

Help for you following a bereavement

Torbay and South Devon NHS Foundation Trust
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**If you require this booklet in another format
i.e. large print or another language please
contact the Customer Service Centre.**

Please accept our deepest sympathy for your loss at this sad time. The death of someone you love can be a devastating experience and even if you knew they were dying, you may still feel a sense of shock when they die. You may experience sadness, anxiety, anger and guilt, as well as blaming others. Common physical responses can be of overwhelming tiredness and difficulty in sleeping, generalised aches and pains with possible changes in appetite, a feeling of sickness and a vulnerability to infections. If these symptoms continue and start impacting on your daily routines you may need to seek medical support/advice.

When someone dies there are many decisions and arrangements to be made. This booklet aims to provide some useful help and advice during the early days of your bereavement.

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What to do first

Collecting the Medical Certificate of Cause of Death (MCCD)

This certificate **is not** the official death certificate but you will need it later to register the death with the Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages (pages 5-8). The Registrar keeps the MCCD and issues the formal death certificate.

Where you collect the MCCD from will depend on whether the death occurred in a hospital or at home / in another community setting.

For deaths occurring in a community hospital

Providing there is no Coroner's investigation (see page 4), you will be given the MCCD by the Hospital. It is usually available on the next working day. **To avoid a wasted journey to the Hospital it is important to telephone the administration office, or ask someone to do so on your behalf, after 10.30am** (or after 11.00am following a Bank Holiday) to check if it is ready.

Community Hospital	Telephone Numbers
Brixham Hospital	01803 881 399
Dawlish Hospital	01626 868 500
Newton Abbot Hospital	01626 324 500
Totnes Hospital	01803 862 622

For deaths occurring at home or in another community setting (e.g. residential home, nursing home).

Providing there is no Coroner's investigation (see page 4), you will need to collect a MCCD from the GP of the person who has died.

The MCCD is usually available on the next working day.

However, it is important to telephone the GP Surgery, or ask someone to do so on your behalf, after 10.30 a.m. (or after 11.00 a.m. following a Bank Holiday) to check if the certificate is ready for collection.

For deaths occurring at Torbay Hospital

If the person has died in Torbay Hospital the MCCD will need to be collected from the Bereavement Office there. Torbay Hospital produces a similar booklet which gives more details in respect of a death which has occurred there. Torbay Hospital's Bereavement office can be contacted on 01803 654818.

Coroner's Post Mortem

Occasionally, deaths have to be reported to the Coroner who decides if there should be a post mortem. If this is the case, the Coroner's officer will contact you and give advice as to what you should do and when you can register the death with the Registrar. In this instance the Coroner, not the GP, will issue the MCCD and there may be a small delay before you can proceed. The Coroner's officer is based at Plymouth and can be contacted on 01752 487405.

Request for a Hospital Post Mortem

Occasionally the doctor who issued the MCCD may ask your permission for a post mortem examination to be carried out to assist in medical knowledge and teaching.

The post mortem will be explained to you and you will be asked to give your consent as, in this instance, it is entirely your decision whether you grant your permission for this. If you agree, you will be asked to sign a form. The examination should not delay the funeral arrangements.

Clothing and valuables

If the person died in hospital any property and valuables not taken away at the time of death may be collected at a later stage. Contact the hospital concerned on their main number (see page 14) and ask for the Ward Administrator. He or she will be able to advise you where and when to collect items.

Last respects

If you wish to pay your last respects we recommend you contact your funeral director who will be able to arrange this for you.

Registering the death

When you have been given the MCCD by the hospital or GP practice you can make arrangements to register the death. You have up to five days from the date of death to do this. You must make an appointment to register the death.

The MCCD will have been given to you together with a list of who can register the death and what information the registrar will need.

