



Coping with  
bereavement in  
your volunteering

# About this guide

**In your volunteering role at Independent Age, you might become very close to the older person you support. If that person dies, it may be difficult to come to terms with it. Bereavement is a universal experience and affects everyone differently.**

This guide looks at what you might be feeling and thinking after the death of someone you have been supporting, and where you can find information and support, including through us at Independent Age. Grief is a complex and intensely personal experience and there is no right or wrong way of coping. It is important to know that support is available – and that you're not alone.

Have a look through this guide and take what you need from it. If you would like to speak to someone, please reach out to your Independent Age contact.

## **How you may be feeling as a volunteer**

You may not feel you need emotional support to deal with the death of the person you've been working with. This may be because you've not known each other for very long or already feel well equipped to cope with bereavement. For others, the death of that person will have a much greater impact, or it may spark feelings from personal grief they have experienced in the past. Everyone experiences grief differently, whether you think about that person as a friend or someone you supported as a volunteer.

You may want to manage any feelings you have on your own. But it's also good to know that, if you want to, you can talk to others and draw on their support. Your Independent Age contact is here to talk to you, if that would be helpful. If you're worried about anything you're thinking or feeling, or you're finding it hard to cope, please do seek support.

You may experience periods of sadness, and these may become more pronounced after some time has passed. We are always here to listen, if you would find it helpful. It may also help to talk to those around you or to a support organisation. The bereavement support organisation At a Loss has a database of local services ([ataloss.org](http://ataloss.org)).

If you experience intense sadness, it will often ease as time goes on. It is not uncommon, though, to still miss the person years later, particularly on occasions such as the person's birthday or around the anniversary of their death, if you had been close.

# What happens now?

We're here to support you with whatever you decide to do next. Have a look at the options below and let us know what feels right for you.



## Taking a break

You may like to continue your volunteering with us, but just need a little more time. If this is the case, we can look to pause your volunteering for the time being, until you feel ready to return.



## Continue to volunteer with Independent Age

We greatly value the time you have given, and you may wish to continue in your role as a volunteer. We would love it if you wanted to continue volunteering. It may be possible to introduce you to someone new, but you might prefer to try something different and take on a new volunteer role with us. We'll be in touch in about a month's time to see if you'd like to continue as a volunteer and talk through what might be of interest.



## Ending your volunteer journey

Not everyone feels they want to continue volunteering when the person they have been working alongside dies. We also recognise things may have changed for you in your life. If you feel you would rather stop volunteering with us, we will miss you, but understand that things change. We will always be here if you change your mind.

We promote all our volunteering opportunities on our website ([independantage.org/get-involved/volunteering](https://independantage.org/get-involved/volunteering)), so please take a look when the time feels right.

# Circumstances of bereavement

The circumstances of the death can affect how you feel about it: for example, whether the death was sudden or expected, and the type of relationship you had with the person who died. For some people, the death may also bring up memories or feelings of any personal bereavements.

## When someone dies and we don't have any more information

We recognise it can be difficult when you don't know the circumstances of someone's death, particularly if it is unexpected. Sometimes we are not given any more information, especially if the family were unaware that the person was being supported by an Independent Age volunteer. We will always share with you any information we are able to.

For more support, please see the links to bereavement organisations listed on [page 6](#).

## When someone dies through suicide or other trauma

The death of someone through suicide or in a traumatic way is often particularly difficult. Cruse Bereavement Care has information on coping with death through suicide, violence or crime, and other traumatic incidents. It also runs a bereavement helpline and has local support groups ([0808 808 1677](tel:08088081677), [cruse.org.uk/get-help/local-services](http://cruse.org.uk/get-help/local-services)).

## Grief during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic

Isolation and anxiety about the pandemic could make your feelings of loss more intense. Seek help if you're struggling to cope with your emotions. See [independentage.org/covid-19](http://independentage.org/covid-19) for more information.

# Impact of grief

Sometimes the death of someone you know can bring up thoughts about your own mortality.

Bereavement can make you anxious and this is a common response. If it is troubling you, speak to your GP or someone you trust, or see our guide Managing anxiety ([independentage.org/get-advice/advice-guides-factsheets-leaflets/managing-anxiety](https://independentage.org/get-advice/advice-guides-factsheets-leaflets/managing-anxiety)).

If you have been through a bereavement of a family member or friend, it is not uncommon for these feelings to resurface when you hear about the death of the person you have been supporting.

Grief doesn't just affect people emotionally. The stress and anxiety it causes can also produce physical symptoms – for example, you might feel more tired or less hungry.

These are common symptoms, but grief can affect people in all sorts of ways. If you are worried about your health or wellbeing, or are struggling to resume daily tasks, speak to your GP.

