

A practical guide to living with and after cancer

AFTER SOMEONE DIES – COPING WITH BEREAVEMENT



About this booklet

Coping with the death of someone close to you involves dealing with difficult feelings and emotions, as well as practical tasks that have to be done. This booklet is for the relatives and friends of anyone who has died from cancer. It gives you some practical information about what to do and what to expect when someone dies. It also looks at some of the emotions you may have, and the support that can help.

If your relative or friend has died recently, you may be feeling overwhelmed by your emotions and the number of practical tasks you have to do. Even if they died some time ago, you might still be struggling with your thoughts and feelings. You may still have practical tasks that you need to complete, for example sorting out probate (see page 24). You will also still be adjusting to your life after the person has died.

Dealing with difficult emotions and practical tasks can be exhausting. You may not have the time or energy to read all of this booklet at once. You can just read the sections that are helpful to you at the moment. You can come back to the rest later if you want to. Keep this booklet in a safe place so you know where it is if you need it.

We have another booklet called **Preparing a child for loss**. It is for people who are supporting a child or young person when a relative or friend is dying or has died of cancer.

It can often help to share your thoughts and feelings with others who are going through, or have been through, a similar experience to you. Macmillan's Online Community has two groups for people who have been bereaved. You can join these groups at **macmillan.org.uk/community** In this booklet, we've included quotes from people in these groups and quotes from **healthtalkonline.org** There are also quotes from Bill, who is on the cover of this booklet.

If you'd like to discuss this information, call the Macmillan Support Line free on **0808 808 00 00**, Monday–Friday, 9am–8pm. If you're hard of hearing you can use textphone **0808 808 0121**, or Text Relay. For non-English speakers, interpreters are available. Or you can visit **macmillan.org.uk**

If you find this booklet helpful, you could pass it on to other family members and friends. They may also want information to help them support you.

Contents

Practical information and support (pages 5–27)

There are lots of things that need to be done when someone dies. You may find it hard to think clearly and it may be difficult to know what to do first. This section has information about some of the tasks that need to be done.

Emotional information and support (pages 29–55)

You may have many different thoughts and feelings when your relative or friend dies. In this section you can read about some of them, and about the different types of support that might be helpful. There's also information about thinking about going back to work and doing other activities. And we explain what may help as you adjust to life without your relative or friend.

If someone else has been bereaved (pages 57–59)

You may know someone who is grieving after the death of a relative or friend. It is sometimes very difficult to know what to say and how to help. The information in this booklet can help you understand more about how they may be feeling. This section also has some ideas and suggestions about things to do and say that may be helpful.

Further information (pages 61–72)

There are a number of organisations that offer information and support to people who are bereaved. In this section, we have included details of organisations you may find helpful.



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At the time of the death

There is no right or wrong way to feel or react immediately after the death of a relative or friend. You may feel shocked or numb and as if everything is unreal. Or you may feel relieved that they are now at peace. Everyone reacts differently. You may have known that your relative or friend was dying and been preparing yourself for that. But sometimes a person may die unexpectedly, and this can be a huge shock. You can read more about the different feelings you may have on pages 30–45.

Your relative or friend may have died at home, or in a hospital, hospice or care home. If you are alone when your relative or friend dies, it may be possible and helpful to have someone with you soon after the death to support you. This might be a relative, friend, health or social care professional, or spiritual or religious adviser.

Many cultures and religions have ceremonies or rituals that are important to carry out when someone dies. A spiritual or religious adviser can help you with these if you would like them to.

If you want, you can spend some time just sitting with the person who has died.

It is important to do what you feel is right for you. Don't feel that you have to do anything straight away or rush to get on with things.

If your relative or friend dies at home

If your relative or friend dies at home, you may be alone with them. You may not be certain they have died, and you may be unsure of what to do next.

You can take your time – you may find it difficult to think clearly. You may have been given some written information from the district nurse or palliative care team about what to do, so follow that if you can. If you're on your own, you may want to call a family member or friend to be with you.

First of all, you need to let the person's GP or district nurse know what's happened. They will come as soon as they can to confirm the death. If the person dies when the GP practice is shut, you can call the out-of-hours doctor.

If the GP comes, they will confirm the death. If the death is expected, they will be able to write the medical certificate of cause of death (MCCD). They may give you a time to collect the certificate from the GP practice later. Or you may have to call to arrange a time to do this. They will also give you a form called **Notice to informant**. This tells you how to register the death (see pages 12–13).