Where the death occurred will determine which office you need to contact to register the death. **Remember** to call the relevant register office to make an appointment to register the death (see page 6)

Where the death occurred	Who to contact
Ashburton	Devon Register Office Old Forde House Brunel Road Newton Abbot TQ12 4XX Tel: 0345 1551002
Buckfastleigh	
Bovey Tracey	
Dartmouth	Monday to Thursday (9am – 4.30pm)
Dawlish	
Kingsbridge	Friday (9am – 4pm)
	Monday to Friday closed between 1pm – 2pm
Newton Abbot	There are sub offices at Totnes and Tavistock with limited hours. The Devon Register Office will be able to provide you with information regarding these sub offices.
Tavistock	
Teignmouth	
Totnes	
	By appointment only
Brixham	Torbay Register Office Tel: 018303 207130 www.torbay.gov.uk
Paignton	Paignton Library and Information Centre, Great Western Road Paignton TQ4 5AG
Torquay	Monday – Friday 9.30 – 3.30 pm
Once a week, the registrar also attends Torquay Library 9.45am -3.30pm. This is strictly by appointment only. Please contact the Torbay Register Office for more information	

You will need to give the Registrar the following documents:

- The Medical Certificate of Cause of Death (MCCD)

You will also need to give the Registrar:

- The date and place of the death of the one who has died.
- Their last (usual) address, this may be a Residential or Nursing home.
- Their first names and surname (and maiden name if appropriate).
- Their date and place of birth.
- Their occupation (or former occupation if retired).
- If the person was married, the name, occupation and date and place of birth of their marriage partner.
- Whether the person who has died was receiving a pension or allowance from public funds.

It is important to have as much information as possible to give the Registrar. However, if you are unsure of any details do not delay in seeing the Registrar, as they will be able to advise you.

The Registrar will then give you two things:

1. A Certificate for Burial or Cremation (also known as the Green Form) to give to the Funeral Director.

If the Coroner has been involved he or she will give you an Order for Burial or a Certificate of Cremation, which again needs to be given to the Funeral Director.

2. A Certificate of Registration of Death (usually known as the Death Certificate). You will need this document to send to the department of Work and Pensions. If you wish you may purchase certified copies of the Registration of Death. This may be helpful in dealing with financial and other matters relating to the person's death you are registering. We recommend you obtain at least one copy and the Registrar will explain the costs of this to you.

Arranging the Funeral

Following a death it is important that you contact a Funeral Director of your choice as soon as you are able so they can start making preliminary arrangements for you. You can do this even before the MCCD has been issued. Funeral Directors are a valuable source of information for you and most Funeral Directors are available seven days a week and will usually be happy to visit you in your home. They can advise you on registering the death and other issues. Costs of funerals do vary and you may wish to ask for a brochure and price list or compare the costs before making a decision. A funeral can take place in the Funeral Director's own Chapel. If you wish, the Funeral Director can organise the cremation without your attendance and this can reduce costs considerably.

The deceased may have already made arrangements and/or payment for a funeral. This information may be kept with their Will or personal documents or with their solicitor. If you think this may be the case but are unable to locate information regarding this you may like to check with the local Funeral Directors.

If you receive State Benefits you can apply for help in paying for funeral costs. You can obtain **form SF200 (Funeral)**

Payment from the Social Fund) from your local Department of Work and Pensions Office or Job Centre Plus. Please check what costs the Social Fund will cover.

You may wish to organise things by yourself but please consider asking for help from relatives or a close and trusted friend. They will want to help and support you in any way they can.

What else has to be done?

Things to send back

You should return the following, with a note of explanation and the date of death with each of the documents:

- Order books, payable orders or giro-cheques to the social security office or other office which issued the payment
- Driving licence
- Passport
- Membership cards of clubs and associations
- Library books and tickets
- Any NHS equipment such as wheelchairs, hearing aids, artificial limbs etc.

People to tell

- Local social services if the person was getting meals-on-wheels, home help or day centre care
- Inland Revenue
- Employer and trade union
- Car insurance company
- Gas company
- Electricity company
- Telephone company
- Water company
- Council tax/housing benefit office
- Bank
- Building society

When someone dies

The death of someone you love is a devastating experience and can bring about stronger emotions than most people have ever felt before.

Even if you have known that your loved one was dying there is still a sense of shock when the death occurs. You may feel cold, numb, empty and unreal for a time. Following this, you may experience such emotions as anger, panic, guilt and sadness. This may also be accompanied by periods of restlessness, especially at night when it is difficult to sleep. You may also react by becoming irritable or critical of yourself and others, which can lead to feelings of despair. All these are natural reactions to bereavement and are not a sign that you cannot cope anymore.

