



**Bereavement  
Charter**  
FOR SCOTLAND

# **A Bereavement Charter for Children and Adults in Scotland: Guidance Notes**

**#becausegriefmatters**

## INTRODUCTION

Eighteen months ago, a range of like-minded professionals and individuals came together to reflect on the nature of bereavement support in Scotland. We concluded that despite a lot of really good work happening, we could do more, and we could do better, and from that point on we undertook work to produce a National Bereavement Charter for Scotland.

The Charter has been produced as a result of many discussions and debates, of much consultation and engagement, and is offered in sincerity as a support to all those who struggle with the death of someone they know or someone in their community.

Today, the need for such a Charter has become even more important due to the unique circumstances we currently find ourselves in due to the COVID-19 pandemic. People who are bereaved may not have been able to be with a person as they approach the end of their life and may be isolated from their usual networks of support. It has also changed the customary ways we are able to mark our grief. Traditional bereavement rituals and funerals have changed with many people now unable to attend funerals in the way that they might have in the past. Many deaths have become sudden with little or no time to prepare.

It is therefore increasingly important that we understand not only the importance of bereavement support, but what that support needs to look like. Whilst accepting that every death is unique and that the way we each come to terms with a death is individual, this Charter and Guidance attempts to describe what good bereavement support can look like and what difference it can make. The Charter does not claim to be the end of the story or to have all the answers. It is an evolving document designed to ensure that we get better at talking about grief and bereavement care. It is offered in part to help the discussion but also to guide us by describing good bereavement support at its best.

Many of us will have experienced the death of someone close to us. We may have had to do the hard work of grieving on far too many occasions. Whilst we recognise that grief is normal, and that many people will cope with bereavement through the help and support of family or friends, some may struggle to find a path through and a sense of balance when the waves of absence and grief overwhelm.

Bereavement is the sense of feeling robbed and bereft. For no matter how expected or anticipated a death or loss is, its ache is still sore, its pain is still raw, its touch is a cold beyond description.

This sense of lost-ness is beautifully conveyed in the original word for 'bereavement' from the Old English - '*bereafian*' which denotes a sense of deprivation, of being robbed by someone, of being seized or grabbed out of living and life.

We have lots of evidence to show that as a society in Scotland we have lost the cultural and societal ability to deal with dying and have misplaced our skills at working through loss in bereavement.

We believe that bereavement support is a fundamental right of what it means to be a citizen in modern Scotland. That is why we have framed the Charter very explicitly in human rights terms.

Human rights at their heart are statements underpinned by law which describe what it means to be human, how we relate to others who are different from us, and how we can make decisions and determine priorities when society is being challenged.

Human rights are rarely black and white, more often they sit within the multiple competing convictions and priorities which are involved in modern living and decision-making. That is why when we consider bereavement, they have a particular resonance and application.

In Scotland we have a long history of ensuring that human rights sit at the very centre of what we do as a society and the way in which we should seek to support one another.

At this present time there is active consideration of embedding the United Nations Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ESCR) into Scottish law. This will potentially enshrine into Scottish law the '*right to health*'. Health is viewed as the right to not just physical health, but to mental, emotional and psychological health and wellbeing. The right to health is considered fundamental to the ability of a person to achieve and realise all their other human rights.

The authors of the Charter believe that a core element of what it means to be well and healthy includes our ability to deal with the emotions and feelings which occur before and after the death of someone. That therefore means that how we are supported to deal with death, dying and bereavement are intrinsic to our ability as citizens to being able to achieve the right to health and by extension all our other human rights.

Good bereavement support is not an optional extra, it is fundamental to a society basing its character on dignity and human rights. Good bereavement support renews and restores, it can give a sense of purpose and direction, for many it is what has literally saved their lives.

**There is a short film further summarising the rationale  
for the development of the Charter available at:**  
<https://vimeo.com/395685686>

**Dr Donald Macaskill,**  
**Chair of the Bereavement Charter Development Group**  
14th April 2020

<b>CONTENTS PAGE</b>	<b>Page</b>
<b>1. How to use the Charter</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>2. Charter statement explanations</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>3. Additional Guidance for Specified Groups and Individuals</b>	<b>7</b>
• Children and young people	<b>7</b>
• Learning disabilities and degenerative neurological conditions such as dementia	<b>12</b>
• Pregnancy loss, stillbirth and neonatal death	<b>13</b>
• Bereavement following suicide	<b>14</b>
<b>4. Links to further information and sources of support</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Appendix 1 – the Charter</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Appendix 2 – the FAQs</b>	<b>20</b>

## **HOW TO USE THE CHARTER:**

**The Charter is designed to be used by any organisation and/or individual in whichever way you feel is appropriate. Our hope is that you use the Charter and that it starts a serious conversation about bereavement support across Scotland.**

One of the things we would like to see happen is that the Charter is displayed in as many places as possible. We would like you to consider displaying it in your place of work, business or pleasure.

