

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.

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, 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>