

## 1. Introduction

This self-help guide is intended for people with mild-to-moderate symptoms of bereavement and grief. If you're feeling distressed, in a state of despair, suicidal or in need of emotional support you can phone NHS 24 on 111. For an emergency ambulance phone 999.

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This guide aims to help you to:

- understand the experience of grief
- cope with the effects of grief
- decide if you need further help coping with your grief

This guide uses cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) techniques to help cope with the experience of grief. There are also tips taken from other kinds of therapy, including interpersonal psychotherapy (IPT) and different types of grief therapy. You might recognise some of these techniques, and some of them will likely be new to you.

Most people who are grieving don't have to visit their GP, as grief isn't an illness. However, grief can have physical symptoms, and if you're worried about them then you should visit your GP. You can find details for your local GP in [Scotland's Service Directory](#).

### How to use the bereavement and grief self-help guide

Working through this guide can take around 30 to 40 minutes, but you should feel free to work at your own pace.

To type in a graphic or diary, click or tap the part you'd like to fill in and use your keyboard as usual.

You can save and print this PDF guide on your device at any time.

## **2. Understanding grief**

Grief is a very complex and intensely personal issue, and can affect you in different ways. Losing someone close to you is a highly distressing experience, associated with a range of powerful emotions. There's no 'usual' way to cope – everyone will cope with loss in different ways. It might feel like you're struggling more than you 'should,' but for most people this isn't anything to be concerned about. It doesn't mean that you're 'weak' or need to 'hurry up and get on with things.'

It's important to understand there's no time limit – there's no deadline on feeling better or recovering. You might feel pressured to get back to day-to-day life, and return to dealing with your usual responsibilities, but it's important to take time to deal with your grief.

Grief is a process – you won't feel better all at once, but it will start to get easier as time goes on. You might not realise the process is happening, but you'll normally notice improvement. This is especially hard to remember when grief is fresh – you might feel like you'll never get over the loss, but you will.

As you work through this guide, you'll learn a lot about grief. Hopefully this will help you understand what you're experiencing, and help you to feel better long-term.

### 3. Effects of grief

Grief can affect your body, mind, and the way you think and behave. These symptoms might be familiar to you.

#### Grief and your body

Some people experience physical symptoms as a result of grief. These might include:

- difficulty sleeping – you might have nightmares, disturbed sleep, or dreams about the person you lost
- [anxiety symptoms](#) – you might have panic attacks, feel anxious and scared, or feel shaky
- losing your appetite, or comfort eating
- feeling tired and as if it's too much effort to do anything
- feeling as if there's a weight on your chest

People who are grieving can be more likely to catch infections or develop health problems, because stress makes your body more vulnerable.

If you've lost someone to an illness, you might become concerned about your own health. Some people might even think they have the same condition that affected their loved one, or something similar.

If you're worried about your health, visit your GP and tell them you recently lost someone important to you. They can work out if you're suffering from an illness, or if it's part of your grieving process.

#### Grief and your emotions

You may experience a lot of complex emotions in a short time. These can include:

- sadness
- anxiety
- feeling tearful

It can be hard to understand the emotions you're experiencing, and it can feel overwhelming.

## **Grief and your thoughts**

You might have thoughts like this:

- "I should have done more."
- "I should have said that when they were alive."
- "I shouldn't have said that."
- "It's my fault."
- "It's the doctor's fault" – sometimes people who are grieving blame someone or something else for the loss.
- "If things had been different they'd still be alive."
- "Why am I still alive when they're dead?"
- "What have I done to deserve this?"

You may also think about the future you might have had with the person, and feel regret and sadness about lost opportunities to spend time with them.

## **How grief can affect what you do**

When you're grieving, you might:

- avoid going to places that remind you of your loved one, or find it very difficult to be in those places
- become withdrawn, not wanting to go out or see or talk to people

- avoid talking about your loved one
- try to avoid thinking about your loved one

## **How grief can affect relationships with other people**

Grief can have a big effect on how you interact with and feel about other people in your life.

- you might become more irritable and grumpy, and find yourself being rude or offhand with people, or ‘snapping’ at loved ones
- you might struggle to cope when people say insensitive things, like “they had a good life,” or “at least they’re not suffering anymore”
- you might feel angry with other people and have trouble keeping in mind that most people are trying to make you feel better, even if they say the wrong thing
- you might find it too difficult to speak to people at times
- people who don’t know you’ve been through a loss might say things that upset you – it can be hard to remember that they don’t know your circumstances, and they aren’t trying to hurt you
- when you’re grieving your feelings can be very ‘raw’ – it can be much easier for people to accidentally hurt you

Grief can put a strain on existing relationships, especially if they were difficult to begin with or those people are also grieving the same loss in their own way. There’s more information on managing relationships with people close to you later on in the guide.

## **4. Your feelings of grief – Activity 1**

The things you think and feel when dealing with grief, and the methods you use to try to feel better, can actually make it harder to move forward and find it easier to cope.

Use the table below to write about how you've been feeling so far, and how you've been dealing with your grief. Filling this in helps you see how your emotions, thoughts, physical symptoms and coping methods are all linked, and can all affect each other.

