

Care & Inform

# Support for Grieving in Exceptional Times



Irish  
Hospice  
Foundation



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# Introduction

Irish Hospice Foundation (IHF) is a national charity that addresses dying, death, and bereavement in Ireland. We offer support and guidance for people of every age and stage of grief.

Everyone experiences death through bereavement and we believe support in grief should be available for all who need it. Being there for those who are grieving and understanding their needs is a key pillar of our work.

As a national leader in the development of bereavement care, we are working in collaboration with bereavement care providers and charities to provide information, resources and programmes for individuals, families, communities and workplaces.

We hope this collection of information gives you some guidance and support as you or someone you care about navigates their grief at this time.

Our **Bereavement Support Line**, in partnership with the HSE, is open Monday-Friday 10am-1pm on 1800 80 70 77. It is there to provide connection, comfort and support to those who are grieving and those who care about someone who is grieving in these exceptional times.



# Acknowledging and coping with grief from a COVID-19 death



## The world is reeling from the impact of COVID-19.

If your loved one has died due to COVID-19, you may feel your own world has turned upside down.

You may be experiencing different feelings. You may feel out of control and upset. You may feel abandoned, isolated or lonely. You could feel angry or let down, you may feel afraid. You may feel that this is unfair. You may even feel both relieved that the worst has happened and is now over, and guilty for this relief. You may jump from one feeling to another, the nature of grief is that it shifts and changes.

Talking to others about what you are experiencing and feeling may help. You may also experience people seeking ways to be kind to you and being concerned about you as you mourn. People may acknowledge your pain and seek to comfort you, even if they cannot visit. Try to keep connected with people as much as you can.

**A relationship  
is made up of all of  
life's shared times, this  
can never be taken away  
from you.**

## On unexpected death

The nature of the COVID-19 illness is that it comes on relatively suddenly and in that way it is unexpected. You may feel unprepared for the loss of your loved one and also experience shock.

It may take you some time to fully realise what has happened and what it means for you now and in the future. You may find yourself going over the events and re-telling the story of what has happened. Talking about what has happened is a way of coming to terms with its reality.

After a death, family and friends may seek to come together and share their experiences and loss. Due to the current restrictions, coming together physically will not be possible. However, you can connect with others outside your household in different ways such as, by telephone, text, email, video call, or in groups through video conference calls. Do try to stay connected.

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## On not being there

You or your family members may not have been able to spend much time with your loved one prior to the death, or be present at the time of your loved one's death.

This may make it more difficult to feel that the death is real or bring up feelings of regret, anger or even guilt.

It can be hard to find meaning and peace/comfort at times like this. The COVID-19 pandemic has meant people like yourself have had to make very difficult sacrifices to protect the health of others. While you will of course be thinking about all that happened including death, try not to dwell on these painful aspects. A relationship is made up of all of life's shared times, this can never be taken away from you.

## On saying goodbye

The burial or cremation convened for your loved one will not be what you would have planned. Try to consider it as a step along the way.

In the meantime, take time to find ways of saying a private goodbye. This may be through prayer and reflection, through writing to the person or organising mementos and photographs of them into a display.

Perhaps set a time aside when family members and extended friends will light a candle in their own homes, perhaps while reading a special poem or prayer, or listening to some music that was important to your loved ones.

## On looking after yourself

These are very exceptional times and a hard time to be grieving.

- You need to consider the most basic things, so eat well and stay hydrated. Try to get a little bit of regular exercise each day – even if that is moving around in your own home or garden.
- Even though you may not feel like it, get up at a normal time, try to keep to a routine.

- Keep as connected as you can and talk with people about how you're doing.
- Look especially to connect with people who will accept you as you are at this time, and allow you to be yourself – however that is (sad, relieved, up and down).
- Grief takes time, and it changes over time. If you are concerned about how you're doing seek information (we have indicated some Useful Resources below), talk to your GP or contact our national Bereavement Support Line 1800 80 70 77.

**We offer you our condolences and sincerely hope that you will have the help and support you need over the coming time.**

## Useful Resources

- National Bereavement Support Line (Freephone, 10am to 1pm, Monday to Friday) <https://hospicefoundation.ie/bereavementsupportline>
- Bereaved.ie
- Minding your mental health during the Covid-19 pandemic (HSE Mental Health) <https://www2.hse.ie/wellbeing/mental-health/covid-19/bereavement-and-grief-during-the-coronavirus-pandemic.html>
- Children and grief [www.childhoodbereavement.ie](http://www.childhoodbereavement.ie)
- Death and bereavement during COVID-19 (Citizen information) [https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/death/death\\_and\\_bereavement\\_during\\_covid19.html](https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/death/death_and_bereavement_during_covid19.html)
- COVID-19 (Coronavirus): A guide for the bereaved (Department of Health) <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/f43301-covid-19-coronavirus-a-guide-for-the-bereaved/>

