

# Bereavement



# Who we are

**Age Scotland is the national charity for older people. We work to improve the lives of everyone over the age of 50 so that they can love later life.**

**Our vision** is a Scotland which is the best place in the world to grow older.

**Our mission** is to inspire, involve and empower older people in Scotland, and influence others, so that people can make the most of later life.

**Our three strategic aims** are to:



**Help older people to be as well as they can be**



**Promote a positive view of ageing and later life**



**Tackle loneliness and isolation**

# How we can help

**We know that growing older doesn't come with a manual. Later life can bring changes and opportunities to your life and you may need to know about rights, organisations and services which are unfamiliar to you.**

That's why we provide free information and advice to help you on a range of topics including benefits and entitlements, social care, legal issues such as Power of Attorney, housing and much more. All of our guides are available to download for free from our website, or you can contact our helpline team to have copies posted to you for free.

The Age Scotland **helpline** is a free, confidential phone service for older people, their carers and families in Scotland looking for information and advice.

Later life can bring times when you just need someone to talk to. Our **friendship line** is part of our wider helpline and older people can call us for a chat. We're here to listen, provide friendship and offer support.

## For information, advice and friendship



**Call us free on: 0800 12 44 222**  
**(Monday – Friday, 9am - 5pm)**



**Visit [agescotland.org.uk](https://www.agescotland.org.uk)**  
**to find out more.**

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### Disclaimer

This information guide has been prepared by Age Scotland and contains general advice only, it should not be relied on as a basis for any decision or action and cannot be used as a substitute for professional advice. Neither Age Scotland nor any of its subsidiary companies or charities accepts any liability arising from its use and it is the reader's sole responsibility to ensure any information is up to date and accurate. Please note that the inclusion of named agencies, websites, companies, products, services or publications in this information guide does not constitute a recommendation or endorsement by Age Scotland or any of its subsidiary companies or charities



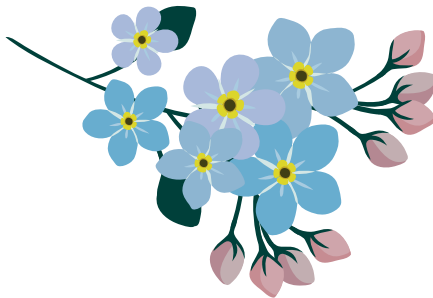
## What this guide is about

The death of someone close to you can be one of the hardest things you ever have to deal with. It is not something you can be good or bad at, you just have to deal with it as best you can.

How you deal with death is very personal and there is no formula. However, this guide can explain:

- practical things you may need to sort out
- how you might be feeling
- why you might be feeling this way
- some of the things that could help you now and in the future.

You may not want to read this guide now and could decide to come back to it at a different time. You may also want to look at it with someone close to you, or with a bereavement counsellor.





## Practical things to sort out

Following the death of someone close to you there are certain practical things that need to be done quickly, such as registering the death, arranging a funeral and looking at the instructions in the Will. If you are working, it can be useful to speak to your employer about what has happened. Time off to deal with family emergencies is normally unpaid but some employers will offer paid compassionate leave.

Some people find being busy a welcome distraction as it gives them something to focus on. Others find the actions and decisions they need to take hard to manage.

The Scottish Government publication **What to do after a death in Scotland** guides you through the practical and legal steps you need to take after someone has died. It is available on the Scottish Government website at [www.gov.scot/collections/what-to-do-after-a-death-in-scotland](http://www.gov.scot/collections/what-to-do-after-a-death-in-scotland), or just call the Age Scotland helpline on **0800 12 44 222** and we will send you a copy.

## Coping with a bereavement

As you get older, it is more likely that you will experience a bereavement. This may be the death of your parents, friends, a partner or even a child. While each of these losses can be devastating, the way you react and cope with each bereavement is likely to be different depending on the circumstances and your relationship with the person who has died. Coping with a bereavement is a very personal process and it can take some time.

The emotions you may experience can feel overwhelming at times, but things do get easier. Talking to someone you trust, a family member or a professional such as your doctor or a bereavement counsellor, is often the best way to start feeling better.