**Describe your situation. You could write about who you lost, and how long ago it happened.**

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**Your feelings**

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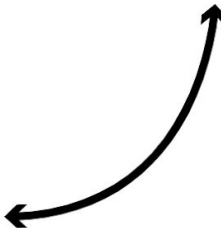
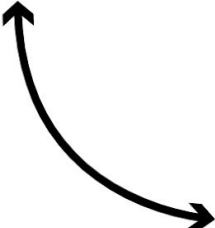
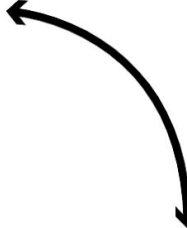
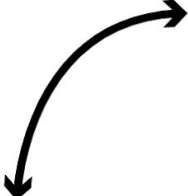
**Your thoughts**

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**How you've been coping**

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**Physical symptoms**

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## 5. Am I experiencing complicated grief?

Complicated grief is when the grieving process doesn't move forward. You can find yourself 'stuck' – maybe unable to feel sad or cry at all, or possibly too sad to manage day-to-day life. All of these things can happen with uncomplicated grief, but with complicated grief the feelings are more intense. The grief can go on for a longer period of time, and can make it difficult to do things like work, interact with people, or look after your family and home life.

If you've experienced mental health problems in the past, such as [depression](#) or [anxiety](#), this could make you more vulnerable to complicated grief.

### How complicated grief can affect you

- you might feel unable to go back to work or study after your compassionate leave is over
- you might feel like you aren't actually grieving – maybe you aren't crying, or don't feel sad
- you might feel like the grief has been too bad for too long – as if the intense feelings of sadness should have passed by now, but they haven't
- you're unable to manage day-to-day life – simple tasks can feel overwhelming, especially after the loss has 'sunk in' and started to feel 'real' to you

Even if you were able to manage things like planning the funeral, you could still have these difficulties further along in the grieving process. How you feel immediately after a loss can be very different to how you feel in the following weeks and months.

Talking to a professional will help you tell the difference between normal and complicated grief. Talk to your GP, or phone [Cruse](#).

If you're in touch with a health professional or having grief counselling already, they can help you work out if it's complicated grief or not.



## 6. Losing a partner

Losing a partner creates unique challenges when it comes to learning to live without them. Coping with household tasks that your partner used to do, or responsibilities that they used to handle, can feel overwhelming.

In addition to the above issues, which often arise in the weeks and months following a loss, the practicalities of arranging a funeral and potentially accommodating relatives and friends in your home can be very difficult.

In order to cope with these challenges, it's important to do these things:

### **Take care of yourself**

Many people, after losing a partner, start skipping meals and can neglect their overall health. This is particularly true if your partner was the person who looked after your wellbeing (for example, by suggesting you make doctor's appointments). Try to plan regular mealtimes, and make plans to eat out with friends and loved ones when you can if it feels upsetting to cook for one person instead of two.

It can be helpful to plan out your days a little in advance, so your days have more structure and you have enjoyable things to look forward to and time to mentally prepare for less pleasant activities.

You can use a planner to help you with this.

In your planner, you could include:

- things you need to do, like visit the doctor or go shopping for food
- things you'd enjoy doing, like spending time with loved ones
- things you do regularly, like engage in a hobby
- one-off events that will be enjoyable, like going to see a film that's coming out this week

Try to complete a plan for a few days. You don't have to fill in every space, or

complete it all at once. The planner can be quite flexible – it's okay for plans to change. Remember to set aside some time to relax and unwind – don't feel like you have to fill every hour of the day.

You'll find a planner to fill out below. If you save this file after filling out the boxes, you'll be able to go back and review the planner later.

Please note: if you use an iPhone, the only way to edit the planner is by using a PDF app on your device.

	<b>Day 1</b>	<b>Day 2</b>	<b>Day 3</b>
<b>Morning</b>			
<b>Afternoon</b>			
<b>Evening</b>			

## **Stay occupied**

While it's important to work through grief, rather than try to ignore your feelings, it's helpful to focus on other things from time to time. After the initial activity of the funeral and any legal matters, you might feel like there's too much time on your hands. Alternatively, you might feel like all your time is now spent taking care of day-to-day tasks that were previously shared with your partner.

It might be some time before you feel ready for this, but taking time for yourself is very helpful when it comes to healing from grief – it helps you to move into this next phase of your life with a sense of purpose. If you can, look into new hobbies or activities, or try spending more time with friends. Even going to the cinema or spending an hour reading a book can be very helpful, and give your mind a rest from the negative feelings and thoughts you've been coping with.

Filling out the planner above will help you stay occupied in a healthy way while still leaving time to process your grief.

## **Reach out**

Many people worry about asking for help after the loss of a partner – they worry about 'being a bother' and inconveniencing people. However, your loved ones will likely want to help you, and it's very reassuring to know someone you care about will ask for help when needed.

Don't be afraid to reach out to your friends, neighbours, and family and tell them what you need, even if it's just a chat. Suggesting to people how they could help you could also be helpful for them, as it can be hard to know what to say or do when someone close to you is dealing with a loss.

