

Care after the bereavement

Follow up support becomes a role for general practice and community staff. Hospital or care home staff may do small things to provide ongoing support. One or more follow up meetings allows clarification of issues about the death, and support for efforts to cope. The relative can speak about the dead person, and feel valued by healthcare staff.

What can you do to support older people after bereavement?

- Identify bereaved older people in the community
- GP may contact the relative after 1-3 days, visit/phone/send sympathy card
- Hospital/care home staff phone 1-3 days after the death, or send a sympathy card
- If community nursing staff know the family – phone 1-3 days, visit 2-6 weeks
- Attend the funeral, if appropriate
- Note the bereavement in relative's records
- Establish a follow up plan
- Set time aside for a visit/consultation
- Allow relative to talk, acknowledge loss
- Contact or suggest other agencies (social work dept., Cruse)
- Communicate concerns to GP, refer to other services i.e. social care
- Conclude follow up with agreement from the bereaved person

Bereavement support

Cruse Bereavement Care

A voluntary organisation that helps people understand and cope with their grief.

Cruse UK: 0844 477 9400

Website: <http://www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk/index.html>

Cruse Scotland: 0845 600 2227

Website: <http://www.crusescotland.org.uk/>

Written information

What to do after a death in England and Wales

<http://www.dwp.gov.uk/docs/dwp1027.pdf>

What to do after a death in Scotland

Practical help and guidance through the arrangements to be made after a death.

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/213661/0056769.pdf>

NHS Scotland

Talking about Bereavement

This booklet provides information that helps people to understand bereavement, and what bereavement may be like.

<http://www.healthscotland.com/uploads/documents/4476-Talking%20about%20Bereavement.pdf>

Help for older people

Age UK

The UK's largest charity working with and for older people.

<http://www.ageuk.org.uk/>

Full guidelines

<http://www4.rgu.ac.uk/nursing/research/page.cfm?pge=41757>



**ROBERT GORDON
UNIVERSITY • ABERDEEN**

Bereavement care for older people

Guidelines for practice

May 2011

What does bereavement mean for the older person?

Bereavement commonly brings health problems, loneliness and social isolation, changed family relationships and the need to make sense of the loss.

What factors affect how older people cope with bereavement?

- Coping with the partner's illness;
- Care giving;
- Cognitive and physical health decline;
- Deaths of friends and other family members;
- Loss of social roles

What are the guidelines for?

These guidelines are for staff in hospital wards, general practices and care homes to use to inform care for bereaved older people. They address care in the time leading up to the death of someone close, at the time around the death, and in the days, weeks, months and years afterwards. It is designed to facilitate care that is flexible to older people's individual situations and support needs.

Aim for a consistent approach to bereavement care that is responsive to older people's needs and supports coping.

Pre bereavement care

The relationship between healthcare staff and families provides the opportunity to help relatives prepare for their inevitable loss. Preparing for the death leads to better adaptation in bereavement, though the death may still be a shock.

What can you do to help relatives to prepare?

- Communicate openly with family members, giving reliable and consistent information
- Include the relative(s) in decisions about end of life care
- Encourage family members to support each other
- Involve the relative(s) in the care of the dying person
- Give the relative(s) the opportunity to plan ahead for the time of the death
- Identify with the relative what bereavement may be like for them
- Give relatives the opportunity to be with the dying person
- A member of staff should sit with the dying person when relatives are not there
- Identify and draw on other sources of support – faith group/chaplain, friends
- Provide hospitality to relative – drinks, meals if available, place to sleep
- Assess risk of complicated grief and coping ability (see full guidelines)

Bereavement care at the time of the death

Support at the time of the death can make the situation easier for the relative. Expressing sympathy and comforting the relative means that grief is acknowledged and they feel supported.

The bereaved also need information to help them make practical arrangements, and that may help make sense of their feelings. Follow up needs should be communicated to other services.

What can you do to support bereaved older people at the time of the death?

- Sensitively break the bad news
- Allow time for the initial reaction
- Express sympathy and acknowledge feelings
- Explain events and answer questions
- Contact another relative if unaccompanied
- Allow the relative to be with the dead person for as long as they need, in private or accompanied
- Provide time for the bereaved person to talk with a nurse or doctor
- Ask the relative about specific faith needs
- Provide oral and written information, and direct to other sources
- Assess risk of complicated grief and judge need for communication with other services (see full guidelines)