

Preparing for loss – How to support people when someone has died

One of our family consultants has been supporting a manager in a service where someone we support died of coronavirus. Sadly, this is something that all managers need to think about in advance of people we support falling ill.

With this in mind, the team have provided a few suggestions for managers to help support family, friends and staff when someone we support dies. The suggestions are tailored around the restrictions of the current pandemic but many of them would be relevant in different times.

Preparing people before a death when we know someone is close to the end of life

1. We might be able to support friends/ housemates to record a short message or make a card to send to someone. Whilst messages and cards may not be delivered, making them could be a valuable process.
 2. Guidance has now changed so that family should be able to make a 'last goodbye' visit.
 3. Where people we support live together, then a house meeting to share the sad news and eat and talk together would be a good thing. Everyone should hear the news at the same time, there should be no hierarchy of who gets to hear when.
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Remembrance

1. It's important to keep mementos safe for family and friends. We will need them later, to help us remember and grieve. Items like photos, wool from a favourite jumper, a napkin from a favourite restaurant, pub tickets from a much loved show. At a later date these can be put together in a scrapbook or memory box for family or the people we support.
2. Some hospitals have asked for volunteers to make pairs of fabric or knitted/crocheted hearts so that one can go to the person in intensive care and the other to their family. It acts as a link between loved ones if visitors are not allowed in hospital. If the person should then pass away, the heart can be placed in the coffin with them. In a similar way, a heart could be made to hang in the home, enabling the people we support to remember their friend who has died. We may have some talented friends who could make hearts in material that matches the personality of the person who has died; favourite colour, favourite football team, favourite animal, whatever is appropriate. If you can't make anything something like this is still available from Amazon:
https://www.amazon.co.uk/Robins-Hanging-Memorial-Christmas-Decoration/dp/B01MAYTRDW?ref_=fscpl_dp_4

3. At the moment there are restrictions on accessing funeral homes. Ask families if they have any small things or a letter that they would like to be placed in their loved one's coffin. When families and friends are grieving it might be hard for them to think of ideas like this in the early days. Later, knowing this happened might be of comfort to them.
4. There's a Books Beyond Words book 'When someone dies from coronavirus' that could be helpful to the other people we support who lived with the person who died.
<https://booksbeyondwords.co.uk/>
5. You could set up online memory books that people can contribute to, or create a page in an existing online book of remembrance, for example the National Autistic Society Book
<https://www.theonlinebookcompany.com/autism/Content/Instructions>.
6. Let staff, families and the people we support know that, because of social distancing and self-isolation, today we can't do the things we would normally do to grieve and remember. But we will be doing something later to remember the person we all cared for. When we can all gather safely again, you could arrange:
 - A. a remembrance event, collecting together people who knew the person and asking them to share memories, stories and photos about him/her.Or,
 - B. For everyone to go out on one of his or her favourite trips and remember him/her.

Useful websites

Professor Irene Tuffrey-Winje provides suggestions on breaking bad news to people we support here:

<http://www.breakingbadnews.org/ten-top-tips-for-breaking-bad-news/>

Cruse has lots of useful bereavement information that can be shared with the people we support, family members and staff:

<https://www.cruse.org.uk/get-help/coronavirus-dealing-bereavement-and-grief>

Cruse also has a free helpline number: 0808 808 1677

Bereavement Advice Centre provides information on how to help others deal with grief and information for professionals: <https://www.bereavementadvice.org/>



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