Everyone in Scotland needs to be talking about bereavement; we all need to be thinking about how we can support others. We will help to achieve the aims of the Charter and create the Scotland which supports those who are bereaved if we give real visibility to the Charter and its accompanying Guidance.

### **So please display the Charter:**

- if you are in your local café or supermarket
- if you are in a pub or restaurant
- if you are in your dentists or doctor's waiting room
- if you are in a hospital, prison or police station
- if you are in a nursery, school or university
- if you are in a club, theatre or museum
- if you are at a local concert or music festival
- if you are on a bus, train or plane

In fact, wherever you go and whatever you do we would love for the Bereavement Charter to be seen.

### **Ways you could use it**

**There are many ways in which you might consider using the Charter:**

- Talk about its content to friends and family
- Take one sentence and think about what it means for you as a person
- If you have family think about what it means for them and those who matter to you
- If you are an employer consider what its terms might mean for the support you give your staff
- If you are a teacher think about ways in which you could create a lesson plan around the Charter to encourage conversations about grief
- If you are a commissioner of care think about how you can change your services to allow carers to talk about these issues with those they support
- If you run the local Students Union, you might want to hold a dedicated session on the Charter
- If you are a supervisor in your workplace, talk through the issues with the staff you manage as a matter of routine
- If you are an event's organiser in a museum or cinema think about organising an event which focuses on the issues raised in the Charter
- If you run a café think about holding a Death Café which can focus on bereavement
- If you run a walking club think about how you could walk and talk bereavement
- If you are a journalist, why not write a piece or record a story about the Charter
- If you are a politician consider how you can make the achieving of its aims easier

**The ways of using the Charter are endless. This is your Charter, please use it and tell us what you are doing by emailing [bereavement@scottishcare.org](mailto:bereavement@scottishcare.org)**



## **CHARTER STATEMENT EXPLANATIONS**

Below are some more detailed explanations about many of the statements in the Charter.

### **People should be treated with compassion, empathy and kindness:**

When an individual is experiencing grief, it is vital that there is understanding of the pain and confusion they may be feeling.

Treating others with kindness and empathy is a decision which involves being able to demonstrate to that person that you recognise the importance of their grief and feelings, acknowledging that every person is unique and will experience grief in their own way.

This means that you cannot make assumptions around how an individual will experience and deal with their bereavement and loss. Sometimes people shy away from talking to someone who is bereaved out of fear of worrying about saying the wrong thing or causing further upset. However, there is no right thing to say and listening to and talking with individuals about their feelings and demonstrating your understanding you can support them.

Empathy is vital in understanding these complex emotions and helps to enable you to imagine how you would feel under the same circumstances. Although we all have our own individual ways of coping with heightened emotions' we can draw on our own feelings and experiences when giving support to others.

We all need to feel that our emotions are important and understood by others particularly when difficult emotions are being displayed such as anger at a loss. We can understand when people are in physical pain so it is equally important to be able to understand that emotional pain can have just as much of an impact on those experiencing grief.

Pain of any form results in us finding it harder to cope with our daily lives and can impact on how we deal with situations and react to others. Through displaying our understanding of each individual's feelings of grief, and supporting them where possible, gives validation of their emotions and shows that we understand and have empathy for their loss. Treating others with compassion during difficult times creates a society that values each other and understands the importance of supporting each other when bereavement is experienced.

### **People should have their wishes, choices and beliefs listened to, considered and respected by all:**

It cannot be emphasised enough the importance of feeling listened to, respected and having personal wishes, choices and beliefs considered when experiencing grief and loss. Every individual will find their own experience of grief different and will rely on their personal beliefs to understand and process their feelings and emotions.

When we talk about person-centred care, it is about knowing each individual and taking time to discover their personal opinions, wishes and choices. It is those personal beliefs which will shape the decisions they make regarding their day to day lives.

People can have a more positive bereavement experience when they are able to follow the wishes of the dying person as closely as possible especially around the particulars of their death and funeral arrangements.

It is important to recognise that others may have different experiences and understand how, for example, a person's religious, faith and spiritual beliefs may impact on their grief. We live in a varied and multicultural society that includes people from all nationalities who have a variety of beliefs that will impact on how they view and talk about death, dying and bereavement.

It is also important to recognise that we cannot make assumptions based on those beliefs but use them to guide us to understand the individual and to have conversations around their personal wishes and choices.

Where possible, every individual has the right to choose their own end of life care and this includes having opportunities to talk about their death and how this is affecting them. It is only by opening up these conversations that we will become more experienced when dealing with death and bereavement and create situations where people feel confident to discuss their own individual needs when dying and when dealing with bereavement.

### **Grief, bereavement and death are recognised as a natural part of life:**

Bereavement or being bereaved is a time when someone has died. Grief is the emotional response to bereavement and can begin before someone dies. As grief is unique to everyone, there is no one way of responding. Death is something that happens to everyone and is a natural part of living, everyone who lives will also die, so it is right that it is understood that we should be supported and given the opportunity to talk openly about death and how it impacts on our lives.

### **Accessing support (including emotional, practical, financial, social, and spiritual) is seen as a right:**

As an individual wishing to exercise your right to bereavement support, you should be able to access the support that best meets your individual needs, when you need it.

This will inevitably mean that this looks different for every single person. It is important that you have the right information, at the right time and are able to feel supported to grieve in a way that helps and protects you. This support will look very different for every individual and, organisations, employers and others, should be careful not to assume that they know what best suits an individual.

For some it might mean knowing what to do in a very practical sense, how to fill in the many forms that seem to accompany the death of an individual. What to do about notifying public authorities and others when a death happens. What the stages are after someone has died for you to undertake particular practical tasks.

For some the support needed might be financial. This is not just about making practical arrangements around pensions, insurances and benefits. Many hundreds of individuals are placed into real poverty when someone in their family dies. This might for instance be because of the sheer expense of paying for a funeral or the fact that the main bread-winner in the family has died, or the reality that you are left with bills to pay and have no source of income because you are off work. Good bereavement support meets the practical and financial needs of people who are bereaved.

It may be the case that you need support which recognises the emotional and psychological changes and impacts you are experiencing following the death of someone you know or someone in your community. Good bereavement care should be able to signpost you to organisations and individuals who can support and assist you in dealing with the often confusing and conflicting range of emotions and feelings you are having.

For many individuals dying and death raise profound questions about the nature of human existence and so the right to good bereavement care recognises the importance of validating, valuing and enabling someone to express their religious and/or spiritual needs and questions. Spiritual care is intrinsic to achieving good bereavement support for many individuals.

**Efforts are made to ensure that adequate bereavement support is accessible to everyone:**

When someone in your life dies you should receive information that you can read at any time about bereavement and how you might feel. This will be relevant to you and in a format that you can readily access. People will understand that whilst you might not feel that you want support at the present time, you might want support in the future and the information will tell you how you can do that.

You will be able to have confidence and trust in the information provided and the support listed. For example, depending on your preference you may receive a booklet, or a list of electronic resources such as websites or apps. If you are a child or young person, you will receive age appropriate information.

**People have space and time to grieve:**

People will understand that your feelings of grief may change and develop over time but that there is no time-limit. You may still have occasions when you need time to think and grieve a long time after a death.

Caring for someone who has then died can be difficult and feelings of grief and loss during bereavement may not only be about the person who has died but about the caring relationship and the purpose, meaning and routines that go with that.

**It is important to:**

- Talk to others about how you are feeling, remain connected with family and friends, find people who are in a similar situation, join groups either in person or online
- Be aware of triggers of dates, transitions and events that may spark off feelings of grief and prepare yourself for how it will make you feel
- Be honest with yourself, let yourself experience these feelings and take some time to work through them in a way that helps you
- Ask for help and tell the person that what you are feeling is grief and bereavement and that you need support with it



**It is recognised that bereavement might affect all aspects of a person's life (e.g. relationships, school, and workplace):**

Grieving can be a lifelong process for some people with no time limit as to if, or when, the grieving will come to an end. It is therefore important that the impact that grief may have on you is acknowledged and respected by whoever you encounter in life, be it through e.g. relationships, work or education.

For example, many people believe that the first year is the most difficult following a bereavement and can expect people to “be over it” after a set time. However, as grief is so unique to everyone, we need to be mindful that someone may have grief responses many years after they have been bereaved, with thought given to events that may trigger grief reactions e.g. birthdays, anniversaries, cultural celebrations etc.

**Grief and bereavement can begin before death and can be life-long:**

It is common and expected to experience grief and bereavement when someone in your life dies, however you can have feelings of grief and bereavement when the person you care for is still alive and these feelings can last all through their life and long after the person dies. There are many triggers and experiences for grief before death and it is important that these are acknowledged and accepted as normal parts of everyday life.

## **ADDITIONAL GUIDANCE FOR BEREAVEMENT IN SPECIFIC CIRCUMSTANCES**

**The following sections are demonstrative of the potential impact of different types of death. These will be reviewed frequently and updated with additional sections being added.**

### **Children and young people**

**Many children and young people will experience bereavement, through the death of a parent, sibling, grandparent or friend. Children can also face the loss of a loved animal or pet which can be as significant for them as the death of a relative or friend.**

#### **Children, young people and grief**

People are often anxious or reluctant to talk about death and dying with children and young people. Many people still believe that children do not grieve or that because they are young, they are resilient and will “get over it”. Whilst many children are resilient, we need to understand the impact on a child’s life following the death of a significant person in their lives.

For children to grieve well and have the best chance for coping with their grief and avoiding potential difficulties in adulthood, it is important that they feel supported, with access to available help at a time they need it. Children often experience similar feelings to adults but may show these differently. For example, very young children may be sad for only short periods of time. This can be misunderstood as not caring but may be to do with their short attention span and protecting themselves from difficult and confusing feelings.

#### **The importance of support**

When a child or young person is bereaved, they might experience a range of emotions. These might include feelings such as, sadness, confusion, worry, guilt or regret and anger. Most children and young people can be supported well with their grief with the care and support of family, friends and trusted adults. Most children will not require specialist intervention.

#### **What children and young people understand about death and how they react**

The age of the child or young person affects how much they understand about death. Children and young people’s reactions will be affected by their understanding of death, and by their experiences and circumstances.

Age and stage	Understanding	Common reactions
<b>Babies and Infants</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can't understand what death means</li> <li>• Can be affected by the emotions of people around them</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can become unsettled and cry more than usual</li> <li>• Can become clingy and restless</li> <li>• May not feed or sleep in the same way as before</li> </ul>
<b>Toddlers to school age</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expect the dead person to return, do not understand that death is lasting</li> <li>• Have a tendency to “magical thinking” believing that their behaviour might somehow have caused the death</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Go back to behaving like a younger child (for example, thumb sucking, bed-wetting)</li> <li>• Not have the words to say how they feel so show feelings in their behaviour</li> <li>• Ask lots of questions over and over again as they try to understand what is happening</li> <li>• Become anxious and upset when separated from those closest to them, as they are afraid that others may also leave them</li> <li>• Be sad only for short periods of time</li> </ul>
<b>Five to nine</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Begin to understand that death is permanent</li> <li>• Be afraid that someone else important to them will also die</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ask lots of questions</li> <li>• Worry about the person who has died (for example, what are they doing now? How do they eat or sleep?)</li> <li>• Still not be able to put their feelings into words</li> <li>• Feel guilty and believe that they might have done something to cause the death, (for example, “... if • I hadn't been angry with x...)</li> <li>• Behave differently (for example, becoming anxious or withdrawn, or becoming difficult, becoming aggressive or showing off)</li> </ul>

Age and stage	Understanding	Common reactions
<b>Nine to twelve</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understand that death is permanent</li> <li>• Be afraid that they might die</li> <li>• Be afraid that someone else important to them will also die</li> <li>• Be anxious about how their life will change</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Find it difficult to talk about and share their feelings</li> <li>• Behave differently (for example, becoming anxious or withdrawn, or becoming angry or guilty)</li> <li>• Become isolated or unhappy at school and find school friendships difficult</li> <li>• Not want to go to school</li> <li>• Experience physical symptoms (for example, headache, upset stomach)</li> </ul>
<b>Teenagers/ young adults</b>	<p>Adolescence at any time is a period of change, the addition of a bereavement on top if this can make life even more difficult for young people. As teenagers making the transition from childhood to adulthood, they can struggle with issues of identity and want to establish their independence from adults and belong with others of their own age. They will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understand that death is permanent</li> <li>• Be anxious about how their life will change</li> <li>• Have similar feelings to those of adults</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not want to be different and so may not be able or willing to talk about or share their feelings</li> <li>• In trying to establish their independence may be reluctant to ask adults for help or support</li> <li>• Look for and find support through social media</li> <li>• Change their behaviour (for example, becoming isolated or withdrawn, may take risks or become involved in anti-social behaviour)</li> </ul>

## **How to support children and young people who are bereaved**

### **Preparing and including children and young people and offering choice**

The best support we can offer children is to give preparation, inclusion and choice. The more that children are prepared and provided with information that is age appropriate and timely, the more this will help them to make informed choices and feel listened to and respected and part of what is going on. For example, giving them the opportunity to attend a funeral (see below).