If you haven't already got a mobile phone, it would be a good idea to get one and trade numbers with family members so they can reach you at any time. It can also be easier to text than call if you're discussing difficult feelings.

If your relative or friend has lost their partner, it could be helpful to stay in contact with them and offer to help with daily tasks they could be struggling with. If you feel able to, let your loved one know you're happy to help them, and they can reach out to you when needed.

## **Talk about closeness**

After the loss of a partner, it can be hard to talk about the loss of intimacy – not just in terms of sex, but also in terms of physical contact like hugs, kisses, and bed sharing.

Many people are embarrassed to discuss this issue, but the loss of intimacy and physical contact is very real. You shouldn't try to avoid thinking or talking about it, as these feelings can be a normal part of grief.

You may feel more comfortable discussing this element of loss with a professional, like a counsellor, than a loved one.

## **Resources for people who've lost a partner**

Cruse Scotland is a charity that offers counselling and support to anyone who's experienced a bereavement. You can phone them on 0845 600 2227. The Cruse phoneline is open:

- Monday: 10am-8pm
- Tuesday: 10am-8pm
- Wednesday: 10am-8pm
- Thursday: 10am-8pm
- Friday: 10am-4pm

You can also reach Cruse using webchat. The webchat service is available:

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[Visit the Cruse Scotland website](#)

## 7. Losing a parent

Losing a parent, whatever your relationship with them was like, is painful and distressing at any age. Even if you were expecting the loss, it's still very difficult to cope with.

The loss of a person who's known you for your entire life can make you feel as if part of your identity has gone. You may find yourself feeling insecure, and possibly experiencing the type of fear and confusion you felt when you were a child.

You might also feel as if part of your personal history has been lost, as a person who knew a great deal about you has passed. You may also feel as if part of your family history, and a significant connection to your family, has been lost.

A bereavement like this can be especially challenging if you've been caring for your parent – you might feel as if you've lost purpose. You could find yourself struggling to manage the spare time that's left in your day after funeral arrangements and legal matters are finished.

If you have children, explaining the loss of a grandparent can be very upsetting and difficult for everyone involved. Very young children in particular may be unable to understand, and handling your own grief and theirs at the same time is a lot for anyone to cope with.

Your relationship with siblings and surviving parents can also be challenged – at a time when emotions are high, and issues like caring responsibilities or wills might already have caused conflict, it's easy for arguments to happen.

If you're coping with some or all of these challenges, these things could help:

### **Remember it's okay to be upset**

Many people who lose their parents late in life feel like they shouldn't be as upset as they are, or shouldn't have feelings that remind them of childhood, because it's 'normal' to lose a parent at that age. You might feel that it's childish to be severely affected by the loss of a parent. However, this isn't the case.

Many people who lose their parents late in life feel like they shouldn't be as upset as they are, or shouldn't have feelings that remind them of childhood, because it's 'normal' to lose a parent at that age. You might feel that it's childish to be severely affected by the loss of a parent. However, this isn't the case.

It's normal to feel lost or vulnerable after losing a parent, so it's important to give yourself permission to feel that way. Don't feel like there's anything wrong with crying or taking some time for yourself if you need to.

Talk about your memories of your parent with loved ones, and share stories with people who also knew and cared about them. This will help you to remember that their influence on you is still there, and you're still the same person, even if your role in your family has changed slightly.

## **Stay occupied**

While it's important to work through grief, rather than try to ignore your feelings, it's helpful to focus on other things from time to time. As mentioned above, if you were acting as a carer for your parent, you might feel like there's now too much time on your hands.

It might take some time to feel ready for this, but taking time for yourself is very helpful when it comes to healing from grief – staying occupied makes intense feelings more manageable. If you can, look into new hobbies or activities, or try spending more time with friends. Even going to the cinema or spending an hour reading a book can be very helpful, and give your mind a rest from the negative feelings and thoughts you've been coping with.

It can be helpful to plan out your days a little in advance, so you have enjoyable things to look forward to and time to mentally prepare for less pleasant activities.

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## **Reach out**

A lot of people worry about reaching out for help after they've lost a parent. However, your loved ones will likely want to help you, and it's very reassuring to know someone you care about will ask for help when needed. Often people don't know what to do for someone who's lost a parent, so it's helpful for everyone if you're able to tell your loved ones what you need and how they can support you.

If you aren't able to get out and see people in person as much as you'd like, video chatting services are a great way to stay in touch (if you don't use them already). It can also be easier to discuss difficult emotions over text than over the phone or in person.

## **Talking to children about the loss**

Depending on your children's ages, you can tell them about the loss individually or as a group. If some children have responsibilities (such as jobs or study), or will need to change arrangements like exam dates, it's best to discuss these things with them individually after the initial conversation.

It would be a good idea to prepare for both practical and emotional questions, and if you can, practise dealing with different questions ahead of time. You should also be prepared for a range of emotional reactions, including your children perhaps not seeming upset at first.

There might be significant disruption to your daily life already, depending on the circumstances surrounding the loss of your parent – for example, you might be staying with them temporarily when they pass away. If that's the case, be aware that the disruption is likely to affect how your children respond to the news, and could make them feel more distressed and unsettled than they would at home.