If a district nurse or out-of-hours doctor comes, they will confirm the death. You will need to get the MCCD and **Notice to informant** form from your GP. This may take a couple of days, for example if your GP is away. You can call the GP practice to find out when the forms will be ready for you to collect.

When the death has been confirmed by a nurse or doctor, you can contact the funeral director (undertaker). You don't need to do this straight away if you would like to spend some time with your relative or friend. Funeral directors are available 24 hours a day. They will explain what you need to do (see page 18).

When you have the MCCD, you need to take this to the local registrar's office to register the death (see pages 12–13).

It can be a shock to see the MCCD, as this will probably be the first time you see in writing that your relative or friend has died. Some people describe feeling as if they are being told their relative or friend has died all over again. You may want to read it while you're with the doctor or a family member or friend.

You may want to ask about what is written on the MCCD and what it means. If you prefer, you can arrange to speak to the GP at a later date. If you don't want to ask about what's written on it, you don't have to.

'The nurses were there, so they phoned the GP straight away. And she came round to officially declare the death and to fill in a bit of paperwork.'

Simon

If your relative or friend dies in hospital or a hospice

Your relative or friend may be being cared for in a hospital or hospice when they die. You may or may not be with them. Whether or not their death was expected, you may feel shocked and numb and unsure what to do next. The care staff should support you through the next few hours.

'I knew the moment she'd gone. I rang the bell and the night staff came in. And I said, "My mum's gone." They checked her pulse and it wasn't there and they said, "Yes, she has." And they left me for a while and I just sat there holding her hands. It was very, very calm.'

Georgina

A doctor or nurse will confirm the death. If the death was expected, they will give you a medical certificate of cause of death (MCCD). You will need this to be able to register the death (see pages 12–13). You may have to collect the certificate from the hospital on the next working day. The nurses will tell you what you need to do.

After you have left the hospital or hospice, your relative or friend's body will be moved to the hospital or hospice mortuary. If you want to see your relative or friend in the mortuary, the nurses will tell you who to contact.

If the death wasn't expected

If your relative or friend dies unexpectedly, you may be totally unprepared. You may find it particularly difficult to believe what has happened. The ward staff or GP will talk to you about what has happened and try to answer any questions you have.

If the death of your relative or friend was not expected, or if they die at home and had not been seen by their GP in the last 14 days (in England, Scotland and Wales) or 28 days (in Northern Ireland), the death will be referred to:

- the coroner (a doctor or lawyer who investigates unexpected deaths) in England, Wales or Northern Ireland
- the procurator fiscal in Scotland.

This is a standard procedure.

Most deaths that are reported to the coroner or procurator fiscal are completely natural, but the cause of death is not clear. The coroner will decide if an examination of the body (post mortem) is needed to give exact information about the cause of death. If a death is referred to the coroner or procurator fiscal, the funeral may sometimes be delayed.

You can get more information about what to do after a death from:

- **gov.uk** in England and Wales
- **gov.scot** in Scotland
- **nidirect.gov.uk** in Northern Ireland.

The Bereavement Advice Centre has a helpful booklet called **What to do when someone dies**. You can find its contact details on page 68.

Caring for the body

The funeral director (see page 18) will arrange for your relative or friend's body to be taken to the funeral home. If you would like their body to be kept at home before the funeral, they can give you information about how long their body can be at home for and what you need to do.

The funeral director will take care of your relative or friend's body. They will carefully wash and dry them, and close their eyelids and mouth. They will tidy and sometimes wash their hair. They will also ask if you'd like them to be dressed in any particular clothes, such as an outfit that may have had special meaning to them.

You can tell the funeral director if there are any particular cultural or religious practices you would like to be carried out.

If you would like to, you can help the funeral directors wash and dress your relative or friend. Let them know as soon as possible so they can arrange this.

Some people want to be embalmed. This is when the body is disinfected and treated with chemicals to help preserve it. The funeral director can give you more information about this.

Registering the death

You will usually be given information about registering your relative or friend's death when you are given the MCCD (see pages 7–9).

The person who can register the death varies in different parts of the UK. You can find more detailed information about this at **[gov.uk/register-a-death](https://www.gov.uk/register-a-death)**

You have to register the death with the Registrar of Births, Marriages and Deaths. This has to be done within five days (in England, Wales and Northern Ireland) or eight days (in Scotland), unless it has been referred to the coroner or procurator fiscal (see page 10).

