



23 April 2020

## Coronavirus (COVID-19): Top tips in Bereavement Care and Support in Specialist Housing

### A Housing LIN Practice Briefing (No4)

#### About this Briefing

This briefing sets out a number of top tips for the housing sector, in particular operators of specialist housing - such as extra care or retirement housing - or general needs housing, on bereavement and care after death. It also signposts to a selection of useful links and further practical advice.

#### Background

As outlined in the earlier Housing LIN practice briefing (No2), [Tips for the housing sector on end of life care](#), care may not be something you want to think about following the death of one of your residents but with the escalation of coronavirus (COVID-19) in the UK it is vital that you know how to support your resident's families, other residents and staff at this time.

Furthermore, in another Housing LIN COVID-19 practice briefing (No1), [Housing and Care in Specialist Housing](#), it asks, do you know:

- what the local process is with your local health team following the death of a residents?
- if your resident had a preferred funeral director?
- changes in how to register a death?
- changes to funerals in the number of people who can attend?
- where you can get bereavement support for families and other residents?

In the light of the above, we would suggest you consider the following tips:

#### End of life care

Following the death of a resident, processes for the verification and removal of the deceased may be different so do contact your local coroner, funeral director and crematorium to find out what the situation is locally as this may change over time.

*There are now restrictions on the number of people and who can attend a funeral the National Association of funeral directors have some very helpful information, do however bear in mind that advice may change so do check.*

## **Guidance for care of the deceased with suspected or confirmed coronavirus (COVID-19)**

*Published on 31 March 2020*

The advice is primarily designed to assist people who are required to manage the bodies of deceased persons infected with coronavirus (COVID-19). It includes first responder information and how the bereaved family of the deceased are treated with sensitivity, dignity and respect.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-care-of-the-deceased/guidance-for-care-of-the-deceased-with-suspected-or-confirmed-coronavirus-covid-19#responders>

### **Registering a death**

During the current COVID-19 situation the registration of a death is now done via email and phone and not in person. Contact your local registrar's office. More information can be accessed at:

<https://www.gov.uk/register-offices>

<https://improvement.nhs.uk/documents/6590/COVID-19-act-excess-death-provisions-info-and-guidance-31-march.pdf>

### **Bereavement support**

Within specialist housing, operational staff will already be experienced with how residents express grief and loss of loved one, friend or neighbour. With COVID-19, this is likely to increase and therefore it is important that staff are fully aware of national and local sources of bereavement support available.

Some operators already have systems in place. For example:

**Anchor Hanover** have produced two useful documents. The first is guidance for their colleagues on end of life care for residents in housing with confirmed/suspected COVID-19 and, the second, a help sheet for their customers to support them dealing with end of life. These are set out at [Appendix One](#) and [Two](#) and may help other organisation when planning their own guidance. But please also note that these live documents are subject to change as needed.

And **The ExtraCare Charitable Trust** and **Cruse Bereavement Care** are working in partnership on a five year Bereavement Supporter Project to improve bereavement support for older people, including those with dementia, in retirement housing. The project, being evaluated by Aston University, supports residents by:

- Raising awareness of how bereavement affects older people's mental and physical health
- Improving access to support for bereaved older people in sheltered and retirement accommodation
- Encouraging self-help and peer support in order to reduce loneliness and social isolation
- Contributing to safeguarding and promotion of long term mental and physical health.

*For more about the project, read Caity Roleston's Housing LIN guest blog, [Talking about "the dark stuff": opening up bereavement in extra care housing](#).*

And at **Grand Union Housing Group**, they have a specific [webpage](#) with information for residents to assist them cope with bereavement.

Consideration in schemes should also be given to other social and physical aspects of bereavement support and housing management issues, including:

- Are there tell-tale signs that a resident is not coping after a loss? For example, falling behind with their rent, becoming socially isolated, impact of their health and wellbeing, including mental health or behavioural/lifestyle changes?
- Does the resident have a care plan or self-care? And is there access to on-site scheme day activities, counselling or 'buddying' support services to support a resident who is bereaved or feeling loss?
- Has the resident applied for a non-mean tested Bereavement Support Payment? This can assist any financial worries.
- Do you have a pets policy?
- Does the scheme have community alarm provision or telecare offering reassuring access to 24 hours help?
- Does the scheme have a meeting room or other communal areas, including outdoor space where someone can retreat to other than their apartment?
- Where applicable, does the resident understand any succession right?
- And have you explained other practical issues to family members such as notification of death to housing benefit, clearance of a property, any outstanding rent, utility supplies, Council Tax payments etc?