Younger children, especially if this is their first experience of death, will likely ask questions and want to discuss the situation for some time after the initial loss.

Here are some tips to help with these conversations:

- listen to their questions and thoughts, even if it's difficult - in the long term, it will help you cope together
- answer their questions simply and honestly
- if you don't know the answer to a question, it's better to say so rather than make something up - say you'll try to find out the answer for them
- correct any misunderstandings they might have
- let them know how the situation affects your feelings and emotions, and what the loss is like for you
- ask them if they're worried about anything in particular

Depending on the children's ages, some of their questions might seem insensitive or upsetting. It's okay to be distressed by this – don't feel guilty if you have to leave the room or take some time for yourself after the conversation.

[The Sue Ryder Trust offers advice on taking children to funerals](#)

## **Relationships with other family members**

Family members may disagree and experience conflict after a loss. This is particularly likely when dealing with sensitive issues like funeral arrangements, wills, and taking over any caring responsibilities your loved one left behind.

It's important to talk openly with your family members during this difficult time, and do your best to include everyone in making decisions. Even if, for example, you don't like someone's idea for the funeral arrangements, it's important to hear them out and make a decision together.

Immediately after a loss, it's important to be aware that everyone shows their feelings differently. Try not to judge family members who are handling their grief differently to you, or who perhaps don't seem to be grieving at all. Everybody expresses these feelings in their own way, and there's no 'wrong' way to grieve.

It's also possible that your grief journey and that of your family members are moving at different speeds – if one person is starting to feel 'normal' again faster than

another, it can cause tension. It might seem like they don't care, or that they're being insensitive.

It might be helpful to talk about these differences in responses to grief and how it makes you feel – especially if it feels like a family member is being insensitive. It could be that they are just handling the situation in a different way to you. In that case, it's best if you can work together to find a way forward that works for you both. It could also be helpful to talk to a friend, or someone else who can give you a different point of view on how your relative is behaving.

If your family is struggling to communicate and there is a lot of conflict, [Cruse Scotland](#) can offer support and advice. If you're struggling to deal with legal matters around wills or caring responsibilities, family mediation could be helpful. You can reach out to [CALM Scotland](#) for help finding a mediator.

## **Resources for people who've lost a parent**

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You can also reach Cruse using webchat. The webchat service is available:

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- Saturday: 2pm-5pm

[Visit the Cruse Scotland website](#)

## **8. Losing a child**

Losing a child, at any age, is a devastating experience. It's particularly shocking because it can feel as if the 'natural order' of life has been disrupted.

Often, parents who have lost a child feel as if they're somehow to blame, or as if there's more they could have done to protect them. This depends a great deal on the circumstances of the loss – for example, if a child has had an accident – but these feelings can make it more difficult to begin recovering from grief and rebuilding your life.

In addition to the feelings of grief discussed earlier in this guide, many parents feel that life has lost its meaning, as the future they imagined for themselves and their child is gone.

There are resources available to help, including support groups and one-to-one counselling.

### **Relationship with your partner**

Losing a child can put a large amount of strain on a relationship – the combination of feelings of grief, and the challenges of handling practical steps like funeral arrangements, can make it hard for parents to move forward together.

This is particularly true if you and your partner grieve in different ways – for example if one person seems to be coping better than another. Alternatively, some people find that their relationship grows stronger as they cope with the loss together.

If you've lost your only child, this can be especially challenging for your relationship, as the structure of your family is completely changed. You may experience complicated feelings about the idea of having another child, or struggle to think about your relationship to each other as parents having changed.

For many people, relationship counselling is helpful in finding ways to support each other. Relationships Scotland offers counselling services across Scotland.

[Find a local relationship counselling service](#)

## **Other children in your family**

At any age, the loss of a sibling is very difficult. Depending on their ages, children could have difficulty understanding what's happened.

Some children might feel as if they should have died in place of their sibling. Children can also believe they're to blame in some way, even if it's not direct - for example, they may believe they lost their sibling because they were badly behaved. Family and individual counselling can be helpful in addressing these feelings - there's more information on sources of support below.

Older children, especially if they had a troubled or distant relationship with their sibling, could experience complex emotions around the loss. There's more information on complicated relationships before death later on in the guide.

When your other children still live at home, it can be challenging to imagine moving forward and being able to support each other, as you're likely to be grieving in different ways but spending a lot of time together. This loss will also change the structure of your family, and mean that your remaining children have to cope with changing roles in your family.

It's important to communicate clearly with each other, especially if your other children are young and this is their first experience of loss. You should also be prepared for a range of emotional reactions, including your other children perhaps not seeming upset at first.

Here are some tips to help with these conversations:

- listen to everyone's questions and thoughts, even if it's difficult - in the long term, it will help you cope together
- if you don't know the answer to a question, it's better to say so rather than make something up - say you'll try to find out the answer for them
- correct any misunderstandings they might have
- try to let them know how the situation affects your feelings and emotions, and what the loss is like for you, in a way they can understand

- ask them if they're worried about anything in particular

Depending on your family's ages, some questions and topics of conversation might seem insensitive or upsetting. It's okay to be distressed by this – don't feel guilty if you have to leave the room or take some time for yourself after a conversation.

