

Support for People Bereaved During COVID-19 Pandemic



Introduction

Losing a loved one at any time can be extremely distressing and experiencing the death of someone special to you during this pandemic is likely to be even more traumatic. The usual ways we would work through what has happened, and the support we could normally expect from friends, family and colleagues may not be available as we would want and need.

The pandemic has changed the traditional ways we mark our grief. Loss of loved ones dying may be particularly severe, and grieving processes may be disrupted because of inability to carry out our usual grieving rites.

For the moment, it is not possible to come together and to gather in one location. It is not possible to have a large funeral. It may not be possible to receive the company of those who wish to offer condolences. However, we can support ourselves and each other in different ways.

Don't struggle alone. There are many organisations who offer support to adults and children locally and nationally. Their usual way of offering face-to-face support may not be available but they are offering online and telephone support (please check the provider's websites for up to date information).

This handbook contains information and advice on coping with bereavement during this uncertain time, and the services offering support still available to you in Warwickshire.

Help and Support

It is important that we make time to allow ourselves to grieve. There are no rights and wrongs, but there are some things that you could do that might be helpful. There are a number of feelings that people who are bereaved may experience; shock, anger, guilt, sadness, relief.

Talk to people about how you are feeling, they may be feeling the same way as you. Some people like to keep this private, but if possible, it is helpful to share your feelings with friends and relatives. Or sometimes it helps to speak to someone independent who doesn't know the people involved.

Sometimes people think that they will get fed up with you or they don't want to hear it, if you don't have anyone to talk to there are organisations that will support you during this time, such as:

Cruse National Freephone Helpline is available - call 0808 808 1677. Cruse offer support, advice and information to children, young people and adults when someone dies. Opening hours are Monday-Friday 9.30-5pm (excluding bank holidays), with extended hours on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday evenings, when open until 8pm. Or visit <https://www.cruse.org.uk/get-help/coronavirus-dealing-bereavement-and-grief>

Bereavement support and counselling can help you if you are having difficulty coping with the loss of a loved one. The services listed here can give support and advice to you and your family <https://www.warwickshire.gov.uk/bereavement>

Self-help books on Bereavement and Grief for Adults are available as e-books and e-audio from Warwickshire Libraries. Find and access these on the Health and Wellbeing page on www.warwickshire.gov.uk/librarycatalogue

It is also important to look after your **wellbeing**. Following a loss, it is natural to feel like your whole life has been disrupted. This may mean that you experience disrupted sleep (sleeping too much or too little), eating unhealthily, or for some people using substances, such as alcohol or drugs - all of which are likely to make your mental health poorer. For information about mental health and wellbeing support services in Warwickshire visit <https://www.warwickshire.gov.uk/mentalhealth>

Supporting Children

Frightening events widely reported in the media, such as the coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic, can cause children to worry about themselves and others. It is normal for children to feel unsettled when something scary is happening or has happened, and many will be upset, sad or fearful at times. Children who have been bereaved are likely to show a stronger reaction and may worry that they or someone they know will die.

If you are recently bereaved and have young children, explain to them what has happened in an open and honest way that is appropriate for their age while remaining factual. Use language such as 'the person has died' rather than they have 'gone to sleep' or 'passed away' because these are terms that children can misunderstand and think the person is coming back or going to wake up. Give them time to ask questions and encourage them to tell you how they are feeling. This may be by talking or it may be through play, making pictures or objects. Children will experience the same emotional response as adults, so if their behaviour seems unusual or they don't seem to be reacting emotionally, they may be feeling a sense of shock or disbelief.

Keep checking in with them about how they are feeling and share with them your own thoughts and feelings. Sharing positive memories can often encourage children to feel safe to talk about the person

who has died.