To find the phone number of your local registrar's office, you can:

- look up 'registration of births, deaths and marriages' in the business section of your local phone book
- look on the envelope the MCCD is in
- ask the staff in the hospital or hospice, if that's where your relative or friend died
- call the Bereavement Advice Centre on **0800 634 9494**.

Some registrars' offices have an appointment system, so call and check before you go.

You will need to take the MCCD with you. It is also helpful to take:

- your relative or friend's birth certificate, and their marriage certificate if they had one
- details of any state benefits they were getting
- their NHS medical card, if they had one
- the National Insurance number of the person who has died, and of a surviving husband, wife or civil partner, if they have one.

The registrar will enter the details of the death in the register and give you a certificate for burial or cremation. You need to give this to the funeral director. If you need a certificate of registration of death for social security purposes, the registrar will give you one. The registrar will also give you an MCCD for you to keep.

Before you go to the registrar's office, it's helpful to think about how many copies of the death certificate you might need. These are duplicate original, certified copies and not photocopies. You usually need one certified copy for each life insurance policy (or similar) that you need to claim.

You can buy certified copies for a small charge at the time of registration. It is also possible to buy certified copies at a later time, but they may cost more.

You can get more information about registering the death from:

- **gov.uk** in England and Wales
- **gov.scot** in Scotland
- **nidirect.gov.uk** in Northern Ireland.



Telling people about the death

You will need to tell other people about your relative or friend's death. This can often be very difficult. You may get very upset and be unsure who to tell and what to say.

Telling other relatives and friends

You may feel that you want to tell people yourself. But this can be tiring and emotional, so don't feel you have to do it all. You could contact key people and ask them to let other people in their group of family members or friends know.

You may find it useful to start by writing a list of people you need or would like to contact, and how you want to contact them. Using an address book, mobile phone or social networking site may help you make a list.

You might also find it helpful to think about what you want to say and write it down before you contact people. There is no right or wrong way to tell people, but the following sentence might be a starting point: 'I'm sorry to say I have some very sad news. (Name of person) has been ill for some time/was suddenly taken ill and died earlier today/this week'.

Telling official agencies and organisations

When someone dies, there are a lot of official agencies and organisations that need to be told. These include:

- employers
- the tax office
- banks and building societies
- insurance companies
- the local council.

Many of these organisations will need a certified death certificate and other relevant documents (see pages 12–13).

Contacting all these organisations can take a lot of time, and you may not feel emotionally ready to do this. You don't have to contact everyone at once. And you can ask a relative or friend to help you.

Some people find it helpful to write a list of all the organisations and gradually work through it over a few weeks. Others prefer to do it in one go.



It is important to tell insurance companies immediately, as insurance policies become invalid as soon as someone dies.

The Bereavement Advice Centre (see page 68) has a useful checklist of the organisations you need to contact.

Tell Us Once

Tell Us Once is a service for people in England, Scotland and Wales that lets you report a death to most government organisations in one go. The local registrar will tell you how to contact the Tell Us Once service. They will give you a unique reference number to access it.

You can find more information about the Tell Us Once service at [gov.uk/after-a-death/organisations-you-need-to-contact-and-tell-us-once](https://www.gov.uk/after-a-death/organisations-you-need-to-contact-and-tell-us-once)

'It is a process, when someone dies. There are a lot of papers that need to be signed. There's a lot of formality. There are a lot of small things, like phone bills and electricity and bank statements.'

Poppy

Funeral arrangements

Funerals and memorial services allow relatives and friends to get together to remember the person who has died. They're a way of acknowledging their death. They can be a celebration of the person's life as well as a chance to say goodbye to them.

Planning the funeral

There are a number of things to think about when you are planning the funeral. You and your relatives or friends can make all the arrangements for the funeral and burial yourself, if you'd like to. But most people prefer to have the help of a funeral director. You can get contact details of funeral directors from your local phone book. The National Association of Funeral Directors (NAFD) and the National Society of Allied and Independent Funeral Directors (SAIF) also have lists of funeral directors – see page 71.