Lastly, a death in a scheme where people have been a collective group is a real loss and a reminder of the vulnerability of people as they enjoy their years, it is important, as well as mourning the loss, that the life and contributions of people are celebrated. This helps to get people to open up and talk about their feelings to support with the experience of death.

For example, holding 'celebrating the life' of a person sessions can really help to open up the topic of death and bereavement and in itself can help with both grief, and overcoming one's own fears. The events bring people together and in themselves may seem like social gathering but they are much more than this, they are helping to open up a difficult topic and supporting expression of feeling that we know people don't easy to do. However, with COVID-19 in mind, are there alternative ways in which you can celebrate the passing of a resident?

## Useful sources of information and websites

Information at this time is important and there are some helpful links that will help them be signposted. These include:

<https://www.gov.uk/when-someone-dies>

<https://www.gov.uk/after-a-death/organisations-you-need-to-contact-and-tell-us-once>

<https://www.which.co.uk/after-life-care/what-to-when-someone-dies>

As stated above, there are now restrictions on the number of people and who can attend a funeral the **National Association of Funeral Directors** (NAFD) have some very helpful information. However, do bear in mind that advice may change so do check regularly.

The **Deceased Management Advisory Group** (DMAG), which is regularly liaising with government on the sector's response to COVID-19 are aware of the important and central role of the funeral ritual to the grieving process for many families. It recommended that funeral services consider limiting attendees to members of the immediate family who are not in any of the high-risk categories and are not self-isolating. The guidance for attendance at funerals is located on NAFD website at: <https://nafd.org.uk/2020/03/24/sector-wide-advice-issued-on-limiting-attendance-at-funerals/>

As there will be limited numbers of people able to attend funerals under the current restrictions alternative to mark the death **Quaker Action** have some good suggestions such as a virtual service using social media, marking the day and remembering the person who has died. Find at: <https://quakersocialaction.org.uk/we-can-help/helping-funerals/down-earth/coronavirus-organising-meaningful-funeral/if-you-cannot>

## **Bereavement care**

**Cruse** is a national organisation with both local and national support available They offer a range of free confidential support for adults and children. Please note there can be a waiting list. More at: <https://www.cruse.org.uk/get-help/coronavirus-dealing-bereavement-and-grief>

**Bereavement what to do** is a colourful 3 page guide (printable) offering helpful tips on how to relate to someone who is bereaved. View at: <https://www.careforthefamily.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/Bereavement-How-other-people-can-help.pdf>

**Sue Ryder** offer a free one to one counselling session which you can book online at <https://www.sueryder.org/online-bereavement-counselling>

Finding your **local bereavement support** can also be found via: <https://www.nhs.uk/service-search/other-services/Bereavement%20support/LocationSearch/314>

For general **advice to help cope with bereavement**, visit: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/coping-with-bereavement/>

**Helping young people with bereavement:** <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/bereavement-and-young-people/>

**The NHS (Wales)** offer compact guide covering range of concerns and particular needs. describes some of the feelings that can arise from losing someone, and where you can go for help and support. <https://www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk/encyclopaedia/b/article/bereavement/>

The charity **Mind** provides information on bereavement, where to go for support, and suggestions for helping yourself and others through grief. Clear and accessible advice and on dealing with bereavement can be found at: <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/guides-to-support-and-services/bereavement/useful-contacts/>

The **Good Grief Trust** provides signpost to other useful information for people who are bereaved at: <https://www.thegoodgrieftrust.org/>

'**At a loss**' states it is the UK website for the bereaved .Here you will find access to a range of articles and resources at: <https://www.ataloss.org/resources>

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## About the Housing LIN

The Housing LIN is a sophisticated network bringing together over 25,000 housing, health and social care professionals in England, Wales and Scotland to exemplify innovative housing solutions for an ageing population. For information on bereavement and end of life care, including opening up about bereavement in extra care housing, visit the Housing LIN's Care and Support at Home webpages at:

<https://www.housinglin.org.uk/EndOfLifeCare/>

For more information on Coronavirus, visit the Housing LIN's online Info Hub on our Health Intel webpages at: <https://www.housinglin.org.uk/Coronavirus-Info-Hub/>

And if you would like to talk through how the Housing LIN can support your organisation at this time, please do not hesitate to contact us (see contact details below). And for more about our consultancy services, visit: <https://www.housinglin.org.uk/consultancy/>

Lastly, if you would like to write a briefing for the Housing LIN on how your organisation is tackling coronavirus, please email us at: [info@housinglin.org.uk](mailto:info@housinglin.org.uk)

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