The following organisations can support bereaved children during the COVID-19 pandemic:

Child Bereavement UK have information and a video about ways to support bereaved children during difficult times <https://www.childbereavementuk.org/coronavirus-supporting-children>

Winston's Wish provides therapeutic support to bereaved children and young people by phone and email, along with online resources and training for professionals. From parents to teachers, everyone and anyone who is supporting a grieving child can call our Freephone National Helpline on **08088 020 021** between **9.00am** and **5.00pm**, Monday to Friday <https://www.winstonswish.org/coronavirus/>

Guy's Gift offer tailored support for bereaved children and young people aged between 5 and 25 and based in Coventry and Warwickshire. For more information, email info@guysgift.co.uk or call **0845 467 3035**. Their telephone line is open every Tuesday afternoon **12:30-16:30** and all-day Wednesday and Thursday **08:30-16:30**. <https://www.guysgift.co.uk/>

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Warwickshire's Family Information Service (FIS) brokerage service can offer one to one support for families with children up to the age of 25 and support them to access appropriate services where there are barriers, or they have complex needs. For more information, email fisbrokerage@warwickshire.gov.uk or via FIS helpline **01926 742274**.

Looking after your wellbeing is important, and mental health support for children and young people is available:

Rise provides emotional wellbeing and mental health services for children and young people <https://cwrise.com/>

The Rise Navigation Hub operates Monday-Friday between **8.00am** to **6.00pm** and is for referrals from professionals working with children and young people up to the age of 17. During COVID-19 they are also accepting referrals from parents/carers. Please call **0300 200 2021**.

What to do when someone dies

For practical information about the COVID-19 Pathway for Care of the Deceased in Warwickshire visit <https://www.warwickshire.gov.uk/information-coronavirus/coronavirus-births-deaths-ceremonies/1>

This website contains information about:

Registering a death

Funeral guidance

Care of deceased in the home

Local Hospital Bereavement Services can offer practical support to families following the death of a loved one in their care:

- North Warwickshire (George Eliot Hospital) - <http://www.geh.nhs.uk/directory-of-services/specialties-and-services/b/bereavement-services-at-george-eliot-hospital/bereavement-help-and-support/>
- Rugby (Hospital of St Cross) - <https://www.uhcw.nhs.uk/caring-for-you/bereavement-services/>
- South Warwickshire (South Warwickshire Foundation NHS Trust) - <https://www.swft.nhs.uk/our-services/adults-out-hospital-services/bereavement-service>

The Government has worked with Faith leaders and published guidance for care of the deceased with suspected or confirmed coronavirus (COVID-19) - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-care-of-the-deceased/guidance-for-care-of-the-deceased-with-suspected-or-confirmed-coronavirus-covid-19>

Saying Goodbye

For many of us, not being able to follow our usual rituals before and following the death of a loved one can intensify our distress. Our sense of helplessness and guilt can be magnified. Where possible find ways, with those closest to your loved one, to remember them. If holding a funeral is not possible, organise a time when you can all share a telephone call or use an app to connect with each other to read a poem that describes how you are feeling, share memories of the person, or say a prayer. If this isn't possible, sometimes having a picture or an object that you helps you feel closer to them can be reassuring, listen to a special piece of music, or write a letter to mark saying good bye. Remember that a service of remembrance can be held once the pandemic is over.

For information about making funeral arrangements:

The National Federation of Funeral Directors have provided information for funeral directors and members of the public on funeral arrangements <https://nafdcovid19.org.uk/>

Guidance for Faith Groups: During the COVID-19 outbreak, Government guidance may impact end of life rituals for religious communities.

EQuIP (Equality and Inclusion Partnership) have published Advice from Warwickshire Public Health for religious organisations <https://www.equipequality.org.uk/covid-19-updates/advice-from-warwickshire-public-health-for-religious-organisations-0> and can offer guidance for faith communities during this time, call 07377 431997 or email advice@equipequality.org.uk

Church of England guidance for churches - <https://www.churchofengland.org/more/media-centre/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-churches#na>

The Muslim Council of Britain has been working with Public Health England to best plan for facilitating the burial of Muslims who pass away during the pandemic <https://mcb.org.uk/community/covid-19-muslim-burial-resources/>

Supporting other people

Starting the conversation - Whether you are a family member, friendly neighbour, charity volunteer or a professional, you are undertaking an important role that is very helpful and rewarding. Research tells us that straightforward kindness and loving behaviours at this time can be a big help. You do not need to be a professional, nor have significant training, to assist someone bereaved in basic but helpful ways.