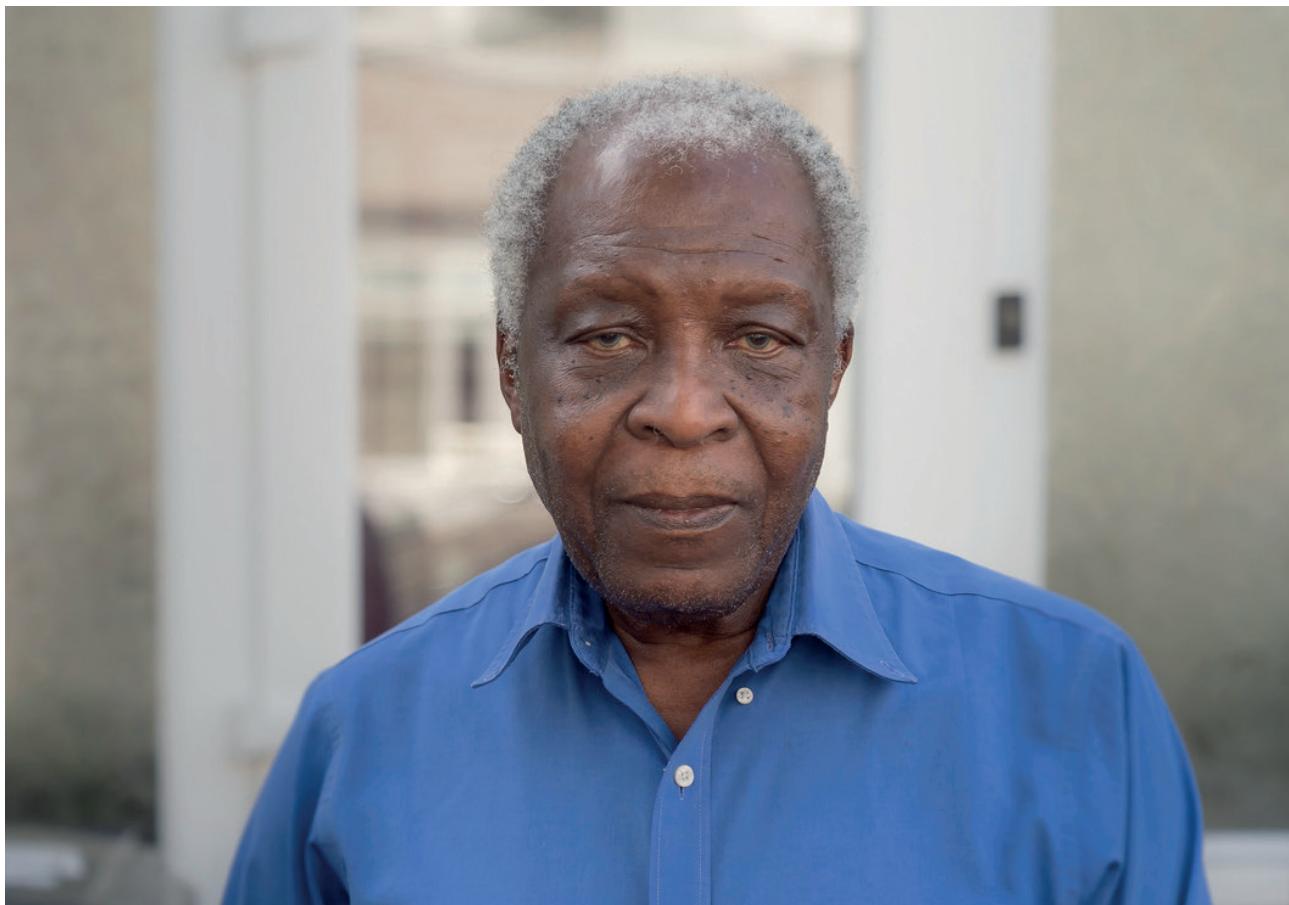


# Looking after yourself

**The death of anyone who we think of as a friend or are close to may have an impact, so it is important to be kind to yourself and give yourself time to grieve. Allow yourself to feel sad and to remember the person in your own way.**

Talking to others about the person who has died and sharing your memories of them can really help. If you would like to share your memories of the person with us, please let us know.

There is no time limit on grieving. People usually feel less sad as time goes on. However, you may continue to have feelings of sadness at particular times, such as on anniversaries.



# Useful resources

Many people find it helpful to read about other people's experiences of grief. Memoirs, poetry, fiction, podcasts and self-help books based on personal experiences of overcoming grief can all be helpful.

Cruse (**0808 808 1677**, [cruse.org.uk/about-cruse/publications/recommended-books](http://cruse.org.uk/about-cruse/publications/recommended-books)) and The Compassionate Friends (**0345 123 2304**, [tcf.org.uk/content/readings-list](http://tcf.org.uk/content/readings-list)) both have recommended reading lists you could use as a starting point or you could look in your local library. The Compassionate Friends also operates a postal lending library.

Overcoming Grief is part of the Overcoming self-help series, endorsed by the Royal College of Psychiatrists. See [overcoming.co.uk](http://overcoming.co.uk) or find it in libraries and bookshops.

## Your GP

If you feel you're not coping or have any physical or mental health concerns, remember you can always speak to your GP.



## Bereavement and support organisations

There are lots of organisations that can offer support. Many of these run local support groups, as well as offering information and advice. Check what's available in your area. Your Independent Age contact can support you with this – just ask them.

**Cruse Bereavement Care** offers support, advice and information to bereaved people (**0808 808 1677**, [cruse.org.uk](http://cruse.org.uk)).

**Bereavement Advice Centre** runs a helpline and online information service (**0800 634 9494**, [bereavementadvice.org](http://bereavementadvice.org)).

**GriefChat** offers free online bereavement support ([griefchat.co.uk](http://griefchat.co.uk)).

It can also be accessed through the Independent Age website ([independenage.org/get-advice/end-of-life](http://independenage.org/get-advice/end-of-life)).

**Samaritans** runs a 24-hour helpline. You can talk to someone about anything that's troubling you (**116 123**, [samaritans.org](http://samaritans.org)).

**Thank you once again for volunteering at Independent Age. Remember to get in touch with your Independent Age contact if you need any support.**