For more help, your family can get counselling from The Spark, to help everyone discuss their feelings in a safe environment and find ways to cope together.

[Learn about family counselling from The Spark](#)

[Children who are grieving the loss of a sibling can get help from Child Bereavement UK](#)

[The Sue Ryder Trust offers advice on taking children to funerals](#)

## **Sources of support**

There are a number of sources of support available for parents who have lost a child. You can visit your local GP for recommendations, or use Scotland's Service Directory to find bereavement support services in your area.

[Search for a local GP](#)

[Search for local bereavement services](#)

Child Bereavement UK is an organisation that supports families both when a baby or child of any age dies or is dying, and when a child is facing bereavement. They provide face-to-face and telephone support, and run support groups in a number of areas.

You can phone Child Bereavement UK on 0800 02 888 40. The phonenumber is open Monday to Friday, from 9am to 5pm. There's also an email service you can reach at [support@childbereavementuk.org](mailto:support@childbereavementuk.org).

You can also reach Child Bereavement UK using webchat. The webchat service is available Monday to Friday, from 9am to 5pm.

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## **Miscarriages, stillbirths, and ectopic pregnancies**

If you've experienced an ectopic pregnancy, a miscarriage, or a stillbirth, there is help available with the next steps, as well as the grief and complicated emotions you and your family are likely to experience.

[Learn about coping with a miscarriage, stillbirth, or ectopic pregnancy](#)

[Learn more about ectopic pregnancy](#)

[Learn more about miscarriage](#)

[Learn more about stillbirth](#)

SANDS, the stillbirth and neonatal death charity, can offer support and advice.

[Visit the SANDS website](#)

For support, and ways to honour your child, you can get assistance from SiMBA.

[Visit the SiMBA website](#)

There's information on NHS inform that can help you and your family with the legal and practical steps that need to be taken after a stillbirth.

[Learn more about arrangements after the death of a baby](#)



## **9. Losing a friend or family member**

Losing someone you care about, at any age, is difficult to cope with. Even if you had time to prepare for the loss, it can be challenging to cope with grief and with your loved one's absence from your life.

### **Remember it's okay to be upset**

When you lose someone close to you, it can be hard to cope with the effect it has on your life. If someone's part of your day-to-day life, it can leave a significant gap that feels difficult to fill.

If you were close, you might struggle with the idea that the things you imagined doing together will no longer be possible. It can also be upsetting to think about your shared history – your stories, jokes, and memories – seeming to be gone.

It's important to remember that your grief is real and meaningful – many people might feel as though they have less of a 'right' to mourn, as they weren't a close relative or the spouse of the deceased, but that isn't the case. If you've made the choice to have this person in your life, and both of you made the choice to maintain the relationship, then the relationship is important. It's normal for you to feel strongly about your loss, and you should take time to recover from your grief.

### **Stay occupied**

While it's important to work through grief, rather than try to ignore your feelings, it's helpful to focus on other things from time to time. When you feel ready for it, taking time for yourself can be very helpful – it helps you to move into this next phase of your life with a sense of purpose. Even if you aren't sure you feel up to it, finding ways to stay occupied can improve your mood.

If you can, look into new hobbies or activities, or try spending more time with friends. Even going to the cinema or spending an hour reading a book can be very helpful, and give your mind a rest from the negative feelings and thoughts you've been coping with.

It can be helpful to plan out your days a little in advance, so you have enjoyable things to look forward to and time to mentally prepare for less pleasant activities.

You can use a planner to help you with this.

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- things you need to do, like visit the doctor or go shopping for food
- things you'd enjoy doing, like spending time with loved ones
- things you do regularly, like engage in a hobby
- one-off events that will be enjoyable, like going to see a film that's coming out this week

Try to complete a plan for a few days. You don't have to fill in every space, or complete it all at once. The planner can be quite flexible – it's okay for plans to change. Remember to set aside some time to relax and unwind – don't feel like you have to fill every hour of the day.

You'll find a planner to fill out below. If you save this file after filling out the boxes, you'll be able to go back and review the planner later.

Please note: if you use an iPhone, the only way to edit the planner is by using a PDF app on your device.

	<b>Day 1</b>	<b>Day 2</b>	<b>Day 3</b>
<b>Morning</b>			
<b>Afternoon</b>			
<b>Evening</b>			

## **Reach out**

A lot of people worry about reaching out for help after they've lost someone.

However, your loved ones will likely want to help you, and it's very reassuring to know someone you care about will ask for help when needed. If you have other friends or family members who were close to the deceased, it can be helpful to talk about your feelings and offer support to each other.

If you aren't able to get out and see people in person as much as you'd like, video chatting services are a great way to stay in touch (if you don't use them already). It can also be easier to discuss difficult emotions over text than over the phone or in person.