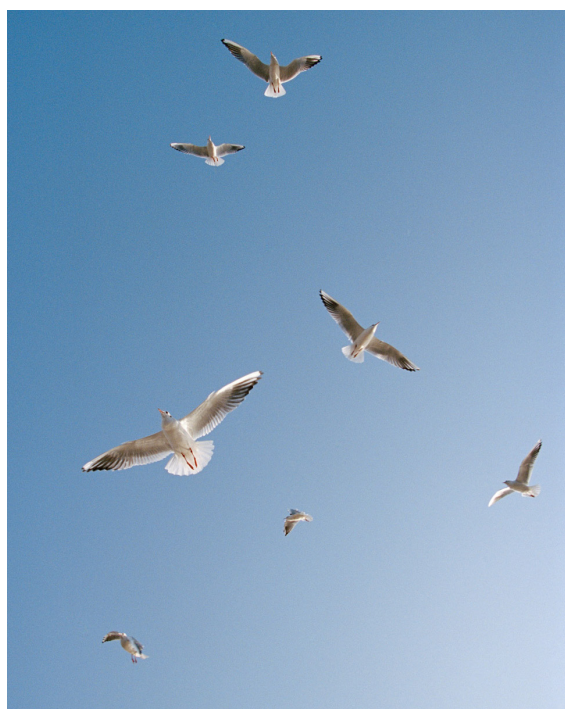
# Grieving in exceptional times

## What is Grief?

A death in your family or in your circle of friends is always difficult. You may feel shocked, upset, tearful or distressed. You may find it difficult to concentrate and to realise what has happened. You may be angry or frightened. These experiences are particularly confusing and intense in the early days and weeks of a bereavement.

In Ireland, we have a long tradition of coming together in the days after a death. We all understand the rituals that happen around a death, and they often provide comfort. These may involve a wake, a funeral, a burial or cremation. There may be a gathering or meal after the funeral and later, a month's mind.

People have found arranging a funeral, meeting with family and friends to be helpful. We share stories and memories about the person who died. We laugh and we cry. We pay tribute to the person who died through our mourning.



The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the traditional ways we mark our grief. For the moment, it's not possible to come together and to gather in one location. It's 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.**

## 10 ways to support yourself when you are grieving

1. Try not to become emotionally isolated. Even if people cannot visit you, allow them to offer their condolences and support in different ways; you may receive texts, emails and messages through social media as well as phone calls.
2. Try to allow yourself to feel and react in a way that is natural to you. We sometimes say that 'grief is the price we pay for love', and there is no doubt but it is painful.
3. Keep conversations going with the people who are closest to you, your family or close circle of friends.
4. Even if those closest to you are not physically near, reach out to them and make sure to telephone someone each day.
5. Having 'conversations' through WhatsApp or through Facebook can mean there is a regular flow of communication through the day. They can remind you that people are thinking about you.

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6. Remember to eat and to keep hydrated. Your body has needs and grief is hard work.
7. Keeping some routine can be helpful and mealtimes play an important part in this. So too, does bed-time and getting-up time. Try to stick to your normal routine as much as possible. Try getting out in the garden, if possible.
8. If there are children in your family, check-in with them often. Answer their questions honestly. Don't 'fob them off'. There are some useful resources below.
9. Children may appear sad and happy in the space of minutes. It can be likened to jumping in and out of the puddles. Let children set their own pace.
10. Try to limit how much news and social media you consume – when you are feeling very sad, regular news can be distressing.

**Remember, in grief you can only do the best you can, try to be tolerant and kind to yourself.**

### Five ways to help others who are grieving

1. To help a grieving friend, think about how you might send your condolences – write a card, complete an online condolence such as on [RIP.ie](https://www.rip.ie), send a text or telephone. You might share photos or drop food and little gifts at a person's door to offer comfort.
2. Reach out, make yourself available not just in the short term but in the weeks and months to come.



### Useful Resources

Some useful websites and resources include;

- Our Bereavement Support Line  
It provides a confidential space for people to speak about their experience or to ask questions relating to the death of someone during the COVID-19 pandemic or a previous bereavement that is more difficult at this time. It's a national freephone service 1800 80 70 77 available from 10am to 1pm, Monday to Friday.
- Care and Inform series  
Other resources in the Care & Inform series that you might find helpful include information on supporting children and teenagers; supporting employees and colleagues; and planning a funeral during COVID. <https://hospicefoundation.ie/our-supports-services/bereavement-loss-hub/grieving-during-covid-19/>
- Bereaved.ie
- HSE minding your mental health <https://www2.hse.ie/wellbeing/mental-health/covid-19/bereavement-and-grief-during-the-coronavirus-pandemic.html>
- What's Your Grief (USA) <https://whatsyourgrief.com/mental-health-and-coronavirus/>
- Cruse Bereavement Care (UK) <https://www.cruse.org.uk/get-help/coronavirus-bereavement-and-grief>
- Irish Childhood Bereavement Network <https://www.childhoodbereavement.ie>

# Grief at work during COVID-19

## Supporting Staff Bereaved during COVID-19



### Grieving during COVID-19

Grieving can be challenging at the best of times but the COVID-19 pandemic has made things more difficult for those employees whose loved ones or friends have died.

With public health and social distancing restrictions people may not have been able to:

- visit their loved one when they were sick.
- be with them when they died.
- see the body of their loved one before burial.
- have a traditional funeral service.
- experience physical comfort and support to/ from family and friends.

In addition, they may be sick themselves and/ or have to self-isolate. They may also be worried about infecting others. Employees may also be working from home making it more difficult to avail of the spontaneous support of colleagues.

These realities can make the experience of grieving more challenging for the employee.

Regardless of when a death occurs, and whether it is from COVID-19 or something else, for that employee, their world stops. Death is no longer a statistic – it's their family member, friend or colleague.

### How to respond - compassion trumps policy and procedure

We know from research (See Note 1) that what employees value most from their employer when they're grieving is to be treated with compassion.

Policies around leave entitlements and flexible working are also important at these times, but being treated with compassion is what matters most.

### A marathon not just a sprint

Grieving is a process which will take a long time as the employee adjusts to the new reality of life without the person who has died. This will take time and patience and is more of a marathon than a sprint. However, there are things that can be done now which will make the process of adjustment less difficult for the employee in the long run. We call these **Bereavement First Aid**.



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## Bereavement First Aid – Acknowledge, Validate, Support/ Signpost (AVS)

### Acknowledge

It's very important to acknowledge what has happened i.e. the death of this individual person, and to offer your sympathies. This is particularly valuable when done sensitively by an employer. Don't worry too much about finding the perfect words – just be genuine and be yourself. Try to think of what you would say if it was a friend whose loved one had died.

For example: *"Jim, I am very sorry to hear about your father."*

Wait a moment – allow the person to take in what you're saying.

Then: *"My sincere sympathy to you and your family."*

If you cannot speak to the employee in person, write a note or send a text/email. It's important for the employer to be proactive, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic and to take the initiative to reach out to an employee who is bereaved.

### Validate

When someone close to us dies, we can experience a range of emotions including sadness, anger, disbelief, numbness, despair, etc. During COVID-19 restrictions, employees may also feel disconnected and isolated. It's important to validate these emotions as a normal part of grieving.

For example: *"It's very understandable that you would feel that way given what has happened."*

or

*"I understand this is a difficult time for you."*

### Support/Signpost

One of the most helpful things for an employee who is bereaved, is good support from their line manager. This involves understanding and



compassion. It is about a human response to a human situation. Work comes second. Don't worry about trying to find the right thing to say or do. Just be yourself and be caring and compassionate.

For example: *"Jim, I want to assure you of my support at this time, can you tell me how I might do this?"*

Or

*"Jim, I want to support you, what would help you at the moment?"*

Let the employee know the organisation is also supporting them at this difficult time and what it has in place to do this.

For example, if your organisation has any of the following listed below, give this information to the employee who is bereaved (don't assume they know already):

- company bereavement policy.
- bereavement leave entitlements.
- flexible work options that can be applied to bereavement.
- knowledge of local/national bereavement supports (See Useful Resource).
- Employee Assistance Programme.

A good way to do this is to give the person a hard copy of the information and include a personal note (so they can read it in their own time). If this isn't possible, use email, and again express your sympathies.

## You can make a difference

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the way we work and how we can support each other when we are grieving. This is particularly the case for organisations wanting to support their employees who are bereaved at this time.

You can make a difference. There are things managers and human resource professionals can do that will make a difference to employees who experience grief at this difficult time.

- Be proactive – reach out.
- Be compassionate – ask what might help, listen carefully.
- Remember Bereavement First Aid – Acknowledge, Validate, Support/Signpost (AVS).

### Note 1: Grief in the Workplace Research (Dec 2018)

#### Key Findings:

1. What do Irish employees want most from their employer when they are bereaved?:
  - a) to be treated with compassion (75%),
  - b) extra leave entitlements (61%),
  - c) flexible work policies around location and work (57%),
  - d) acknowledgement of their loss by the organisation and colleagues (41%), and
  - e) respecting their privacy (34%).
2. Only 3 in 10 Irish adults said their employer has a bereavement policy.