- Tell children and young people about the death as soon as possible and in a way that they will understand
- Use clear language so that there can be no misunderstandings (for example, use the word 'died' rather than 'passed away', 'gone to sleep.' Saying that someone has 'passed away' can be confusing and 'gone to sleep' can make children afraid of sleep). Check that the child has understood what you have said
- Give plenty of reassurance, support and affection and keep routines as normal as possible
- Continue to talk about the person who has died and share your feelings (for example, don't be afraid to say that you are feeling sad or that you miss the person)

### **Thinking about the funeral**

Give children and young people the opportunity to go to the funeral. Before making a decision on behalf of the child, it can be helpful to explain what a funeral is to children and to allow them to decide if they would like to attend. Even for very small children this event will be part of their life story about the person who died.

Children will benefit most from a clear explanation of what might happen at a funeral. Using clear factual words will lessen their confusion and help them to make their decision. Small pieces of information at a time will ensure they don't become overwhelmed.

### **Education and information**

Children who are bereaved, need, and are entitled to, receive answers to their questions and information that clearly explains what has happened, why it has happened and what will be happening. Always answer questions kindly but honestly and if there is something that you do not know – say so.

### **The need for support from schools and colleges**

Children who are bereaved need understanding and support from their teachers and peers without having to ask for it. Good practice would suggest that all teachers are trained in understanding childhood bereavement as mandatory so that more children can be supported in school.



### **Support throughout childhood**

Many people believe that if a child is bereaved as a baby or toddler, that, as they don't remember the person, they will not or cannot grieve for them, when in fact they can and will. They grieve the loss of a relationship with that person. How life might have been if the person hadn't died, and they grieve the loss of memories – that connection with the person who died.

Children may need support for their grief from a variety of different people at different times throughout their childhood dependant on where they are at in terms of their grief. How a child understands information about a death at one age may be completely different at another age. For example, how a child understands the meaning of death at age 5, will be different to how they understand this by the time they are 10.

Children and young people who are bereaved can feel like they have no control over anything. Giving them appropriate information to help make informed choices can support them to regain some sense of control and to feel included. This can help them manage their grief. This might be about attending the funeral, how they can be supported in school, and where they can access information about what help is available to them, so they are able to identify support and decide whether they engage with it.

### **Other sources of support**

Other services, for example, the NHS, hospices, police, funeral directors and faith leaders should have a basic understanding of how children grieve as this can impact how information reaches children at the time of a death. If we start here and everyone understands that children do grieve, this can have a huge impact on how they cope with grief throughout their childhood and into adulthood.

If you need to refer a child or young person a list of each area with support services available will help here. The Childhood Bereavement Network has lists of available supports in areas in Scotland (please refer to the resource section on page 16).

**Additional information and details of support services are available at the end of this document.**

## **Learning disabilities and degenerative neurological conditions such as dementia**

**Some examples of when you may feel grief and bereavement when a person is still living is when you are caring for someone with a degenerative neurological condition such as dementia or caring for someone with a learning disability.**

Throughout and after your time caring for someone with dementia you can experience feelings of loss and grief. You can grieve the loss of the person as they were. Their personality can change, and they can lose familiar parts of their identity – what makes them who they are. They might not be able to have the same conversations as before or do the things they used to love doing. It sometimes feels like you are losing the person twice, once due to their condition deteriorating and again when they die.

You can grieve the relationship you had with them, they might have been your partner, your parent, your sibling, a member of your family or your friend. Now the previous role you had with them may be reversed, and you miss having that person to rely on. It can feel like you are losing shared memories of a life you built together. Or you can grieve memories that you haven't had the chance to make yet.

You can experience these feelings when you are witnessing deterioration in the person's condition, when they lose certain abilities such as speech and mobility. Or when you realise that the situation is not going to get better, you might feel helpless and that you are failing because there is nothing you can do to stop it.

