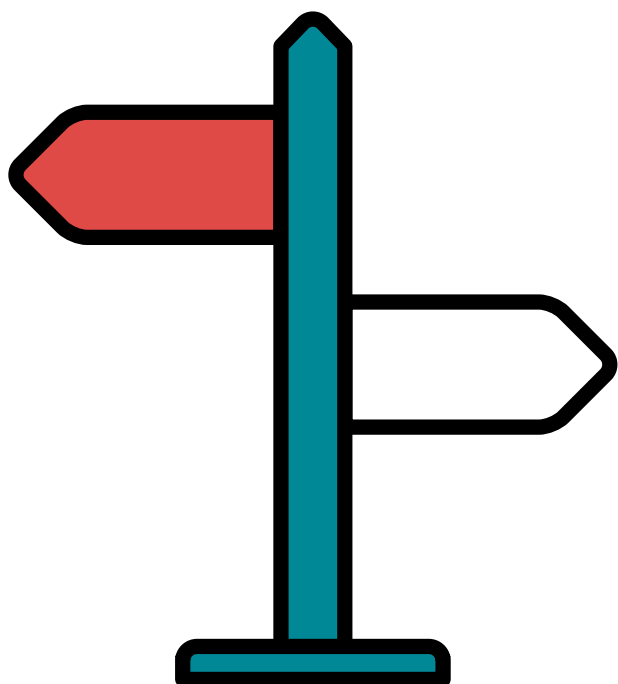


Bereavement Factsheet



As Almoner you should support widows and their families in their time of need, helping them with their grief and guide them through some of the practical implications following the death of their loved one.

Dealing with grief

It can be hard to know how to support someone who is grieving because it affects people so differently. Although you may be worried about saying or doing the wrong thing, the support you can provide others at this time is crucial to helping them cope with their bereavement.

Typically, in the days following a death it is usual to send a card, letter of condolence or flowers on behalf of the Lodge so that the individual or family know that you are thinking of them. In the weeks following a death, you may decide to follow this up with a phone call or suggest a home visit if the bereaved wish you to do so. In addition, you should also arrange for a representative of the Lodge to attend the funeral and enquire as to whether the family wishes for the death to be notified within the Province.

For the inexperienced Almoner, when supporting a bereaved person or family, giving them reassurances, normalising their feelings, experiences, behaviours and physical symptoms is really important. If you don't feel confident in doing so, you may wish to keep the following in mind when speaking to or meeting the bereaved:

- Act naturally and be yourself whilst remembering to take cues from the bereaved.
- Use tone of voice and body language to help calm somebody down. This helps people take in information and think more clearly.
- Help them to make decisions for themselves and suggest choices or options.
- Never say 'I know how you feel' and avoid meaningless platitudes like 'time is a great healer' or 'they are not suffering anymore'. Instead, empathise by putting yourself into their shoes and actively listen to what they have to say.
- Continue to invite them to any events you would have invited them to before.
- Remember that you are not a counsellor and shouldn't attempt to be. There are a number of specialist organisations that can help and you should refer the person to these (see Useful Contacts).
- Keep the Lodge informed on the progress of the bereaved if you have their permission to do so.

What the family will need to do

Although it is not your responsibility to become involved with making or organising any of the practical arrangements following a death, the individual or family may ask you about them so it is important to have an awareness of what will be happening. The most important arrangements for them to take care of include:

- Obtaining a Death Certificate showing the cause of death.
- Registering the death. This has to be done within five days unless there is a Coroner's Inquest. The family will then be able to make the necessary arrangements for the funeral.
- Notifying appropriate agencies and organisations of the death. The 'Tell us Once' government service (limited regional availability) allows a death to be reported to many government organisations in one go.
- Deciding what to do with property and possessions which is usually dependent on a will.

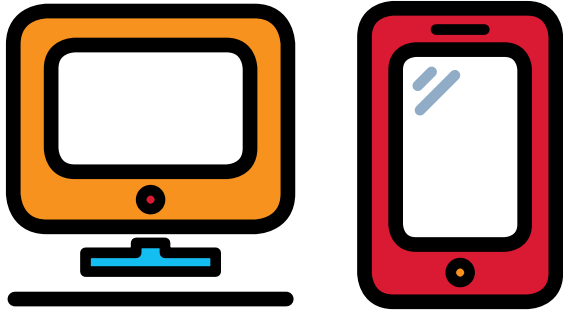


Supporting the bereaved

The death of a partner or child can have an impact on the bereaved person's financial situation, potentially affecting pensions, benefit entitlements, insurance or savings plans. The following are some examples of how a family may be affected and where they can turn for assistance:

- Are they entitled to additional state benefits or support? Bereavement Support Payment is a benefit paid to widows or surviving civil partners. It consists of an initial lump-sum followed by up to 18 monthly instalments. The claim must be made within 3 months of the death to get the full amount but a claim up to 21 months after can be made however payments will be less. Contact the Department for Work & Pensions (DWP) for information and advice (see Useful contacts).
- Are they entitled to a reduction in Council Tax? Contact the local authority for advice.
- Are they facing financial difficulties? Highlight the support which may be available from the Masonic Charitable Foundation (MCF). This includes help with daily living expenses, supporting children in full time education and funeral costs. Contact your Provincial Grand Almoner or the MCF for advice on making an application.
- Remember that a change in circumstances may mean they are entitled to other state benefits.





Useful contacts

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- **The Department for Work & Pensions:**
<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-work-pensions>
or call the Bereavement Service Helpline on 0345 606 0265.
- **Cruse Bereavement Care:**
Offers support after the death of someone close -
www.cruse.org.uk or call 0808 808 1677.
- **Tell us Once:**
A service for reporting a death to most government organisations in one go -
www.tcf.org.uk or call 0345 123 2304.
- **Turn2Us:**
Helping people access the money available to them through welfare benefits and grants -
www.turn2us.org.uk or call 0808 802 2000.
- **Winston's Wish:**
Services to bereaved children and young people -
www.winstonswish.org.uk or call 01242 515 157.
- **The Masonic Charitable Foundation:**
www.mcf.org.uk or call 0800 035 60 90 to gain access to the Counselling Careline.
- **The MCF's Advice and Support Team:**
Offer advice, guidance and support on a range of issues. Contact them by calling 0800 035 60 90. Your Provincial Grand Almoner may be able to signpost you to local support and assistance.

The information contained in this factsheet is intended for general guidance only and does not constitute advice. The organisations referred to for further help are just a sample of other support services available.