For support, advice and training on Grief in the Workplace [breffni.mcguinness@hospicefoundation.ie](mailto:breffni.mcguinness@hospicefoundation.ie)

## Useful Resources

### Phonelines

Irish Hospice Foundation Bereavement Support Line 1800 80 70 77 (Mon -Fri 10am – 1pm)

Barnardos Bereavement Helpline (Children) (01) 473 2110 (Mon -Thu 10am – 12pm)

### Websites

- **Irish Hospice Foundation COVID-19 Care & Inform**  
<https://hospicefoundation.ie/i-need-help/i-care-for-someone/covid19-care-and-inform/>
- **Bereaved.ie**
- **Grief at Work**  
[www.griefatwork.ie](http://www.griefatwork.ie)
- **Irish Childhood Bereavement Network**  
[www.childhoodbereavement.ie](http://www.childhoodbereavement.ie)
- **HSE Coronavirus Hub**  
<https://www2.hse.ie/coronavirus>
- **Coping with Bereavement During COVID-19**  
<https://www.cseas.per.gov.ie/covid-19-bereavement-support/#>
- **Bereavement, loss and grief in a time of COVID-19 -IBEC**  
<https://www.ibec.ie/employer-hub/covid-19/bereavement-loss-and-grief-in-a-time-of-covid>



Irish Hospice Foundation  
**Bereavement  
Support Line**  
**1800 80 70 77**

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# Finding new ways for children to say goodbye

Developed in partnership with our Irish Childhood Bereavement Network.

In normal times, when someone is very unwell, we would encourage parents to allow children take part in opportunities to say goodbye to loved ones in any way they feel comfortable. Children and young people are usually very involved in a family member's final days, in our end-of-life goodbyes and funeral traditions.

It helps them understand the finality of death and it shows them how to give and receive compassion. Children often like to feel they have contributed to the care of the person and can often take a lot of comfort in the future for being part of little acts of kindness in the care of their sick relative.

During these exceptional times, however, it might not be possible to take part in our normal end-of-life and funeral practices. Infection controls may mean family members do not have an opportunity to spend time with someone who is dying, to say goodbye or attend funerals.



Children will need a lot of reassurance and love during these distressing times. They need to know that even though the adults around them are worried and very sad, they will still be able to care for them. They may also feel that they need permission to show their emotions and talk about their feelings.

Children may worry they have not been as good at following the measures to stop the spread of COVID-19 or they may hear things in the media about how children are vectors playing a role in spreading the virus. These anxieties will be worse if someone close to them dies.

Young children may blame themselves in some way for the death. It is normal for primary school aged children to engage in 'magical thinking', this means they can invent explanations in their heads about why bad things have happened.

## When a loved one is dying

For children and young people who have a relative who is dying, the restrictions can mean they will not be able to spend time with their dying relative, they may not even be allowed touch or hug them or even be in the same room.

### Here are some suggestions for families if children cannot visit at end of life:

- explain the situation to children in a clear and honest way.
- talk them through what is happening and how the person they love is being cared for at the end of their life.

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- be prepared to repeat the same information as children may need lots of opportunities to hear what is being said so they can take it in.
- give them as much reassurance as possible without taking away from the truth that it is not an ideal situation for anyone.
- help them prepare for ways to say goodbye – allow them respect to plan it their own way.
- help them express their messages of love through art, poems, music, cards and letters. Allow children to write their own message to the person. If there are a number of children in your household, they may like to do the activity together with siblings but to keep their message private.
- use technology to help children and young people share messages if they wish and talk to loved ones.
- make recording to share at a later stage by way of a digital memory box.
- if it is feasible, set up a video link for an interactive conversation.
- keep them informed but don't pressure them – there is no right or wrong way to say goodbye.

Children may worry that someone else in the family will become sick; reassure them that they will be cared for no matter what happens. We can also reassure that it is hoped no one else in the family will get sick in the same way, but being careful not to promise that no-one will ever get sick again.

## When a loved one dies

### Breaking bad news

Telling a child about the death of a loved one should take place as early as possible to allow the information to sink in. Then the child can ask questions later on, when they have had time to think.



The best thing is to give them honest, age-appropriate information about the death. It's painful to see a child upset, but children do cope better with sad news when they are told the truth. Helping children understand death and grief will vary depending on the child's age and developmental stage. See our simple guide here; <https://www.childhoodbereavement.ie/families/childrens-grief/>

A good place to start is to check what the child already understands about the person's condition, and the conversation can build from there. Asking children what they understood is a great way to get a sense of how much they have taken in.

Each child will react differently, some may behave as if they have not been told anything, or they may be upset or angry. Some children do not want all the details other may want very specific information. Be guided by the child; let their questions lead the conversation. Don't worry if you haven't got all the answers, let them know you will find out and re-visit the conversation again.

Children are hearing a lot about COVID-19 deaths. If the death does not relate to the virus, it is important that children are given the name of the illness the person has died from. So for example, they should be told that the person is dying from cancer and that they are not dying from COVID-19. It helps to give them a little bit of information about cancer and especially



that it is not an illness that you can catch from another person. This will help to reassure them with their very normal worries.

**The best thing is to give children honest, age-appropriate information about the death.**

**It's painful to see a child upset, but children do cope better with sad news when they are told the truth**

## Funerals

Funerals also help children feel less isolated as they are part of something they share with other adults and children in their families. Often for children, funerals connect them with extended family members, particularly cousins and relations who are of a similar age. During COVID-19 restrictions, we know our physical contact and possibly children's attendance at funerals may be very limited.