The caring role can become so overwhelming at times that you do not have the time or energy to face your own grief.

These feelings can be triggered randomly; you may experience them now and again, or constantly. You may feel them at the point where there is a diagnosis made or at transition points into care or hospital, or at the point of death – and they can last for a significant amount of time.

Grief can be triggered when the person forgets a memorable date, like a birthday or anniversary, or they no longer understand or connect the significance of that date, which they did in the past.

Losing the connection you had with the person, when they are unable to recognise you or remember different parts of your life together, whilst they still look like and sound like the person you knew is extremely painful and hard to deal with.

You can suddenly be overwhelmed with grief when you see the apparently normal life of people going on around you and you realise that you don't have that anymore and will never have the future you pictured with that person or do the things you talked about or planned.

As well as grieving for the person you care for, you can grieve the loss of your own identity. You can feel like you lost the parts of you that made you who you are; your job, your relationships, your hobbies and your purpose, as you have taken on the new identity of being a carer. There can come a point when you lose that new identity of being a carer too, when the person you care for moves into a care home or when they die. You can grieve your identity in relation to others; your whole family can be affected. These losses can isolate you and make you feel very alone.

If you are caring for a person with a learning disability you may share some of the feelings and experiences similar to the ones mentioned above. However, you may have been caring for the person since they were born and the life that you imagined for your child growing up will be very different.

You may feel grief and loss at popular milestones in their life which they struggle to meet or when you see other children at the same age achieving things you hoped your child would at that age.

The person may be your sibling, your parent or your grandparent and the typical things you expected to do with them might not be possible or may be different to how other people do it. Your relationship with them might be different to other ones you see around you and that can be hard. Your expectations will change, and you will make adjustments which may trigger feelings of grief and bereavement which are not recognised or understood by others around you.

You will find yourself coming in and out of periods and cycles of grief over a sustained, significant amount of time and that might not end.

Additionally, it is recognised that as a carer (who is not part of the family), who has supported and cared for someone who has died, you will have developed a relationship with the person and their families. This means that you will also become bereaved on their death along with the family, although grief in carers is often not recognised. However, you also have the right to bereavement support that meets your needs. This may be provided in several ways through your employer, General Practitioner and other bereavement services. It is important for you to keep well in your bereavement to allow you to continue with your important caring role.

## **Pregnancy loss, stillbirth & neonatal death**

**Parents may experience loss in a variety of circumstances during pregnancy or after birth including neonatal death and sudden unexpected death up to 24 months. Women, partners and siblings often find family, friends, employers, schools and even healthcare staff can treat the loss of a baby very differently from other bereavements.**

People may react by saying or implying that the loss of a baby, especially an early pregnancy loss, does not really count - 'you can always have another'. This attitude is a cultural issue where people believe a baby is not an individual, a real person, so will not be much missed and families can recover quickly whereas their bereavement has only just started.

When a baby dies there is little or no evidence of the baby's existence and there are few, if any, shared memories, which can make grieving a very isolating experience. This can complicate the grief and families may worry about some of the emotions and feelings they are experiencing.

Whilst parents may find themselves grieving at the same time, their grief may take different forms. This can put a strain on a relationship and a significant number of parents' experience isolation, anxiety and depression in the following months and longer term. Emotions can be hard to manage around anniversaries, family celebrations and when expecting a subsequent baby.

The death of a baby can also lead to the loss of hopes, dreams and expectations parents had for the future. Families may find it difficult to look after other children at home as they may be experiencing unresolved grief which can play a big part in their ability to function and carry out daily tasks.

It is important that parents find support to try and make sense of their grief so they can explore ways of integrating their loss into their life and many learn ways to honour their baby.

For families who have experienced a sudden, unexpected death of baby or infant, the involvement of the police and procurator fiscal and lengthy investigations and review processes can be particularly distressing.

## **Bereavement following suicide**

**A death by suicide is usually sudden, often unexpected and may be violent. These factors and others can increase the degree of shock and trauma experienced compared to many other types of bereavement.**

Bereavement by suicide can bring an intensity and range of emotions and physical reactions which may be unfamiliar, frightening and uncontrollable. Emotional reactions are often complex, and people may find that they are experiencing a bewildering range of feelings including guilt, anger, shame, rejection, sadness and fear. People who have been bereaved by suicide may become vulnerable to thoughts of suicide themselves.

