

CARERS FACT SHEET 10

Loss and Bereavement

What if the person you care for is dying?

Everyone meets this situation at some time, and it is vitally important, if you know that you are caring for someone who is dying, that you have people to talk to about the practicalities of it all as well as about how you are feeling.

Remember you can always phone Carers Together or the free Carers Active Listening Line 08000 3 23456 in complete confidence, or talk to other professionals around you if you need help.

It is worth encouraging the person you care for to talk to their doctor about the kind of help they would like to receive while they are dying. Although, as the law currently stands, it may not be possible for the doctor to follow their wishes exactly, most medical professionals will welcome the interest of both you and the person you care for in these discussions.

There is no reason why the person you care for cannot die at home, if that is what they, and you, most want. You should talk to your doctor about arranging extra nursing/home care services, or providing a specialist nurse, such as a Macmillan cancer nurse.

If the person you care for is going to die in hospital, you can stay with them for as long as you like. Relatives who are not present at the time of death also have the right to ask for some private time on the ward, or in the mortuary or chapel of rest.

There are some rest homes or nursing homes that specialise in the care of the dying, and you should ask your doctor for help to find the right home.

Your doctor can arrange admission to a hospice if that is what you want, where specific care can be provided.

All rest homes and nursing homes are listed in the Guide to Residential Care.

In all these cases, don't forget your feelings – stay with the person you care for as long as you need to and make sure that you have people around you to provide you with support and comfort when they are needed.

After a death

It is important that you give yourself time to grieve. Everyone deals with bereavement differently, and you may experience a whole range of emotions. Don't let other people try to tell you how you should be feeling, but do make sure you have people to talk to about how you feel.

You may find the services of the Carers Active Listening Line, CRUSE, Compassionate Friends (for bereaved parents), Carers Help Line, or other organisations listed by the Office of Fair Trading, including the Gay Bereavement Project, helpful. You may be able to arrange formal counselling if you need it through your doctor.

Just at the time when you need to come to terms with your feelings, though, it is likely that you will be overtaken by the practical arrangements that need to be made after a death. Try and make sure that someone is on hand to help with these, and beware of making any long-term decisions, as you may not be thinking too straight.

If the death was unexpected, it may be referred to the Coroner's Office for possible investigation and/or a court hearing. The Coroner's Officer appointed will advise you.

Otherwise, you will be given a medical certificate stating the cause of death and signed by the doctor who attended the death. It will be in a sealed envelope and addressed to the Registrar.

You must register the death within five days at the local Registrar's Office. Make sure you check before you go that the Registrar is available.

The Registrar will give you a Certificate for Burial or Cremation. This gives permission for the body to be buried or for application for cremation to be made and you should give it to the funeral director.

The Registrar will also give you a Certificate of Registration of Death. This is for social security purposes only and has instructions on it as to what you should do.

The Death Certificate is a certified copy of the entry in the death register. The Registrar can supply one for a small fee.

You may need this for any pension claims, insurance policies or savings bank certificates - it is best to ask for several copies at the time you register a death as they are more expensive later on.

You will need to appoint a funeral director (they are listed in Yellow Pages) and they will advise you on all the steps you have to take. Before you commit to the contract for the funeral director, you should check carefully what is included and perhaps get more than one estimate of the cost. All members of the National Association of Funeral Directors must offer a simple funeral at low cost and the funeral director can make all the arrangements for you if you wish.

If there is no money to afford a funeral you may be able to receive some assistance from your local district council or the Benefits Agency.

If there is a will it is important that it is found and read as soon as possible as it may have plans for the funeral in it. What the deceased person leaves behind is known as their estate. The person who deals with everything owned by the person who died is known as the personal representative - also as the executor if they are named as such in the will, or the administrator if there is no will. The person who undertakes this role is responsible for administering the estate and dealing with all costs and liabilities including funeral expenses, which should come from the estate and not from their own pocket.

If you are the personal representative you may have to apply to prove the will, or if there is no will you may have to apply for a grant of administration. The leaflet *How to Obtain Probate* from a probate registry office (listed in The Phone Book) will tell you what to do if you decide not to employ a solicitor. The Citizens Advice Bureau can also help.

Life after caring

Being a carer was probably a major part of your life. You will need time to adjust and rebuild your life especially if, during the course of caring, you became isolated from other things around you. Counselling can often help and there are several useful leaflets, which could help you rebuild your life.