### **Here are some suggestions for families if children cannot attend the funeral:**

- help them pick something that can be laid beside the person, something that has a meaning for them like a toy, a letter, a paper flower, a poem or a drawing.
- if one person can attend, they can explain in detail to the children what the person looks like and where their body is being looked after.
- let children and young people be part of planning the arrangement, they might choose some readings, music and write part of the eulogy.
- consider setting up a 'virtual wake' so children can honour the life of the person by sharing special memories and stories about the person who has died.

- many places are arranging live streaming so you can follow the same order of service from home, dress and prepare as you would as if you were attending in person.
- for adults who can attend, maybe bring home mementos – a flower, leaf, booklet, photo, you might also consider taking some photographs to show children afterwards.
- pick a day or time for everyone to stop for a moment and light a candle in memory of the person.
- respect their views, allow them to express their feeling in their own way, some might want to do this privately other may want to share.
- the COVID-19 restrictions mean children and young people's normal routine is completely changed, they have fewer places to go and connect with people outside their household who normally support them – friends, teachers and wider family.

Remember grief is an ongoing process for adults and children. How they feel will continue to evolve in the coming weeks and months. It may be helpful to let teachers know of a death in the family when children return to school.

They will rely heavily on family support during these hard times, it is important that parents and caregivers, who are also grieving, find ways to get support for themselves.

### **Mind yourself so you can mind them.**

## Useful Resources

- The Irish Childhood Bereavement Network. Feel free to contact [www.childhoodbereavement.ie](http://www.childhoodbereavement.ie)
- Barnardos Bereavement Helpline Service. Tel. (01) 473 2110. Available 10am-12pm, Monday to Thursday
- The Children's Grief Centre. Visit [www.childrensgriefcentre.ie](http://www.childrensgriefcentre.ie)
- <https://www.psych.ox.ac.uk/files/research/how-to-tell-children-that-someone-has-died.pdf>



# Helping children grieve during COVID-19

Developed in partnership with our Irish Childhood Bereavement Network.

During these weeks of isolation, sadly some families will experience the death of a loved one; it may be due to COVID-19 or it may be completely unrelated. It's natural to want to protect and shield children when someone dies; however, we need to talk to children to help them feel safer. The best thing to do is give children honest, age-appropriate information about death. It is painful to see a child upset, but children cope better with sad news when they are told the truth. Helping children understand death and grief will vary depending on the child's age and developmental stage. See our simple guide here: <https://www.childhoodbereavement.ie/families/childrens-grief/>

**We know this is a scary time for everyone, especially children and young people. Children need adults to help them understand what's going on, to help them talk about what frightens them and to help reassure them.**

## Funerals

In normal times, we would encourage parents to allow children take part in opportunities to say goodbye to loved ones in any way they feel comfortable. Children and young people are usually very involved in our funeral traditions. It helps them understand the finality of death and it shows them how to give and receive compassion. Funerals also help children feel less isolated as they are part of something they share with other adults and children in their families. Often for children, funerals connect them with extended family members, particularly



cousins and relations who are of a similar age. During these exceptional times, however, it is not be possible to take part in our normal end-of-life and funeral practices. Infection controls may mean family members do not have an opportunity to spend time with someone who is dying, to say goodbye or attend funerals.

## Create a sense of connection

We can try and create the sense of connection that would have happened at funerals in different ways. While children may have to be in their own homes, they can connect digitally with cousins and friends to share memories and create ideas together.

Adults can plan sessions for everyone to read the poems or play the song that they would have if funeral gatherings were not restricted. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, we must keep physically distant from each other, yet this is especially hard when we are grieving.

Reaching out and giving a hug to those around us is our normal ways of showing support but now we must restrict these comforts to only those within our safe isolation zone.

Children are normally isolated within the tight family context and should be comforted in the normal way. In fact, being together in isolation may allow more time to support each other with your emotions and feelings around the loss.

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Remember there are no restrictions on household hugs so, you might encourage each family member to offer support and hugs to the children within the confines of your own household.

**There are no restrictions on household hugs.**

## Finding new ways to connect in our grief

We have had to adapt and develop new ways around supporting each other grieve until the crisis passes. Children and young people can be encouraged to use their creativity and technical skills to generate ideas to help.

Younger children might use arts and crafts to create stories and pictures of their loved one and develop memory boxes and scrapbooks to share with siblings, cousins etc.

For older children, they might create a group chat or Facetime/Zoom among cousins and friends to share memories, pictures and videos to create a virtual ceremony to mark the life of their loved one.

Children express their feeling in many different creative ways and while social media will be an important part of this, they can also use the traditional things like making a phone call, writing a poem or song, going for a walk to the loved ones favourite place or baking/cooking their favourite recipe.