Talking to someone who is grieving can be difficult – you may be worried about getting in touch with the person or not be sure what to say. But the support of friends and family can help the person feel supported and loved.

Support for **those who work with bereaved people, the National Bereavement Alliance** will be keeping this page updated every day with information to help bereavement services across the country respond to the current situation <https://nationalbereavementalliance.org.uk/covid-19/>

For Headteachers and Leadership Teams, the Educational Psychology Service (EPS) can offer support to head teachers and leadership teams within settings to manage bereavement and loss within their community this can include:

- Emotional support and a chance to talk through the situation
- Problem-solving and discussing specific issues

- Sharing of information to circulate to staff, parents and carers to support them in talking about loss and bereavement
- Signposting and sharing of guidance leaflets and resources
- Sharing of sample letters and scripts for communicating with children, staff and parents
- Thinking through ways for students to share feelings and an exploration of school sharing forums to promote social connection
- Identification of and planning for vulnerable children
- Advice on practical issues such as marking the event / memorials / books of condolences

If you would like to arrange to speak to a member of the team, please phone **01926 742921** or email eps@warwickshire.gov.uk. When your call is for support in managing a bereavement please make this clear and you will receive telephone contact from an Educational Psychologist, where possible on the same day, who will discuss the situation with you.

For Carers

If you provide help for someone, such as family, friends, or neighbours who couldn't cope without you it is important to know how to help them as best you can, and to look after your own health and wellbeing. In Warwickshire, the following services may be able to help you:

- **Care Companion** – a free 24/7 online tool full of information to support carers and their cared-for, also providing COVID-19 updates from reliable sources. Registering sets up a confidential profile to access all information tailored to your circumstances.
- **Carers Trust** - Support carers across Coventry and Warwickshire including Warwickshire Carer Wellbeing Service

- **EQuIP** (Equality and Inclusion Partnership) also have resources for carers such as template letters and a contingency plan
- Sudden have published COVID-19 bereavement advice if you are caring for someone bereaved <http://www.suddendeath.org/covid-19-bereavement/advice-for-carers>

More advice and information about the wellbeing services available to support you during this difficult time can be found here <https://apps.warwickshire.gov.uk/api/documents/WCCC-630-2014>

If you care for people with dementia, please visit the Living Well with Dementia in Warwickshire website <https://dementia.warwickshire.gov.uk/end-of-life/>

Local hospices can offer bereavement advice and support. Some are extending their offer of support to those who have not previously used their services. Please visit individual hospice websites for more information and for ways to get in touch.

- **The Myton Hospice** 01926 492518 <https://www.mytonhospice.org/>
- **Mary Ann Hospice** 024 7686 5440 <https://www.maryannevans.org.uk/>
- **Shakespeare Hospice** 01789 266852 <https://www.theshakespearehospice.org.uk/>
- **Acorns Children's Hospice** 01564 82 5037 <https://www.acorns.org.uk/>
- **Zoe's Place Baby Hospice** 024 7636 1675 <https://www.zoes-place.org.uk/coventry/default.aspx>

Marie Curie Telephone Bereavement Support line **0800 090 2309** is a free national listening support service for people who have been bereaved due to terminal illness.

Support for the vulnerable

The person who died may have been your partner or carer, and you may have been left without practical or emotional support at a time when you need it most. If your bereavement leaves you isolated without support from family, friends or neighbours, Warwickshire County Council is here to help. We can help you with emotional, financial and practical support, such as:

- Food and essential household goods parcels
- medication delivery
- community groups
- financial support
- mental health and wellbeing advice

- local volunteer networks
- housing support
- health and social care information

Further information is available from: <https://www.warwickshire.gov.uk/coronavirusvulnerable> Or call **0800 408 1477**

The telephone line is open:

- Monday to Thursday - **9am to 5pm**
- Friday - **9am to 4.30pm**
- Saturday and Sunday – **9am to 3pm**

Further information and support are also available from:

- NHS - Grief after bereavement or loss <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/coping-with-bereavement/>
- NHS - Bereavement and young people <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/bereavement-and-young-people/>

Grief is the last act of love we give to those we love.

Where there is deep grief, there is always great love.

This handbook has been created by:

