

# When Someone Close To You Dies

What to do after a death • Living and coping with bereavement  
Helping children cope



Western Health  
and Social Care Trust

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## Introduction

We acknowledge the distress and pain felt after the death of a loved one, and would like to offer our sincere sympathy to you and those important to you, following this sad bereavement.

Death can happen at any time of life. Sometimes it is expected, because of illness and ageing. Sometimes it happens suddenly, without warning, but whether expected or sudden, the initial shock can be overwhelming. For some people, it may be really difficult to attend to the many practical things that need to be done after a death, whilst also coping with the emotions that come with grief and bereavement.

It is important to take some time to gather your thoughts, to cry and to talk. The support of family and friends is important, and speaking to someone outside of the family, such as a support organisation, may also be of help. See contacts on page 19.

We hope that you will find the information in this booklet helpful in the days and months ahead. It contains practical information that you may need, bereavement support contact details and a section on helping children cope with the death of someone they love.

# Practical Information

After a death there are many practical things to do. You might find it helpful to seek support from another family member or a trusted friend. This next section contains some of the information you may need.

If health care staff or your funeral director need to be aware of any particular religious or cultural requirements in caring for your loved one after death, please let them know as soon as possible.

## Medical Certificate of Cause of Death

The doctor who cared for your loved one before they died will issue a Medical Certificate of Cause of Death showing the cause of death, unless the Coroner is involved. Please keep this medical certificate safe, as you will need it to register the death. The Registrar will then provide you with the Death Certificate.

## The Coroner

If a doctor cannot certify the cause of death, the Coroner will investigate and may order a post mortem examination, which is an examination of a deceased body to help find out the exact cause of death.

If a doctor did not see or treat the person for the apparent cause of death in the 28 days beforehand, the death will also be referred to the Coroner.

As the Coroner does not require consent from next of kin for this type of post mortem examination, this may cause additional distress. Staff will explain to you why this process needs to be carried out and the Coroner will appoint a Coroner's Liaison Officer who will help and support you through the process.

The police may wish to speak to the family of the deceased, those caring for your loved one and anyone who was present at the death. A member of the family will be asked to formally identify the body and the Coroner may also obtain witness statements and medical records.

Funeral arrangements cannot be finalised until the release of the body has been authorised, but the Coroner can however give consent for the funeral, based on the initial findings of the post-mortem examination. The death certificate will not be available until the Coroner's investigation is complete.

In some circumstances the Coroner may order an inquest, which is an inquiry to understand the facts about a death. It does not consider why the person died or if anyone is to blame. If an inquest is ordered, the death certificate will be issued after the inquest is completed.

## Consented Hospital Post-Mortem Examination

A hospital doctor may, on occasion, ask a family for permission to carry out a consented hospital post mortem examination. This can help determine the nature and extent of the illness and increase medical knowledge.

Your consent is needed for this type of post mortem examination and you can refuse. If you are willing to consider it however, the doctor will seek your consent, explain the process to you, answer any questions you may have, give you written information and a copy of the consent form.

## Organ and Tissue Donation

Some people choose to join the donor register or carry an organ donor card. In the absence of this, next of kin can consent to organ / tissue donation when someone dies. If you know your loved one wished to donate their organs or tissue or if this is something you wish to consider on their behalf, please inform ward staff.

The consent of the next of kin is always required for organ or tissue donation. In some hospital wards for example, the Intensive Care Unit, you may be specifically approached about organ or tissue donation. Sometimes however, a medical condition or cause and place of death will mean a deceased person cannot be an organ donor.

## Cremation

If your loved one is to be cremated, you must inform the nurse or doctor and funeral director so that the relevant paperwork can be completed. There is an additional cost for completing cremation forms and your funeral director can deal with these arrangements for you. Cremations can take place only after two doctors have confirmed the cause of death. Most cremations in Northern Ireland are carried out in Roselawn Crematorium, Belfast.

## Repatriation

If you need to have your loved one's body or cremated ashes repatriated to another country, permission needs to be obtained from the Coroner for Northern Ireland. Your funeral director will guide you through these arrangements.