Staying emotionally connected is very important – help children reach out and talk to their friends and family. Encourage children to talk about their emotions; let them know they can come to you and that it is okay to be sad/confused/angry/lonely, that grief is messy but, together you will help each other.

The world is a very scary place now. COVID-19 is on all our minds but for families who are bereaved their grief is the biggest thing on their minds. Children get their support through grief mainly from family, this means that adults supporting children need to look after their own grief as well.



## The COVID-19 crisis impacts all of us

We are all going to be challenged but one of the best things we can do is follow the official guidance and play our part to stop the spread.

Sometimes we will be angry, sad and confused by all that is going on. Children will have these feelings as well; they may worry they have not been as good at following the measures to stop the spread. These anxieties will be worse if someone close to them dies, as adults our job is to reassure them that no one is to blame.

### Useful Resources

- The Irish Childhood Bereavement Network. Feel free to contact [www.childhoodbereavement.ie](http://www.childhoodbereavement.ie)
- Barnardos Bereavement Helpline Service - (01) 473 2110 is available from 10am-12pm Monday to Thursday
- The Children's Grief Centre are available online at [www.childrensgriefcentre.ie](http://www.childrensgriefcentre.ie)

### Some resources for activities with grieving children;

- [https://www.dougy.org/docs/Movement\\_Activities\\_Sheet.pdf](https://www.dougy.org/docs/Movement_Activities_Sheet.pdf)
- <https://shop.winstonswish.org/collections/books/products/muddles-puddles-and-sunshine>

# Supporting teenagers to grieve during COVID-19

Developed in partnership with our Irish Childhood Bereavement Network.

Under normal circumstances, grief can feel isolating, however during COVID-19 restrictions it is especially important to find ways to support and connect with each other. Grief is made up of many feelings and reactions and can be confusing. All of us, at every age, are challenged by grief.

Adolescence is a time of great change. As teenagers try to bridge the gap between childhood and adulthood, they struggle with issues of identity and independence. As children move towards adulthood and become more independent they look towards friends and peers more and more. Losing someone at this time can make life very difficult. It is particularly important to think about how to support teenagers through grief in the changed territory created by COVID -19.

The Irish Childhood Bereavement Network (ICBN) has developed some specific resources to help you understand and to support a grieving young person or teenager.

See our simple guide here: <https://www.childhoodbereavement.ie/families/adolescents-and-grief/>

## Coping with grief

When someone close to us dies, funerals are one of the key ways we come together, young people normally hang out with cousins and family friends their own age, which can help build a sense of community at difficult times.

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the traditional ways we mark our grief. For the moment, it is not possible to come together and gather in one location. It is not possible to have a large funeral.



However teenagers and young people are experts at socially connecting, and being physically apart does not stop them. They 'gather' through a range of social media platforms.

Connecting and sharing are important when trying to come to terms with a death and to engage in grieving. While adults may often argue with teenagers about the use of social media, during COVID-19 restrictions we have all become more dependent on using social media to stay connected.

### Let young people help show adults good ways to harness social media by:

- setting up virtual family gatherings to share memories, pictures and videos.
- exploring ways to create a virtual ceremony to mark the life of their loved one.
- exploring websites and podcasts from good sources to help find ways to understand and cope with the emotional turmoil of grief.
- helping set up virtual art & crafts sessions for younger siblings and cousins to build memory boxes and other ways to express grief.
- be mindful of the information you share, use reliable sources and be sensitive to the fact that we all grieve differently and there is no right way to grieve.
- let young people be part of planning the arrangement, they might choose some readings, music and write part of the eulogy.

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Children  
& Grief



- respect their views, allow them to express their feeling in their own way, some might want to do this privately others may want to share.
- teenagers themselves may also communicate across multiple platforms like Snapchat, Instagram, Twitter etc in order to express their feelings with their peers.

It is important for teenagers and important for families who are isolated together to make time to talk, share, cry and hug.

## Remember some of these old fashions things as well:

- writing letters and postcards.
- making a phone call.
- writing a poem or song.
- going for a walk to the loved one's favourite place.
- baking or cooking their favourite recipe.
- planting something and nurturing its growth – if you have no seeds take a snip from a plant you are already growing.
- visiting the grave of your loved one while keeping social distance can be comforting for many.

## Remember

- balance of structure and 'downtime' is important.

- families are spending more time at home together during these periods of lockdown, while it is hard for everyone to have their own much needed space, it may also present an opportunity to have conversations about learning to live with grief and loss.
- sometimes we will be angry, sad and confused by all that is going on. Stay emotionally connected and find ways that suit you to express your feelings and emotions.

## The COVID-19 crisis impacts all of us

We are all going to be challenged and the best we can do is follow the official guidance and play our part to stop the spread.

Feel free to [contact the Irish Childhood Bereavement Network](#)

## Useful Resources

**Barnardos Bereavement Helpline Service.**  
Tel. (01) 473 2110. Available 10am-12pm,  
Monday to Thursday

**The Children's Grief Centre.**  
Visit [www.childrensgriefcentre.ie](http://www.childrensgriefcentre.ie)



# Planning a funeral in exceptional times

If you're caring for someone who is very sick and are worried they may die, or someone you love has just died, you may have some concerns about what might happen at a funeral during this COVID-19 response period.

