for a grieving person is just be there and don't worry about what to say it's actually more important to listen.

Further reading:

Goodhousekeeping

Bereavement and grief during lockdown

Cruse

Grieving and isolation





Planning your loved one's funeral during the Coronavirus pandemic

One of the ways we begin to process the death of a loved one is by organising their funeral. It is the last thing we can do for them and of course we want to give them a 'good send off.' Having that focus can help us and possibly provide us with a little solace.

However, due to the current situation we might not be able to say goodbye in the way we had hoped. There are new restrictions in place around social distancing etc that have had a big impact on the way funerals can be held.

As churches are currently closed, all funerals will have to take place at a local authority crematorium or at the graveside. The numbers of people who can be present at a funeral have been severely limited which may lead to difficult conversations as to who can and can't attend.

In more normal times you and your family would have got together to talk about the arrangements. Family members who are living out of the area would travel to be part of this but shielding, self-isolation and social distancing are preventing this from happening. Planning with your funeral director and minister or celebrant may have to take place on the phone or by social media which can feel impersonal and cold.

All of these changes can have a huge impact on your grief and may leave you feeling that you have let down the person who has died.

However, it is still possible to hold a service that is meaningful and that celebrates your loved one; and it is still possible to honour the person you love, even if you are unable to attend the funeral itself.

We hope that the following advice and information will be helpful to you.

A local Funeral Director has summarised some of the **practical things you may need to consider when someone dies** and we also have included some suggestions to think about when you are discussing the content of the funeral with your minister/celebrant.

For those of you unable to attend a funeral, we have put together some ways you might **celebrate and remember your loved one at home**.

The funeral service

Your chosen funeral director should be able to put you in touch with a local celebrant who can help you to plan your loved one's service. If you are a person of faith, while most places of worship are closed at the moment, your faith leader maybe still able to lead the service or recommend someone who can.

Normally your minister/celebrant would visit you and your family at home but at the moment they, like funeral directors, are unable to do so and therefore this may be done by phone or social media. As you are also unable to be in physical contact with your families and friends outside your own household, it might be worth thinking about some of your wishes before you speak to your minister/celebrant.

The following is a list of some of the things you might want to consider and discuss:

- The number of people who can attend a funeral will vary depending on which crematorium you have decided on. It would be useful to have this information before you speak to your minister/celebrant. Your Funeral Director will be able to advise you on this. Obviously, deciding which of your friends and family will actually attend is going to be very difficult. However, I have found that in most cases people are very understanding and will want to support the decisions you make. There is, of course, the opportunity to use social media to allow more people to 'be there'. This is very helpful for family members who live away and cannot travel to be with you, especially if they live overseas. They could also record their own memories and have them played at the funeral.



- If you are used to using social media you can do this yourself but many Funeral Directors can help you set this up. You could even record the service and share it with people afterwards.
- The average time for a service is about 30 minutes. This can vary, and again, your Funeral Director can help you with this.
- **Is the service to be religious, non-religious or a mixture of both?**
If your loved one was a person of faith you might want to contact your local faith leader to see how they can help you. But be aware that certain religious rituals and observances may not be possible at this time. You can have a non-religious or “humanist” service or one that includes a few prayers etc.
- **What music would you like played at the beginning of the service and at the end?**
You might like to consider a piece of music for the middle of the service which can be played to allow a little time of reflection.
- **Are there any readings from scripture and/or alternative readings and poems you might like to include?**
- For most people, the most important part of the service is sharing memories of the person who has died and celebrating their life. Think about how you might want to do this. **Are there members of your family or close friends who might like to speak about your loved ones on the day?**

Or, if you would prefer, your minister/celebrant can gather stories and memories and speak on you and your family’s behalf. This can be done via phone, email or social media or a mixture of all of the above. If you can, start to think about how you want to celebrate you loved one and talk to the people who have been most important in their life about their favourite memories.

- **Do you require a service sheet?** This is a simple booklet that outlines what will happen during the service and could include pictures of the person who has died. It is a lovely reminder of the day and can be sent to other people who were not able to attend.



Further reading:

Age UK

Arranging a funeral – Coronavirus advice

Cruse

Coronavirus: Funerals and memorials

Quaker Social Action

Coronavirus: Organising a meaningful funeral

Talking Death

Planning an alternative funeral during Covid-19

Funeral Guidance

Live Streaming funerals

Marie Curie

Other ways to say goodbye