## Spiritual Support

If you would like spiritual support and help with planning and preparing for your loved one's funeral, contact your faith representative as soon as possible.

If you are unsure who to contact, ask staff to contact the hospital chaplain or if your loved one died at home, your funeral director will provide information.

## Funeral Director

When arranging a funeral, most people use the services of a funeral director who will provide a 24 hour on-call service. If you or your loved one have not chosen a funeral director you can find details online via the National Association of Funeral Directors **[www.nafd.org.uk](http://www.nafd.org.uk)** or via the national Society of Allied and Independent Funeral Directors **[www.saif.org.uk](http://www.saif.org.uk)**

If the Coroner is involved, you may only make provisional funeral arrangements until you have either the signed Medical Certificate of Cause of Death or permission from the Coroner.

If your loved one died in hospital, the funeral director will contact the mortuary staff and you will be informed when your loved one's body can be released from hospital.

Your funeral director and/or spiritual advisor can help you plan the funeral. The funeral director can make all the arrangements for you, including the collection of your loved one from the place of death, contacting the cemetery or crematorium, inserting newspaper notices and ordering flowers.

If you need to buy a grave, the funeral director will also explain this process. The cost of a grave may vary from one council area to another and the local council may also charge a burial fee, even if there is already a family grave in the cemetery.

## Registering a Death

All deaths must be registered, as soon as possible, or within five working days, after the Medical Certificate of Cause of Death has been received. Deaths can be registered at any District Registration office. Most offices ask that you make an appointment before attending.

The registrar will need the Medical Certificate of Cause of Death and will make an entry of the information into the register of deaths. You will be given a copy of this information which is the Death Certificate. There is no cost for registering a death but there is a charge for the Death Certificate. It can be useful to buy extra copies of the Death Certificate at the time of registration as proof of death. You may need these for other agencies such as insurance companies who do not accept photocopies.

## Who can Register a Death?

Any relative of the deceased person who has all the necessary information - see below. The death can also be registered by:

- A person present at the death.
- A person taking care of the funeral arrangements.
- The executor or administrator of the deceased's estate.

## What Information will the Registrar Need?

- Full name and surname of the deceased.
- Deceased's usual address.
- Date and place of death.
- Marital status
- Date and place of birth.
- Occupation of the deceased
- If the deceased was married/civil partner: full name and occupation of husband/wife/civil partner
- If the deceased was a child under 16, the full name and occupation of the parents.
- Maiden surname (if the deceased was a woman who had married).
- The name and address of the deceased's GP.

- Details of any NI Civil Service or Teacher's pension that the deceased may have held.

Contact details of District Registration offices are on page 19 or can be found via **[www.nidirect.gov.uk](http://www.nidirect.gov.uk)** under 'Registering a Death'

## Who Else Needs to Know About the Death?

As well as informing your funeral director and registering the death, you will need to inform some or all of the following:

- Your loved one's workplace or school / college
- Your workplace
- Solicitor (to check, before the funeral, if there are any details of your loved one's wishes)
- GP / Hospital / Social Worker / District Nurse / Home help / Day Centre / Dentist / Optician / Podiatrist
- Social Security Bereavement Service (to report the death to Social Security Agency)
- Bank / Building society / Credit Union / Post Office / Credit & Store card companies / Hire purchase / Loan company
- Mortgage provider / Landlord / Housing association
- HM Revenue and Customs
- Pension provider
- Life assurance company
- Insurance company - Household / Medical / Travel
- Trade Union / Professional Organisation

- Car insurance company (If you are a named driver, you will no longer be insured)
- DVA (driving licence to be returned–[www.nidirect.gov.uk/Motoring/ Driving Licence](http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/Motoring/DrivingLicence))
- DVLA Swansea for vehicle registration
- Translink (Travel Pass)
- Passport Office
- Mobile phone / Landline / Electricity or gas supplier and any other organisations providing services to the deceased
- The Bereavement register to stop unwanted mail:  
**[www.thebereavementregister.org.uk](http://www.thebereavementregister.org.uk)**
- Social Media accounts (Facebook / Twitter etc.)