In Ireland, funerals are how we celebrate and commemorate those who have died. As you navigate this new reality please remember death ends a life, not a relationship and your connection with the person who has died will remain.

We send our heartfelt condolences to you as you enter this different journey. In these difficult times, people are willing to help in different ways. We have prepared this leaflet to give you some ideas as you plan a funeral for a loved one, but also to remind you to reach out and ask for help.

## What you should do

We appreciate that physical distancing requirements make this bereavement and funeral even more difficult but there are immediate steps you can take to plan the funeral of someone you love or care about.

- Do contact your preferred funeral director as soon as you are able. Your funeral director will be equipped with most up-to-date information and procedures due to the COVID-19 response period. They will guide you through the process, and ensure you are cared and minded for.
- Do ask as many questions as you need to. It is important to know as much as possible, for example practices such as carrying the coffin may not be allowed. Ask your funeral director to explain the current restrictions.
- Do let people know of the death – you can still place a death notice, to be published online, on radio or in print. If the funeral is being streamed (broadcast from the church/



crematorium or other setting) the link can be provided to people at home and abroad.

- Do remember the funeral will be planned as private, for close family only. However, you can organise readings, poems or eulogies, even if the service is short.
- Do remember that everybody will understand how difficult a funeral is at this exceptional time – people will respect and support you as best they can.
- Do know that you may not be able to gather with others in a restaurant or someone's home after the funeral. Plan within your own household what you are going to do after the funeral, e.g. having a special meal, plan some exercise or agreeing just to rest. Some family and friends may decide to come together after the funeral for a virtual gathering over Zoom or a similar platform.

# 3

Funerals

**Where we can no longer reach out with our hands, we must now reach out with our hearts. Keep our distance but keep in touch, stay apart but stay in contact.**

Government of Ireland





As it is not possible during this time to have public reposés or wakes in funeral homes, there are ways you can keep the funeral personal and beautiful, and to involve others in remembering your loved one.

- Do make use of RIP.ie online condolence book to record messages of love and appreciation. In the death notice you can invite people to leave personal messages.
- Do think about hosting a memorial service at a later time, and plan that, in time, when you feel able.
- Do ask people to send you a letter or write you a card with their memories of the person who has died.
- Do encourage children to draw pictures or write poems.
- Do talk about the person who has died, within your household and beyond through telephone calls.
- Do seek to keep in contact and try to be open to others contacting you. We can still be together when we are not together.
- Do seek out the latest technology to help. You can use videoconferencing (Google hangouts, WhatsApp, Zoom etc) to come together with special people who cannot physically be with you.
- Do stay in contact. But be mindful of the amount of contact you are able for.

## How can we honour someone who has died without attending the funeral?

We are a nation of great culture and tradition and we can honour the person who has died in many ways. We are already seeing examples of how Irish people are finding new and innovative ways to support each other, some of the 'old' ways are also being revived.

## Here are some of the ways you can help

- Be the person who organises friends and neighbours to stand at their gates (observing physical distancing) to show support to the grieving family.
- Do post condolences and messages of support online on RIP.ie or on Social media.
- Do take time to write letters of support and condolences, expressing your thoughts is very meaningful.
- Do phone/text the bereaved person to keep in touch – not just immediately but in the weeks and months ahead.
- Do share photos, memories and stories virtually with each other.

**'One of the greatest gifts a person can give another is support'**

## Useful Resources

- COVID19 (Coronavirus): A Guide for the Bereaved
- HPSC Guidance for Funeral Directors/

# 3 Funerals

# Planning a funeral when your relative has died from COVID-19

If someone you love has just died as a result of COVID-19, we at Irish Hospice Foundation send our heartfelt condolences to you and your family.

In Ireland, funerals are how we celebrate and commemorate those who have died. As you navigate this new reality, please remember death ends a life, not a relationship and your connection with the person who has died will remain. COVID-19 has meant newly bereaved families and individuals have had to make very difficult sacrifices. It is important to remember that in these exceptional times, people are willing to help in different ways.

You may have questions and concerns about what will happen at a funeral during this COVID-19 response period. We have prepared this leaflet to give you some ideas as you plan a funeral for a loved one, but also to remind you to reach out and ask for help.



## Where can I get advice on current regulations?

The most current advice for funerals and the regulations involved are developed by the Irish Health Protection Surveillance Centre and the Department of Health <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/f43301-covid-19-coronavirus-a-guide-for-the-bereaved/> HSE.

## Planning the funeral

Unfortunately, COVID-19 and social distancing requirements make this bereavement and funeral even more difficult.

Following the death of someone you love, here are some immediate steps you can take to plan the funeral.