If the person witnessed the death or found the body, they may suffer from flashbacks or nightmares. This can also happen even if the person did not see them but cannot stop imagining what happened – and imagination may be worse than the reality.

Most people bereaved by suicide are troubled by two big questions – “why did the person take their life?” and “could I have somehow prevented it?”. Also, perhaps they may dwell on what they said or did not say or what they did or did not do. These are impossible questions and thoughts to resolve and eventually the person may have to either accept that they will never know or settle on an answer which they can live with. It is natural that the bereaved person will take some considerable time in exploring these questions and it is an important part of the grieving process.

There is still a stigma attached to suicide, rooted in centuries of history and this generates misplaced associations of weakness, blame, shame or even sin or crime. This stigma can prevent people from seeking help when they need it and others from offering support when they want to.

There may be a desire to deny that the death was a suicide, perhaps driven by cultural values or from a sense of denial or shame. This can create further confusion in an already complex situation. It may also be that the person who is bereaved avoids other people and may struggle to share their own feelings because they are fearful themselves of what they are experiencing and from the reaction of others. They may not want to upset other people or they may worry about how to answer questions such as “how did (s)he die?”.

In addition, when someone dies by suicide, it can be difficult to maintain privacy. There may be emergency services at the scene and visits from police. There may also be unwanted media attention.

Whilst family and friends are often a great source of support, they can also be a source of tension and conflict. Sometimes families struggle to communicate, protective instincts kick in and they may be worried about causing more pain or about having a different view or feeling to others.

Existing tensions and difficulties in family relationships can surface as a result of the death. Some people cope with their pain by blaming another person – this may go as far as excluding them from the rest of the family, denying them the opportunity to attend the funeral and withholding information about the investigation.



## **LINKS TO FURTHER INFORMATION AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT**

These are currently a selection of links and not a comprehensive list and will be added to as the document evolves.

### **General**

#### **Breathing Space**

<https://breathingspace.scot/>

#### **Cruse Bereavement Care Scotland** (all ages and any type of bereavement)

<http://www.crusescotland.org.uk>

#### **Mygov.Scot** (death and bereavement)

<https://www.mygov.scot/births-deaths-marriages/death-bereavement/>

#### **Good Life, Good Death, Good Grief**

<https://www.goodlifedeathgrief.org.uk/>

#### **Marie Curie**

<https://www.mariecurie.org.uk/help/support/bereaved-family-friends>

#### **National Records of Scotland** (how to register a death)

<https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/registration/registration-services>

#### **NHS Inform**

<https://www.nhsinform.scot/care-support-and-rights/death-and-bereavement>

#### **Samaritans**

<https://www.samaritans.org/>

#### **Scottish Care**

<https://scottishcare.org/>

#### **Sue Ryder**

<https://www.sueryder.org/>

#### **Support around Death** (website for health and social care professionals)

<http://www.sad.scot.nhs.uk/>

#### **What to do when Someone Dies**

<https://www.mygov.scot/when-someone-dies/>

## **Children and young people**

**CHAS** (Children's Hospices Across Scotland)  
<https://www.chas.org.uk/>

**Childhood Bereavement Network**  
<http://www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk>

**Child Bereavement UK**  
<https://www.childbereavementuk.org>

**Richmond's Hope**  
<https://www.richmondshope.org.uk/>

**St Columba's Hospice**  
<https://stcolumbashospice.org.uk/>

**The Compassionate Friends**  
<https://www.tcf.org.uk/>

## **Learning disabilities and degenerative neurological conditions such as dementia**

**MND Scotland**  
<https://www.mndscotland.org.uk/>

**PAMIS** (promoting a more inclusive society)  
<http://pamis.org.uk/>

**Tide** (together in dementia everyday)  
<https://www.tide.uk.net/resources/>

## **Pregnancy loss, stillbirth and neonatal death**

**Miscarriage Association**  
<https://www.miscarriageassociation.org.uk/>

**National Bereavement Pathway for Pregnancy and Baby Loss**  
<https://nbcpathway.org.uk/>

**Sands, Stillbirth and Neonatal Death Charity**  
<https://www.sands.org.uk/>

**Scottish Cot Death Trust**  
<https://scottishcotdeathtrust.org/>

**Twins Trust Charity**  
<https://twinstrust.org/>

## **Bereavement following suicide**

**Choose Life, Suicide Prevention in Scotland**  
<http://www.chooselife.net/Bereavedbysuicide/index.aspx>

**Petal** (people experiencing trauma and loss)  
<http://www.petalsupport.com/>

**SAMH, After a Suicide**  
[https://www.samh.org.uk/documents/After\\_a\\_suicide.pdf](https://www.samh.org.uk/documents/After_a_suicide.pdf)