## Social Security Bereavement Service

If your loved one was receiving Social Security benefits, this service will inform the offices from which they were receiving benefits. They will also offer relatives an eligibility check to help access any benefits to which they may be entitled.

**Freephone number 0800 085 2463**

## Is There a Will?

It might seem strange to be thinking about a will just after your loved one has died, but if a will was made, it may include special requests for the funeral.

If there is not a copy of the will at home, check if the deceased's solicitor has it and, if so, whether it includes anything about funeral arrangements. If there is no will,

you may need to contact the Citizens Advice Bureau later to find out what you should do about any money or property your loved one owned.

It is difficult enough coping with the death of a loved one as well as needing to sort out financial and legal affairs. You may want to ask a solicitor to help you, especially if there are complex legal or financial arrangements to be made. The Citizens Advice Bureau can also give you advice and support. If things are less complicated, but you do not feel like dealing with them yourself, perhaps a family member or a close friend may help you.

# Coping With Bereavement

We all react to death in different ways, even people in the same family. Grieving is a very individual experience and there is no 'right' or 'wrong' way to grieve and no time limit for grief. There are so many different emotions, some of which are described below; you may feel some or all of these at different times.

The death of someone close is always a shock, even if it was expected. You will want to understand why it happened and sometimes there are no clear answers. Everything may seem unreal or remote. You may feel in a daze or feel so numb that you go on as if nothing has happened. This can be nature's way of protecting you from the shock

As the numbness wears off, you may begin to realise more sharply what has happened. You may feel depressed or anxious, and cry often. Do not be afraid to cry or to let people see you cry. The tears will help to relieve your pain and tension.

Your grief can have physical effects for example, feeling unable to sleep, tired all the time, aches and pains and being over-sensitive. This is all part of grief

After the death of a loved one you may feel angry with family members, with whoever happens to be around, or with health care professionals. Depending on your religious or spiritual beliefs, you may question 'why' the death happened. You may even be angry with the person who died. You may not understand these feelings at the time, but they can be a normal part of the bereavement journey.

You may feel that you should have done more to prevent the death or should have spent more time with the person. All sorts of questions may go around in your head, most starting with 'If only'. Bereavement support can give you the chance to say 'I'm sorry' or to remember the good times and accept that these feelings of guilt can be a very normal part of your loss and grief.

No two people grieve the loss of a loved one in the same way. The early intense feelings and emotions of grief may last a long time, depending on the circumstances of the death. There is no 'right' amount of time. And even when it seems to be easier to bear, you may find that something triggers those strong feelings of loss again.

Even after many years there may be difficult days - birthdays, anniversaries, Christmas, family gatherings, or going somewhere that meant a lot to you and your loved one. It can be helpful to plan how you are going to spend these days so that you feel more in control.

It is important to look after yourself. Try to eat well and get plenty of rest. Take time to laugh and cry. Take time to grieve. Create a box of memories with things that were special to you and your loved one. Keep in touch with friends and family.

Do not compare yourself to others. This is your grief. Express your feelings as much as possible and be patient with yourself. Talk through what has happened with someone you trust - a family member or friend.

Alcohol, drugs or smoking will only numb the pain for a while. They will not take away your grief, and could lead to other

problems for you and your family. Contact your GP if you feel unwell or ask your GP to refer you to other services for support.

Some people feel awkward or embarrassed talking to someone who has been bereaved. They worry that they will only upset the person, especially if they mention the death. So it may be left to you to let people know that you would appreciate their support.

Once people see that it is all right to talk to you about the death and that this helps you, it may be easier for everyone. But if you find that it is too hard for you to cope with your grief, ask your GP about bereavement support or contact the organisations at the end of this booklet.