## **Resources for people who've lost a loved one**

Cruse Scotland is a charity that offers counselling and support to anyone who's experienced a bereavement. You can phone them on 0845 600 2227. The Cruse phoneline is open:

- Monday: 10am-8pm
- Tuesday: 10am-8pm
- Wednesday: 10am-8pm
- Thursday: 10am-8pm
- Friday: 10am-4pm

You can also reach Cruse using webchat. The webchat service is available:

- Thursday: 10am-1pm
- Saturday: 2pm-5pm

[Visit the Cruse Scotland website](#)

## 10. Things that can make grief worse

There are a number of things that can make grief more difficult to deal with. This can be due to the way your loved one died, or your relationship when they were alive. You might have difficulty understanding why you feel the way you do, and struggle to make sense of your emotions and your memories of the deceased.

The suggestions below are designed to offer some guidance for these situations, but it's important to seek help from your GP or a service like [Cruse Scotland](#) if you're struggling to cope.

### Traumatic loss

In some cases, grief can be made worse by additional trauma around the loss. This can happen when someone dies in a particularly distressing way – this can include being the victim of a crime, or being involved in an accident.

Losing someone in a traumatic way, whether you were present or were told about it later, can cause significant emotional distress and make it hard to move forward with your life. Conditions like [post-traumatic stress disorder \(PTSD\)](#) can affect people who have experienced traumatic loss.

If you're concerned about your mental health following a loss, visit your GP for support and information on the services available to you. You can find a local GP using Scotland's Service Directory.

[Learn more about traumatic loss](#)

[Find a GP near you](#)

[Learn more about PTSD](#)

[Get help from Cruse Scotland](#)

## **Losing someone to suicide**

If you lose someone to suicide, it can leave you asking a lot of questions, including wanting to know why it happened. It can be hard to stop searching for answers and thinking about their death. Many people wonder if the suicide had something to do with them, even if that's unlikely to be the case. People take their own lives for a variety of reasons, and it's most likely there were a number of problems that led this person to end their life.

You might also feel shame when it comes to discussing what happened, and feel unable to reach out for help, due to the stigma that's often attached to suicide. However, this stigma is unfair and inaccurate – mental health problems are as real as physical health problems, and people who have lost a loved one to suicide should be able to seek help without worrying about judgement.

Many people experience other difficult feelings, including guilt at the thought they could have prevented their loved one's death. Even if there was nothing you could have done, it's common to blame yourself or think "what if?" In reality, as mentioned above, suicides don't usually happen as a result of just one person, event, or problem in someone's life.

There are other complex feelings you might experience after losing someone to suicide – you might feel angry with them, hurt that they didn't reach out to you for help, or rejected at the idea your loved one "chose" to leave.

When dealing with this particular type of traumatic grief, it helps to talk through your feelings, once you feel ready to do so. Services like Cruse Scotland can help, and you can reach out to local services for advice and support too.

The Scottish Association for Mental Health (SAMH) has more information on coping after a suicide.

[Visit the SAMH website for more information](#)

[Find a GP near you](#)

[Get help from Cruse Scotland](#)

## **Unexpected death**

The shock of losing someone unexpectedly can make bereavement more difficult. You might feel overwhelmed by suddenly having to deal with funeral arrangements and legal matters. It might feel as though your life has suddenly and completely changed, and you haven't had a chance to prepare yourself or find a way of coping. Many people also struggle with being unable to say goodbye to their loved one, which is discussed in the next section.

Unexpected losses cause severe distress, even if they aren't the type of traumatic loss described in the previous section. If you feel you need help coping, visit your GP for support and information on the services available to you. You can find a local GP using Scotland's Service Directory. You can also reach out to services like Cruse Scotland for advice on coping with a sudden bereavement.

[Find a GP near you](#)

[Get help from Cruse Scotland](#)

## **Not getting to say goodbye**

Not having the chance to say goodbye to a loved one can make it particularly hard to grieve – there might have been things you wanted to say to them, and it's hard to cope with being unable to do so.

Some people find different ways of easing this feeling – for example, visiting and talking to their loved one's grave, talking to photos of them, or taking part in a memorial. You might find it helpful to organise a gathering or memorial with others who were close to the deceased, and talk about your loved one and what you'd like to say to them.

Alternatively, if you'd prefer to do this privately, you can. Whether that means visiting their grave or writing a letter, it helps to express your feelings and work out what you want to say, and how you would have chosen to say goodbye if you could.

## **Delayed grief**

In some cases, people are unable to feel grief fully after a loss. This can happen for a number of reasons, including not having the time or opportunity because you were looking after other people. Feelings of grief can then affect you later on in life and feel overwhelming and unexpected.

Delayed grief for one loss can be triggered by another loss later on in life, making it more difficult to cope as you have to grieve for more than one person.

It's never too late to grieve, even if it's a long time after the event. Having support and guidance while you work through these feelings, and possibly memories from many years ago, is important.

[Contact Cruse Scotland for help and support](#)

If the person you lost was a child, you could also [contact Child Bereavement UK](#)

## **Complicated relationships before death**

If you had a difficult relationship with someone before their death – due to conflict, distance, or other circumstances – it can be hard to cope with your feelings. You might find yourself feeling angry or upset with the person, and feel unable to tell anyone about these emotions. You could feel ashamed that you aren't "upset enough" or grieving "properly".

You might feel surprised by how strong your feelings are, and how much you wish the relationship had been different – closer, more positive, or more supportive, for example.