During this time, you may need the support of others. Do not be afraid to speak about your feelings to someone. This is often a difficult time for family and friends too. They may be afraid to speak about your loved one for fear of upsetting you. It may be necessary for you to take the first step; let them know you want to talk and would like their support.

You might also wish to seek the support of a minister or priest regardless of your religious beliefs. The hospital's chaplain can put you in touch with a minister of your own denomination. Please contact the relevant hospital and ask to speak to the Chaplain.

Grief is a very individual process and we can each react differently so do not feel that you should necessarily experience the feelings we have described. What is important is that you allow yourself time to grieve and come to terms with your bereavement in whatever way is right for you.

In time, the pain will hopefully begin to ease and you will find yourself being able to remember your loved one without becoming too distressed. This is a good sign, and a clear indication that you are beginning to come to terms with your loss.

There is a national charitable organisation known as CRUSE, which was founded to help the bereaved. They can offer help with emotional and practical situations and also arrange social activities if you would find this helpful. The telephone number of the Devon area is 03003 305466

Grief in Children and Adolescents

Generally children do not understand the meaning of death until they are three or four years old. However, they feel the sense of loss of a close relative or friend in much the same way as adults. Even in infancy, it is clear that children grieve and feel great distress. Children experience the passage of time differently to adults and can appear to overcome grief more quickly. However, children in their early school years may need reassuring that they are not responsible for the death of a close relative as they often blame themselves for one reason or another.

It is important that the grief of a young person is not overlooked as they will often not want to burden parents by talking about their feelings. It can be helpful to include them in the arrangements. Remember to tell schools, clubs etc. about the child's loss as their behaviour may change; they may be angry or withdrawn.

After the funeral

Settling the deceased person's estate can be confusing, time consuming and distressing. If you have been named as the Executor in the Will it is your responsibility to see that the person's wishes, as you understand them, are carried out. This will include payment of funeral expenses, debts and taxes, as well as the disposal of their possessions and assets.

To undertake these tasks you will need to obtain Probate for the Estate through the Probate Registry and this can be done quite simply (for telephone number see page 14). This can be more cost effective than using a solicitor. However, if it seems likely that the Estate could be complex it may be worth using solicitors and accountants to deal with this. Fees will be charged for these services and they will come out of the Estate. Make it clear precisely what work they are required to do. Whilst this is going on, access to monies in the Estate can be difficult but a solicitor may be able to arrange alternative financial support and sometimes banks and building societies may write a cheque from the Estate to cover funeral expenses even before Probate is granted.

For those who have been close relatives or friends the process of adjustment to their loss may take a while. Try to avoid making hasty decisions during this time, especially if you are living alone.

Remembering

Everyone will have their own way to remember the person who has died. Talk about them and mention their name often and put emphasis on the good things that happened when they were alive. Members of the family or close friends may appreciate a photograph or small object as a reminder. Most important of all will be your own memories.

Useful telephone numbers

Brixham Hospital	01803 881 399
Dawlish Hospital	01626 868 500
Totnes Hospital	01803 862 622
Newton Abbot Hospital	01626 324 500
Samaritans	116123 (any phone mobile or landline free phone number)
Cruse	03003 305466
Age UK Devon (Information and Advice Line)	0333 2412350
The Compassionate Friends Helpline (Nationwide self-help organisation for bereaved parents)	0345 1232304
Work and Pensions Helpline	0800 0556688
Veterans UK Helpline	0808 1914218
Probate Exeter	0117 3664960

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www.tsdhc.nhs.uk

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(For advice & support, NHS equipment returns or to cancel home help or community meals on wheels etc)

From the Rebecca Notebook by Daphne du Maurier

"I would say to those who mourn - and I can only speak from experience - look upon each day that comes as a challenge, as a test of courage. The pain will come in waves, some days worse than others for no apparent reason. Accept the pain, do not suppress it. Never attempt to hide the grief from yourself."

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