## Contact us

Sometimes, when you think back after a death, everything can seem muddled and hazy. This is very natural given the shock at the time. If you would like to understand things better, when you feel ready, you can speak with your GP, district nurse, care-home manager or other professional involved in the care of your loved one.

If your relative died in hospital, you can contact the hospital and arrange to come to the ward or department and talk to the doctor or nursing staff. If coming into the ward would be too painful for you, a meeting in another area of the hospital can be arranged, if that would help.

Again, please accept our sincere sympathy on the death of your loved one.

# Helping Children

When someone close to a child dies, it is important to talk to the child about the death as soon as possible. Your instinct may be to say very little to protect them from the pain which is a natural reaction. But children need to know what has happened and need to be able to share their feelings. If they cannot, or they do not understand what has happened, they may feel confused and angry at being excluded and find it more difficult to deal with their feelings about their loss in the future.

Like adults, children find it hard to accept that someone close to them has died. They too need to grieve in their own way. Let them cry or be angry. Spend time with them. Be honest about your own feelings, and encourage them to ask questions or talk about the person who has died. Being close to people they love and having someone to talk to are important for children at this time. Above all, give your child plenty of time, love and reassurance.

## What Should I say?

Use simple language, using words such as 'dead' and 'died' rather than 'passed away' or 'sleeping' as this can be misleading and confusing for children. They may question why their loved one has not returned and think that perhaps it was their fault that they went away.

Let them ask questions when and where they want to. Listen to what they want to know, and answer as honestly and simply as you can - even when your answer is 'I don't know'.

Children are often more capable than we think of understanding an honest explanation of death. You might want to say something such as ‘When we die our bodies stop working and cannot be mended. We do not feel hurt, cold or pain anymore.’ Encourage the child to go on remembering the person who died as the special person they used to be.

Explaining death honestly helps children to ask other questions, possibly why their loved one died. Each parent knows their own child best and will find the right words to help their child understand. Reading storybooks on the subject can help. Books suitable for children and young people are included at the end of this booklet.

## What About the Funeral?

Do not be afraid to involve children in the funeral arrangements; but ask them what they would like to do. Allow them to see their loved one, if this is their decision and prepare them for what they will see. Ensure they understand what will happen at the wake, the funeral or at the graveside so that they are not confused or frightened.

## Children Coping With Grief

Children need to remember the person who has died, so do not be too hasty to tidy away a loved one’s belongings. Taking time to sort through these things together is painful but is another way of saying goodbye. Sharing stories about the person or looking at photos together can also help keep children’s memories alive and can help both of you cope a little easier with the grief. Making a memory box, drawing

pictures and giving a child a keepsake of the person, such as a watch or a ring or a special photograph, can be another way of celebrating their relationship.

## When Should I get Support?

It is reasonable for a child not to accept for a few weeks or months that a loved one will not be coming back, but if this continues, it may be a sign that they need support. Most children will work through their grief if they are supported to express it openly. If a child has regular headaches, sleeplessness, long periods of restless activity, or continual feelings of anger or guilt, this may also suggest that something is wrong and professional help may be appropriate.

# Bereavement Care Information and Support

Sometimes it can be easier to talk to someone you do not know about your grief. This section lists organisations that can offer you practical advice, support and counselling, whether you need it now or in the future. For a full listing of contact information please see the Western Trust web site: [www.westeritrust.hscni.net/services/1618.htm](http://www.westeritrust.hscni.net/services/1618.htm)

## **Bereavement Register**

Registering relatives' details will stop unwanted direct mail being sent to those who have died.