Talking through these complex emotions will help you to move on in a healthy way. It can help to talk to someone who knew you both and was familiar with your relationship, and who you can talk to without feeling judged. You can also seek counselling through Cruse Scotland or local services.

[Contact Cruse Scotland](#)

[Search for a local GP](#)



## **11. Other ways of dealing with your feelings**

In addition to the advice discussed in previous sections, there are other ways of dealing with the feelings of bereavement and grief.

### **Religion and faith**

If you have a religion or faith, there are many ways it can help you through this time. Different rituals and practices for grieving can provide an important sense of comfort and offer closure and opportunities to say goodbye.

Your religious community and spiritual leader can provide important sources of support. This is true even if you haven't practised in some time, or don't spend a great deal of time participating in events outside of worship. Reach out to your local spiritual leader for advice on resources and support around you – they can often provide valuable counselling themselves.

Many people with religious beliefs feel conflicted about grieving – as if the belief that their loved one is in a better place should reduce the pain they're experiencing. Grief comes from the absence of your loved one, and missing them doesn't make your religious beliefs any less real or important.

Similarly, it's normal for people who have lost a loved one to feel angry or question their faith. This isn't something to feel guilty about, or feel pressured to resolve – it's part of the grieving process. Talking to someone, whether it's a spiritual advisor or a secular counsellor, can be helpful.

### **Peer support**

Many people find support groups, either online or in person, very helpful. Talking to others who have similar experiences can make you feel less alone, and it can be useful to discuss and share coping strategies.

## **Finding support**

Your GP can refer you to local bereavement support services. You can also find local services that don't need a referral using [Scotland's Service Directory](#).

There are a number of online peer support services that can be useful, particularly if you live in an area where transport to in-person groups is difficult. Resources include:

[Side by Side](#) – a moderated community for anyone seeking support or conversation around mental health.

[SANE](#) – an online community for discussing mental health and seeking support.

## **Getting the most out of peer support**

In order to make sure a support group is right for you, it can help to ask the group leader or moderator about it before you attend or sign up online.

### Things to ask about include:

How long the service is accessible for – is there a set number of sessions you can attend?

Are the sessions at set times? In-person groups are likely to be scheduled in advance, but online support can vary.

Can you bring someone with you to an in-person group?

How do you find and access the venue for an in-person support group?

Are there ground rules and guidelines for taking part? If so, what are they?

What are you likely to be asked to do in the sessions? For example, are you required to participate at every session?

What happens if you have a concern, complaint, or question about the group or one of its members?

Many online groups have list of rules and guidelines that you can read ahead of time. Getting the answers to these questions, and any others, ahead of time can

make you feel more comfortable about joining a group, and let you know what to expect at your first session.

## **Therapy**

Therapy can be very helpful for coping with the lasting effects of grief, and provide a safe place where you can talk through your feelings.

These resources on NHS inform will help you to find the right kind of therapy for you, and learn how to access it in your area.

[Talking therapies explained](#)

[Benefits of talking therapy](#)

[Find the right therapist](#)

## **Taking time for your feelings**

If you're struggling to cope with your emotions, trying to push them away or force yourself to feel something different can be unhelpful. Instead, it can help to sit with your feelings, think about them, and find a way of expressing them.

Many people find writing helpful for this. Use a notepad and pen, or your device, and write about your feelings when they start to become overwhelming. It can help to keep the notepad nearby throughout the day, so you can write about how your feelings change. You can also note the effects of different activities on your mood, and write about times when you were reminded of your loved one. If you find this helpful, you could also keep a journal and write about your day every night before bed.

If you'd prefer not to write about your feelings, you could use a voice recorder (or a voice recording app on your phone) and record an audio diary. You could also take photographs or make videos. The important thing is to spend time with your feelings and be aware that they're part of your grief journey.

## **12. Living with grief**

Learning to live with grief while moving forward with your life can be difficult, but there are ways to care for yourself and make the next part of your grief journey easier and less painful.

### **Significant dates**

After experiencing a bereavement, many people have difficulty coping with holidays, birthdays, and the anniversary of their loved one's death. This is particularly true for the 'firsts' after someone has passed away – the first Christmas, for example, or the first anniversary of your loss. Here are some ideas for helping you to get through the difficult days:

#### **Honour your loved one**

It might be tempting to pretend everything is fine and “put on a brave face”, but you will likely feel better if you take some time to acknowledge your feelings on significant dates. Take some time to think about your loved one and how they would have spent the day, and talk about them with the people around you. You may wish to go to the grave or a memorial site and lay some flowers – this can be particularly helpful on the anniversary of their passing.

#### **Decide how to celebrate, if you want to**

If your loss is recent, the thought of celebrating a holiday like Christmas or your birthday can feel like too much. If so, it's okay if you want to 'cancel' the day. Talk to your family and decide together – you might decide to have a smaller celebration with only those closest to you, for example. Or you might decide to have the same type of celebration you usually do, but take some time to visit your loved one's grave. There's really no right or wrong way to handle holidays, as long as everyone is able to celebrate, and grieve, in their own way.