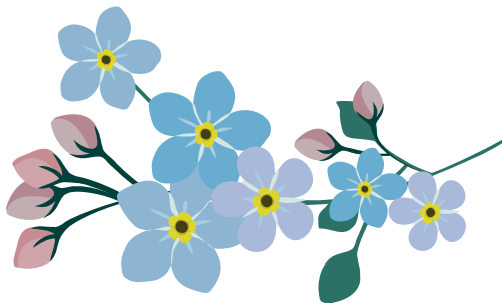
## Dealing with grief

Grief is the often conflicting and sometimes overwhelming mixture of emotions you experience when someone close to you dies. Understanding these emotions can be difficult, but it is important to accept them and be reassured by the fact that there is no right or wrong way to feel. Though everyone grieves, each of us does so in our own way.

Grief is natural and can last a long time. How you feel can be influenced by a number of things such as your personality, your relationship with the person who has died, your life experiences, your religious beliefs and your cultural background.

Whatever grief is to you, talking to those close to you can really help. If you find it hard to talk to family or friends, you may feel more comfortable speaking to a professional grief counsellor, who can help you to deal with your loss.

**Cruse Bereavement Care Scotland** may be able to help. You can call them on **0808 802 6161** or contact them through their website **[www.crusescotland.org.uk](http://www.crusescotland.org.uk)**.





## How you might be feeling

The emotions you experience as you grieve can be intense, and you might feel some more strongly than others. There might be days when you cope better, and days when the feelings seem overwhelming.

There is no right or wrong way to feel, and the process of grieving is different for everyone. With time, and the right support, emotions experienced after bereavement tend to become less difficult to manage, as you start to adjust and come to terms with your loss.

You may feel:

**Numb:** many people talk of feeling a sense of numbness and disbelief soon after a death, even if the death was expected. You might feel shocked and dazed.

**Angry:** you might be angry at the person who died for abandoning you, or angry at yourself if you have regrets. You may be angry at those around you for how they are reacting, even knowing that everyone deals with bereavement differently. If you have religious faith you may be angry and even question your faith. You might also just be angry and not know why; this is also perfectly natural.

Dealing with anger can be difficult; it might help to write down your thoughts or talk to someone you trust.

**Frightened:** fear and anxiety are very natural emotions. You may feel that you're struggling to control your thoughts or feelings, or have panic attacks, which are not dangerous but can be very distressing. Speak to your GP if you are struggling to cope with these feelings.





**Guilty:** you may feel you could have done more to help, or regret something you said or did not say. Try not to be too hard on yourself, as you cannot change the past. With time, you are likely to be able to accept what has happened.

If your sense of guilt doesn't go away or becomes more powerful, then you should try and talk about it with someone close to you, or someone who specialises in bereavement support.

**Isolated:** if the person who has died was your best source of good company, or you have been caring for them for a long time, you could feel lonely and that you have lost the structure of your life. You may want to isolate yourself because you don't want to mix with other people. Feeling isolated and alone can affect your confidence in the long term. Try to find a way to stay connected to friends and family. If you are struggling with loneliness, call the Age Scotland helpline. We can keep in touch with you with a regular friendship call, or put you in contact with local support organisations.

**Relief:** if the person had been very ill or was in pain before their death, it is natural to feel relieved that they are no longer suffering. If they lived with dementia, you might already have been grieving for them in stages as their condition progressed, and may already have dealt with some of the feelings of grief at losing them. You may also feel relief if the person who has died used to bully or abuse you, but feel unable to tell anyone this. A grief counsellor will understand your feelings and can help you to work through them.



**Empty and sad:** after a bereavement, feelings of emptiness and sadness may be intense and can often come in waves; some days or weeks might be easier to cope with than others. These feelings are natural, and are part of the healing process, even if you don't realise this at the time.

If the intense feelings of sadness and low mood don't improve gradually, you are unable to think about anything but the person who has died or you are struggling with looking after yourself, speak to your doctor. Experiencing depression is common after losing someone you are close to, and help is available, so don't struggle on alone.

If you feel you might hurt yourself, talk to someone as soon as possible. You can talk to your doctor or:

- **Samaritans: 116 123** (any time of the day or night)
- **Breathing Space: 0800 838587 / [breathingspace.scot](https://www.breathingspace.scot)** (open Mon-Thu 6pm - 2am and Fri 6pm - Mon 6am)





# Looking after yourself

Bereavement can have a physical as well as an emotional impact. Complex emotions can leave you feeling drained, unmotivated and closed off. But you need to do what you can to look after yourself:

**Sleep and rest:** bereavement is exhausting. Be kind to yourself and sleep when you can or want to. You may struggle to sleep or your sleep may be disrupted, but rest and recharge whenever you can.