- Do contact your preferred funeral director as soon as you are able. The funeral director will be equipped with the most up-to-date information and procedures in place during the COVID-19 response period. They will guide you through the process, and ensure you are supported and informed as you make decisions.
- Do think about nominating a person in your family, who is not considered a close contact of the deceased, to be the family spokesperson to work with funeral director. This will make it easier for them to meet the funeral director if required. However, if you would prefer to do this yourself, most of the organisation can be done over the phone.

3  
Funerals

### 3 Funerals

- Do ask questions about what will happen, or whether the aspects of the funeral you would like are allowed under the new restrictions. It is important to know as much as you need to in advance. While some choices – eg a burial or cremation are at the discretion of the family, some traditional practices are not allowed – eg carrying the coffin.
- Do remember the funeral director will take care of the preparations of the body of your loved one. Rest assured they will treat your loved one with care and respect. This will include removal of his/her body from the care setting and preparing them for funeral or cremation. To protect yourself and others, you are advised not to kiss the body of your loved one and to adhere to very careful hand hygiene at all times, especially if you have touched the body.

In order to manage the spread of any infection, the coffin will be closed and, only in very rare circumstances, will it be opened for viewing. This is to protect you and others. You can discuss this with your funeral director.

- Do remember the funeral will be planned as private and for close family. The current guidance is for up to 10 people to attend the funeral.
- Do let people know of the death. You can still place a death notice, but no times or venues of the funeral may be published online, by radio or in print. You can let those who are to attend know privately. If the funeral is being streamed (broadcast from the church/crematorium or other setting) the link can be provided to people at home and abroad.

**Remind family and friends that people with respiratory illness including those who have known or suspected COVID-19 are being asked to self-isolate and to avoid public gatherings including funeral services.**



### On the day of the funeral

- Do remember everybody will understand how difficult a funeral is at this exceptional time – people will respect and support you as best they can.
- Mourners should follow the advice on social distancing when travelling to and from the funeral gathering, and should avoid any handshaking or hugging. They should also continue to practice good hand hygiene and sneezing etiquette.
- Do take time to mark this moment and go gently with yourself and others.
- Do know that you may not be able to gather with others in a restaurant or someone's home after the funeral. Plan within your own household what you are going to do after the funeral, e.g. having a special meal, plan some exercise or agreeing just to rest. Some family and friends may decide to come together after the funeral for a virtual gathering over Zoom or a similar platform.



## What can I do to mark this moment?

As it's not possible during this time to have public repose or wakes in funeral homes, there are ways you can keep the funeral personal and beautiful, and to involve others in remembering your loved one.

In a time when so much is out of your control, there are significant elements you can choose - you can still choose readings, hymns, and poems to remember your loved one by, even if the service is much smaller.

- Allow yourself to grieve in your own way. You may find it useful to refer to our Grieving in Exceptional Times resource.
- Do ask people to send you a letter with their memories of the person who has died.
- Do seek to keep in contact and try to be open to others contacting you - we can still feel and be connected even when we are not together. Technology can help. Videoconferencing (Google Hangouts, WhatsApp, Zoom etc) can be used to come together with special people who cannot physically be with you.
- Do involve children and young people and keep talking to them, we have listed some resources below.
- Do talk about the person who has died, within your household and beyond through telephone calls with friends and family.
- It is best at this time, not to use actual books of condolences. The RIP.ie online condolence book can be used to leave messages of sympathy, support and appreciation.
- You may wish to host a memorial service or an event to remember your loved one at a later time. You can make this known and plan an event for a time when you are able.

## Can I honour someone who has died when I cannot attend the funeral?

Yes. Our culture is rich in traditions and ways to honour our dead. We are already seeing examples of how Irish people are finding new ways to support each other - some of the 'old' ways are also being revived.

### Here are some ways you can help remember the person who has died:

- Be the person who organises friends and neighbours to stand at their gates as the hearse passes by. At this time of social distancing, we are asked not to line the road for a funeral.
- Be the person who organises friends and neighbours to leave food and meals for family members (adhering to social distancing).
- Do post condolences and messages of support online on RIP.ie or on social media.
- Do take time to write letters of support and condolence - expressions of solidarity can be meaningful and helpful to the bereaved.
- Do phone/text the bereaved person to keep in touch - not just at the time of death and immediately afterwards but in the weeks and months ahead.
- Do share photos memories and stories virtually with each other.

### Useful Resources

- [Bereaved.ie](https://www.bereaved.ie)
- [Children and grief](https://www.childrenandgrief.ie)
- [Citizen information](https://www.citizeninformation.ie)
- [HSE](https://www.hse.ie)
- <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/f43301-covid-19-coronavirus-a-guide-for-the-bereaved/>

As part of our [COVID-19 Care & Inform](#) series, we have also developed [Grieving in Exceptional Times](#).

# 3

## Funerals



# Irish Hospice Foundation

To die and grieve well wherever the place

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