[www.thebereavementregister.org.uk](http://www.thebereavementregister.org.uk)

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## **Citizens Advice Bureau**

**Derry/Londonderry CAB** Tel: 028 7136 2444

**Strabane CAB** Tel: 028 7138 2665

**Enniskillen CAB** Tel: 028 6632 4334

[www.citizensadvice.co.uk](http://www.citizensadvice.co.uk)

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## **Coroners Service for Northern Ireland**

Tel: 0300 200 7811 [www.coronersni.gov.uk](http://www.coronersni.gov.uk)

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## **District Registration Offices ~ Western Trust Area**

Londonderry 14 Magazine Street,

Londonderry, BT48 6HH

Tel: 028 7137 6520

Strabane Council Offices,

47 Derry Road, Strabane, BT82 8DY

Tel: 028 7125 3253

Omagh The Grange, Mountjoy Road, Omagh, BT79 7BL  
**Tel: 0300 303 1777**

Enniskillen Town Hall, Enniskillen, BT74 7BA  
**Tel: 0300 303 1777**

Limavady 7 Connell Street, Limavady, BT49 0AH  
**Tel: 028 7772 2226**

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**NI Bereavement Service** (Department for Communities)  
To report the death of someone receiving Social Security benefits. Offers relatives a single point of contact to inform benefit offices of the death and an eligibility check to help access any benefits due.

**Freephone: 0800 085 2463    [www.nidirect.gov.uk](http://www.nidirect.gov.uk)**

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**NI Council for Ethnic Minorities (NICEM)**

Information & support for people from ethnic communities.

**Tel: 028 9023 8645    [www.nicem.org.uk](http://www.nicem.org.uk)**

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**Aisling Centre Enniskillen**

Counselling for bereavement, trauma & anxiety

**Tel: 028 6632 5811    [www.theaislingcentre.com](http://www.theaislingcentre.com)**

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**Barnardo's Child Bereavement Service**

Support for bereaved children & young people,  
up to age 18 & their families

**Advice line Tel: 028 9066 8333    [www.barnardos.org.uk](http://www.barnardos.org.uk)**

### **Bereaved by Suicide - Family Liaison Service**

Western Trust service providing practical support and guidance, short term follow up and local bereavement support groups.

**Londonderry/Limavady Tel: 028 7132 0138**

**Enniskillen/Omagh Tel: 028 6638 2112**

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### **Brake: The Road Safety Charity**

For anyone bereaved, injured or affected by a road traffic crash.

**Helpline: 0808 8000 401 [www.brake.org.uk](http://www.brake.org.uk)**

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### **British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy**

Professional counselling association and accrediting body.

**Tel: 01455 88 33 00 [www.bacp.co.uk](http://www.bacp.co.uk)**

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### **Cancer Focus NI**

Bereavement groups and one to one support for those bereaved through cancer.

**Tel: 028 9066 3281 [www.cancerfocusni.org](http://www.cancerfocusni.org)**

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### **Childline**

Free confidential helpline for children and young people in danger or distress.

**Tel: 0800 1111 [www.childline.org.uk](http://www.childline.org.uk)**

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### **Compassionate Friends NI**

Supporting bereaved parents and their families after the death of a child, of any age.

**NI Helpline Tel: 028 8778 8016**

**National Helpline Tel: 0345 123 2304**

**[www.tcf.org.uk](http://www.tcf.org.uk) email: [helpline@tcf.org.uk](mailto:helpline@tcf.org.uk)**

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### **Cruse Bereavement Care**

Confidential bereavement support and counselling for adults, young people and children.

**Folye Area: Tel: 028 7126 2941**

**Omagh & Fermanagh: Tel: 028 8224 4414**

**Freephone helpline Tel: 0808 808 1677**

**Website for young people: [www.hopeagain.org.uk](http://www.hopeagain.org.uk)**

**[www.cruse.org.uk](http://www.cruse.org.uk) email: [helpline@cruse.org.uk](mailto:helpline@cruse.org.uk)**

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### **Derry Well Woman**

Counselling service

17 Queen Street, Derry BT48 7EQ

**Tel: 028 7136 0777 [www.derrywellwoman.org](http://www.derrywellwoman.org)**

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### **Family Trauma Centre**

Specialist treatment services for children, young people & their families following severe trauma.

**Tel: 028 9504 2828 [www.familysupportni.gov.uk](http://www.familysupportni.gov.uk)**

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### **Koram Centre Strabane**

Counselling, psychotherapy and psychosocial support  
3, Mourne Villas, Strabane BT82 8BG

**Tel: 028 7188 6181 [www.koramcentre.com](http://www.koramcentre.com)**

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### **Lifeline**

24 hour/7 days a week support for those in distress or despair.