**Eating and drinking:** try to eat and drink regularly to stay as healthy as you can. Even if you have no appetite and food is the last thing on your mind, eating anything is better than eating nothing. See Age Scotland's **Eat Well guide** for advice and help.

For some, drink can go from being a comfort to being an escape, so be careful not to have more alcohol than is recommended. If your drinking or someone else's drinking is becoming unhealthy you should talk to a specialist organisation such as:

- **Alcoholics Anonymous: 0800 9177 650 / [www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk](http://www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk)**
- **Drinkaware [www.drinkaware.co.uk](http://www.drinkaware.co.uk)**

**Don't neglect yourself:** it may be difficult to stick to everyday routines as you grieve; you might struggle with simple but important things like washing frequently, keeping appointments or washing up. If you don't manage to settle back into healthy routines, speak to your doctor to find out what help they can suggest.

**Stay connected:** you might want to have time to yourself for a while as you grieve and to avoid social situations. When you're ready though, get in touch with friends and family and ask them over for a cuppa.

Some people find their faith is a great comfort, and find their place of worship a source of support socially, emotionally and spiritually.



## Past bereavements

If you have experienced the death of someone close to you before, you may think you know what to expect, but some emotions may be stronger after the death of certain people, or you may experience emotions you haven't felt before.

Bereavement can bring memories of past losses flooding back, including times when you did not have the support you needed – maybe after a miscarriage or a suicide at a time when those issues were not talked about. You may feel the need to mourn past losses before you can start to cope with your more recent bereavement. Talk to friends and family, your doctor or a bereavement counsellor.

There are specialist organisations you can contact such as:

- **Sands**, the stillbirth and neonatal death society, offers support to those who have lost a child during pregnancy or after birth. **0808 164 3332 / [www.sands.org.uk/onamission](http://www.sands.org.uk/onamission)**
- **The Compassionate Friends** support bereaved parents and their families. **0345 123 2304 / [www.tcf.org.uk](http://www.tcf.org.uk)**
- **SSAFA**, the Armed Forces charity, specialises in helping those who have served or have lost someone who served. **0800 260 6767 / [www.ssafa.org.uk/scotland](http://www.ssafa.org.uk/scotland)**



## Those around you

Family dynamics at a time of bereavement can be tricky both emotionally and practically.

While everyone grieves in their own way, family can be a great support. You can be a great support to them too, as you are dealing with the same loss, but may each need different kinds of support at different times. Talking to each other and sharing memories is often the main way people start to accept the loss and begin to feel better.

It can be hard to start a conversation with someone who is grieving as you might be scared of saying the wrong thing, but people will usually just be glad that you care.

Speaking to young children can be difficult, especially if it's the first time they have experienced a bereavement, but it is important to be open and honest and answer their questions.

**Winston's Wish** supports children and young people after the death of a parent or sibling. Call them on **08088 020021** or see their website **[www.winstonswish.org](http://www.winstonswish.org)**.



# If your spouse, partner or civil partner has died

If you have lost the person you shared your life with, it can be especially difficult to deal with. It may seem that you don't have anyone you can talk to about your emotions, or you may feel lonely and isolated.

There are helplines you can call if you want to talk to someone who understands what you are going through. You can also ask your doctor about local support services to help you cope with the loss.

If you relied on your partner every day for things such as cooking, shopping, looking after money and dealing with repairs around the home, there may be practical help available from the organisations below:

- **The Age Scotland helpline: 0800 12 44 222**
- **Moneyhelper: 0800 138 7777 / [www.moneyhelper.org.uk/en/family-and-care/death-and-bereavement](http://www.moneyhelper.org.uk/en/family-and-care/death-and-bereavement)**
- **Citizens Advice Scotland's Money Talk team: 0800 028 1456 / [www.moneytalkteam.org.uk](http://www.moneytalkteam.org.uk)**
- **Care and Repair Scotland: 0141 221 9879 / <http://careandrepairsotland.co.uk>**

Age Scotland's information guides contain lots of information and practical advice, on a wide range of topics. To order free copies, visit our website at **[www.ageuk.org.uk/scotland/information-advice/publication-order-form](http://www.ageuk.org.uk/scotland/information-advice/publication-order-form)** or call our helpline on **0800 12 44 222**.