**Supporting People Bereaved by Suicide**  
<http://www.chooselife.net/uploads/documents/107-Supporting%20People%20Bereaved%20By%20Suicide%20-%20Apr2016.pdf>

**Survivors of Bereavement through Suicide**  
<https://uksobs.org/>

# A Bereavement Charter for Children and Adults in Scotland

This Charter provides a set of statements which describe how in Scotland we can support a person or a group of people experiencing bereavement. Good bereavement care is a human right. This Charter is underpinned by a desire to make sure that in Scotland, we can do all that we can to support people who might be experiencing difficulties following the death of someone they know or somebody in their community. It is the responsibility of everyone within Scotland to ensure that this is achieved. These are our statements:

## IN SCOTLAND, PEOPLE WHO HAVE BEEN BEREAVED SHOULD:

- be treated with compassion, empathy and kindness
- have their wishes, choices and beliefs listened to, considered and respected by all

## SCOTLAND SHOULD BE A PLACE WHERE:

- grief, bereavement and death are recognised as a natural part of life
- there is an open culture which is supportive of people having the opportunity to grieve
- accessing support (including emotional, practical, financial, social, and spiritual) is seen as a right
- efforts are made to ensure that adequate bereavement support is accessible for everyone
- people have space and time to grieve
- it is recognised that bereavement might affect all aspects of a person's life (e.g. relationships, school, workplace)

## IN SCOTLAND, PEOPLE ARE SUPPORTIVE OF FRIENDS, FAMILY AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS WHO HAVE BEEN BEREAVED, WHICH MEANS THAT:

- people's needs and grief reactions are recognised and acknowledged as being different at different times
- grief and bereavement can begin before death and can be lifelong
- people who have been bereaved should feel supported to talk about the person who has died if they wish to
- bereavement and grieving can be experienced by the whole community and not just by individuals
- there is help to know where to refer or signpost people to for additional support

The Charter and additional information can be found at [www.scottishcare.org/bereavement](http://www.scottishcare.org/bereavement)

This Charter was developed by a coalition of individuals and organisations including:



# A Bereavement Charter for Children and Adults in Scotland

## Frequently Asked Questions

### WHAT IS THE CHARTER?

The Charter provides a set of statements which describe how people and communities who are bereaved in Scotland can be supported. The Charter is accompanied by further Guidance that gives additional information for specific groups and individuals.

### WHO IS THE CHARTER FOR?

The Charter is for everyone in Scotland, and it will hopefully make a difference to the experience of people who are facing death, dying and bereavement in their community.

### WHAT MIGHT THE CHARTER MEAN TO ME?

Death is something that happens to everyone and is a natural part of living. Every person is unique and will find their own experience of grief different. Many will rely on their culture, beliefs and other sources of support to understand and process their feelings and emotions. The Charter should help to support people and give them the opportunity to talk openly about death, dying and bereavement and how it impacts on all our lives.

### WHY WAS THE CHARTER CREATED?

This work has been brought about by a desire to make sure that in Scotland, we can do all that we can to support people who might be facing difficulties following the death of someone they know.

### WHO WAS INVOLVED IN THE CREATION OF THE CHARTER?

A number of professionals and individuals across a wide range of backgrounds developed the Charter, over a period of eighteen months, to describe what Scotland could be like if we really support those who are experiencing the death of someone. We consulted widely on the content of the statements during this time.

### WHO IS THE CHARTER OWNED BY?

The Charter is owned by everyone and not by those who created it. It is a Charter for everyone who experiences death, dying and bereavement in today's Scotland.

### WHY BASE THE CHARTER ON HUMAN RIGHTS PRINCIPLES?

The Charter is based on human rights principles as a set of values which means that you are treated with respect and dignity, that your voice is heard, and that if you are facing difficulties, you are able to find a means by which those difficulties can be met.

### WHERE MIGHT I FIND MORE INFORMATION ON THE CHARTER AND GUIDANCE?

These are available at [www.scottishcare.org/bereavement](http://www.scottishcare.org/bereavement)





# Bereavement Charter FOR SCOTLAND

This guidance document was developed by a coalition of individuals and organisations including:



Scottish Government  
Riaghaltas na h-Alba  
gov.scot