#### **Find ways to lift your mood**

On significant dates in particular, you might struggle with feelings of grief being

stronger than they have been in some time. The day can feel like a painful reminder of your loss. While it's important to acknowledge your feelings, it can also be helpful to lean on sources of support and find ways of lifting your mood. This can include planning to spend time with friends and family, arranging a session with your therapist, or simply watching a movie or TV show that will make you laugh. If you plan to do something like this ahead of time, it can make the day feel easier to cope with.

## **Asking for help**

After losing someone close to you, it can be hard to reach out and tell people what you need. The help you need can be in the form of emotional support, or it could be practical things, like assistance with fixing something in your home. You might find it helpful to make a list of the people that you feel comfortable with asking for help and support, and keeping it close by. It can also be a good idea to think about what you need before reaching out, and perhaps write it down.

Preparation can be very useful if you need help with matters related to work or health. For example, if you need to request additional time off from work, read your company's policy on bereavement and compassionate leave beforehand and write down what you'd like to say when making your request. If you're asking your GP for advice on bereavement services in your area, make a note of the kind of services you think could help you the most.

Reaching out for help can feel difficult at first, but as you do it more often, you'll find it gets easier. Your loved ones will likely be glad that you feel able to reach out.

## **Remembering your loved one**

As you move forward in your grief journey, you could find comfort in remembering your loved one and keeping their memory alive. There are a number of ways you could do this, including:

## **Talk about your loved one**

You don't have to do it all the time, but it will help to talk about them the same way you talk about anyone else you care about. Share funny stories, phrases they used to say, and memories about their life with the people around you.

## **Enjoy your memories**

Look at photos, watch videos, and listen to any recordings you have of them. You might enjoy making a scrapbook of memories, or putting a few photos in frames around your home.

## **Social media**

Decide what to do with social media. If your loved one had social media accounts, you might be able to have them memorialised, so you can still view their profile and read about how others remember them. You can also request the accounts be deleted if you prefer. Different social media sites have different policies, so it's best to look at the options for each one and decide what you want to do.

## **13. Moving forward**

As time goes on and you begin to work out who you are in this new phase of your life, it helps to have positive things to focus on. There are a number of ways to make sure you're living well as you continue to grieve and remember your loved one.

### **Keeping active**

Exercising, or just spending time outdoors, is great for both mental and physical health. Just going for a walk outside a few times a week can really boost your mood and overall fitness.

[Learn more about keeping active here](#)

## **Hobbies**

Hobbies can be very helpful, and make you feel productive. You might not be the same person you were before the loss, but spending time on the activities you're passionate about will help you feel more comfortable with who you are now. If there's a hobby you've always wanted to try, search online for groups in your area that will help you develop your new skill.

## **Socialising**

It can be difficult to reach out to friends and family members when you're grieving. As you move forward in your grief journey, it's important to stay in touch with people. If you haven't been in contact with friends for some time, reach out. Keeping a support network of friends and family around will help you as you work out what this new phase of your life will look like.

## **Remember to relax**

Don't feel you need to be busy all the time. It's important to have a sense of purpose and keep your mind and body active, but that doesn't mean you need to be constantly moving. It's okay to rest and do nothing sometimes.

If you're having difficulty working out how to spend your time, you can use the planner available in sections 6, 7 and 9.

## **Alcohol and drugs**

Avoid drugs and alcohol, especially if you're feeling low. People who have experienced a bereavement can be vulnerable to problem alcohol and drug use, and using substances won't help you deal with the pain in the long term.

If you're planning to drink, it's best to do it in moderation – [read more about having a responsible relationship with alcohol here](#).

[This video from Marie Curie](#) has advice and stories about grieving from other people who have experienced a bereavement.

## 14. Next steps

Keep using the techniques you found helpful from this guide – they should continue to benefit you. If there are some things that you didn't find helpful to begin with, stick with them – learning to live with a bereavement is a process, and there's no time limit on your grief journey.

### Further help

If you're feeling distressed, in a state of despair, suicidal or in need of emotional support you can phone NHS 24 on 111. For an emergency ambulance phone 999.

If you feel you need more help with your mental health, try speaking to your GP, or [search for mental health and wellbeing services in your area](#).

For information and advice when you're feeling down, you can phone [Breathing Space](#) on 0800 83 85 87.

The Breathing Space phonenumber is available:

- 24 hours at weekends (6pm Friday to 6am Monday)
- 6pm to 2am on weekdays (Monday to Thursday)

If you found this guide helpful and would like to do more work like this, [Living Life](#) offers a range of structured psychological interventions and therapies to improve mental health and wellbeing. This service is appointment-based and specifically for low mood, or mild/moderate depression or anxiety. Living Life are open Monday to



Friday, from 1pm to 9pm, and you can phone them on 0800 328 9655 for an assessment appointment.

## **Learn more**

For more information and support coping with a bereavement, [visit the Cruse Scotland website](#).

For more information on mental health and coping after a loved one's suicide, [visit the SAMH website](#).

To find more sources of support and advice, [visit the Good Life, Good Death, Good Grief website](#).

You can also visit some other parts of NHS inform:

[Legal, practical, and emotional advice on coping with death and bereavement](#)

[Learn about dealing with traumatic events](#)

[Work through a self-help guide for depression](#)

[Work through a self-help guide for anxiety](#)