## Looking ahead

You may find it difficult to look forward, but there's no rush. Looking after yourself and talking about how you feel can help to build foundations for the future. Try not to make any important decisions whilst your grief is intense. You may want to move house, or change a relationship, but give yourself plenty of time to think and don't let other people tell you what to do.

Don't feel guilty about looking ahead - having hope and planning for the future is not a betrayal, or a substitute, for the life you had with the person who has died.

When you are ready, spend time with those close to you and do things you enjoy. Give yourself things to look forward to, like a day out with a friend or a weekend away. Don't feel guilty if you find you are enjoying yourself. Finding ways to have fun or feel less sad is an important part of recovery, and only you know when you are ready.

Birthdays, anniversaries or important dates can be difficult, and you might want to plan what to do on those dates to celebrate good memories, or to have time on your own.

When the time is right for you, you might want to find a course or class to attend or think about volunteering. Volunteering can be a good way meet interesting people and to help a cause that means a lot to you. Being around other people may feel strange or uncomfortable at first, but almost everyone you meet will have experienced grief themselves, and understand what you are going through.

Grief can be a long and emotional process, but if you find yourself struggling to cope or would like to talk to someone, help and support is always available.



## Useful organisations

### Age Scotland

Age Scotland helpline: **0800 12 44 222**

The Age Scotland helpline provides information, friendship and advice to older people, their relatives and carers.

If you need an interpreter call 0800 12 44 222 and simply state the language you need e.g. Polish or Urdu. Stay on the line for a few minutes and the Age Scotland helpline will do the rest.

You can call us for a copy of our publications list or download / order copies from our website at **[www.agescotland.org.uk](http://www.agescotland.org.uk)**.

### Breathing Space

Confidential phone service for anyone in Scotland experiencing low mood, depression or anxiety.

Tel: **0800 83 85 87**

**[www.breathingspace.scot](http://www.breathingspace.scot)**

### Cruse Bereavement Care Scotland

Information and support for people who are bereaved

Tel: **0808 802 6161**

**[www.crusescotland.org.uk](http://www.crusescotland.org.uk)**

They have information leaflets about understanding your grief, living through grief, bridging the gap (ideas for what to say to someone who is grieving) and after a suicide.





## Drinkaware

An organisation funded by alcohol firms that offers tips on responsible drinking.

**[www.drinkaware.co.uk](http://www.drinkaware.co.uk)**

## Samaritans

Provides confidential support for people in distress, 24 hours a day.

Tel: **116 123**

Email: **[jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org)** **[www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org)**



# How you can help

## Our vision is a Scotland which is the best place in the world to grow older.

All the information and advice we provide is free and completely impartial and in helping people access their rights and entitlements, it can be life changing.

We are an ageing population and more people than ever are coming to us for support. You can help us be there for those that need us most.



### Make a donation

No matter how small or large, donations make a massive difference and help us continue our important work.

- ▶ Call **03330 15 14 60**
- ▶ Visit **age.scot/donate**
- ▶ Text **LATERLIFE** to **70085** to donate £5.\*



### Fundraise

Whether it is having a bake sale, running a marathon or knitting small hats for the Big Knit, there are so many ways to raise vital funds to support our work. To find out more, call **0333 323 2400** or visit **age.scot/fundraise**.



### Leave us a gift in your Will

By choosing to leave us a gift in your Will, you can help Age Scotland to continue being there for vulnerable older people in the years to come. To find out more, call **0333 323 2400** or visit **age.scot/legacy**.

\* Texts cost £5 plus one standard rate message

# Let's keep in touch



## Sign up to our newsletter

Our regular newsletters by email contain details of our campaigns, services and how you can support our work.

Sign up today by visiting [\*\*age.scot/roundup\*\*](https://age.scot/roundup)



## Follow us on social media

Our social media channels are a great way to keep up to date with our work and issues that affect older people.



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[\*\*/AgeScotland\*\*](https://www.linkedin.com/company/AgeScotland)

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**Head office**

0333 323 2400

**Age Scotland helpline**

0800 12 44 222

**Email**

info@agescotland.org.uk

**Visit our website**

www.agescotland.org.uk

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