**Freephone: 0808 808 8000**

**Text phone 18001 0808 808 8000**

**[www.lifelinehelpline.info](http://www.lifelinehelpline.info)**

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### **Samaritans**

Emotional support for those in distress or despair.

National 24/7 Helpline: Freephone 116 123

**www.samaritans.org.uk email: [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org)**

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### **Silver Line**

Free and confidential helpline for older people, providing information, friendship and advice.

**Freephone: 0800 470 8090 [www.thesilverline.org.uk](http://www.thesilverline.org.uk)**

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### **Victim Support NI**

Independent charity offering free and confidential services for victims and witnesses affected by any type of crime.

**Folye Hub Office Tel: 028 7137 0086**

**[www.victimsupportni.co.uk](http://www.victimsupportni.co.uk)**

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### **Wave Trauma Centre**

Care & support to people bereaved, injured or traumatised as a result of 'The Troubles' in NI

**Tel: 028 2766 9900 [www.wavetraumacentre.org.uk](http://www.wavetraumacentre.org.uk)**

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### **Zest**

Counselling and support for anyone affected by the impact of self-harm and suicide

**Tel: 028 7126 6999 [www.zestni.org](http://www.zestni.org)**

#### **Disclaimer**

Inclusion in this booklet does not necessarily constitute or imply any endorsement or recommendation by the Western Health and Social Care Trust of that organisation or service.

# Helpful Reading

## Books for Adults

### **It's OK that you're NOT OK**

Devine, Megan (2017) Sounds True

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### **When parents die: Learning to live with the loss of a parent**

Abrams, Rebecca (2013) Routledge

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### **Surviving the Early Loss of a Mother: Daughters Speak**

Tracey, Anne (2008) Veritas

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### **Beyond the Rough Rock: Supporting a Child who is bereaved through Suicide**

Stubbs, D & Stokes, J (2008) Winston's Wish Publications

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### **The year of magical thinking**

Didion, Joan (2006) Harper

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### **A Special Scar: The Experiences of People Bereaved by Suicide**

Wertheimer, A. (2001) Routledge 2nd edition

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### **Grieving: A Beginners Guide**

McCormack J. H., (2006) Paraclete Press

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### **'You'll get over it: The rage of bereavement'**

Ironside, Virginia (1997) Penguin

## Books for Younger Children

### **Michael Rosen's Sad Book (all ages)**

Rosen, M (2011) Walker Books

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### **The Memory Tree (4+ years)**

Teckentrup, Britta (2014) Orchard Books

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### **When Someone Very Special Dies (5+years)**

Haggard, M. (1991) Woodland Press

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### **Badger's Parting Gifts (3-5 years)**

Varley, S. (1985) Hodder and Stoughton

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### **Help me say goodbye Activity Book**

Silverman, Janis (1998) Fairview Press

## Books for Teenagers

### **When a friend dies: a book for teens about grieving and healing**

Gootman, Marilyn E (2005) Free Spirit

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### **The grieving teen: A guide for teenagers and their friends**

Fitzgerald, Helen (2000) Fireside

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### **Healing Your Grieving Heart for Teens 100 Practical Ideas**

Wolfelt, Alan, D (2001) Companion Press

# Feedback

We hope you found this booklet useful. If you would like to comment on it, or wish to give feedback about your experience of bereavement care, we will be pleased to hear from you. Please contact:

**Carole McKeeman**  
**Trust Bereavement Coordinator**  
**Western Health and Social Care Trust**  
**Agnes Jones House**  
**Altnagelvin Hospital**  
**Glenshane Road**  
**Derry / Londonderry**  
**BT47 6SB**

**Tel: 028 7134 5171 Ext: 214184**  
**E: [carole.mckeeman@westerntrust.hscni.net](mailto:carole.mckeeman@westerntrust.hscni.net)**

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