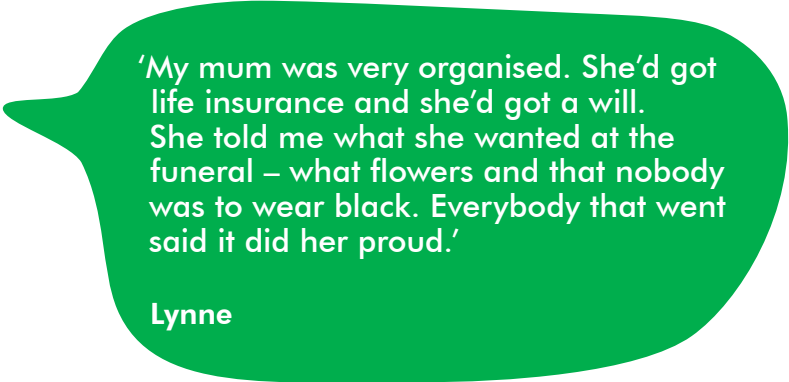
If you're planning a cremation rather than a burial, you need to tell your relative or friend's GP, so they can complete some paperwork.

On pages 19–20 we've listed some things to think about when planning a funeral.

Choosing the type of funeral your relative or friend would have wanted

Your relative or friend may have talked about, or left information about, the type of funeral they wanted. They may have left instructions in their will or a pre-paid funeral plan. This allows someone to plan their funeral in advance.

If they haven't left instructions, you might like to think about what they would have wanted while you plan.



'My mum was very organised. She'd got life insurance and she'd got a will. She told me what she wanted at the funeral – what flowers and that nobody was to wear black. Everybody that went said it did her proud.'

Lynne

Deciding whether to have a religious or non-religious ceremony

You don't need to have a religious leader to conduct a funeral or memorial service.

Some people have no strong religious beliefs, while others have a strong religious or spiritual faith. Some people live their lives as humanists, agnostics or atheists.

You may have very clear ideas about the funeral service and what you would like to include. You can also get ideas from books, online, or from the registrar.

Deciding where to have the funeral

Some people have a clear idea of where they want the funeral or memorial service to take place. A funeral, religious service or spiritual service can be held wherever you like. Services are often held in the church where the body will be buried or in the chapel next to a crematorium, but they can be held in other places if you prefer. For example, they can be held in your relative or friend's home, or a favourite place they liked visiting.

Deciding whether to have a burial or a cremation

After the memorial service, the person's body is cremated or buried.

A cremation takes place in a designated crematorium. Afterwards, the ashes of the person are given in a container to the next of kin. You and your relative or friend may have talked about what they would like to happen with their ashes. You can carry out these wishes when you're ready.

A burial is usually in a churchyard or other official burial place. It is also possible for people to be buried in other places, such as a garden. If you want to bury someone on a property you own or in a place they loved, you can get information from the Natural Death Centre (see page 71).

Paying for the funeral

If you are arranging your relative or friend's funeral, you will also be responsible for paying for the funeral costs. Your relative or friend may have had a pre-paid funeral plan or an insurance policy that covers the cost of their funeral. Or if they have left money, this can be used to pay for the funeral. Sometimes banks and building societies will allow money to be used to pay for the funeral before probate is granted (see page 24). But they don't have to do this, and you may have to pay the funeral costs while you're waiting for probate.

The Social Fund is a government fund that makes payments to people in need. These payments include a Funeral Payment to help with the cost of arranging a funeral. To be eligible for most Social Fund payments, you need to be receiving certain benefits when you apply. The fund is run by the Department for Work and Pensions.

If you live in England, Scotland or Wales, visit **gov.uk** or contact your local Jobcentre Plus office for more information on Funeral Payments. If you live in Northern Ireland, visit **nidirect.gov.uk** or contact your nearest Social Security Agency office for more information. You'll find its number in the phone book or on its website – **dsdni.gov.uk**



Love you
Always
Diana
1/22

After the funeral

The period of time after the funeral, when everyone has gone home, can be very difficult. Now there is nothing to organise and it can feel very quiet. It's a good idea to try not to do too much too soon. You will need time to get used to your relative or friend not being around and the changes this brings. It's important to take time to look after yourself.

You may feel very emotional at this time. Some people may try to keep busy to try and avoid their feelings. But don't be afraid to show your emotions – it's perfectly natural to cry when you're thinking and talking about your relative or friend. Some cultures have specific practices to follow, which can help mark each phase of the bereavement process after a person's death. See pages 32–45 for more information about your feelings and emotions.

'There was so much happening and so much for me to think about, I didn't really have time to think about what it would be like. It's not until after the rest of the family goes home that it really hits you.'

Bill

Wills and probate

Probate is the process of proving what someone owned and owed when they died. In Scotland, probate is called confirmation.

When someone dies, the person who deals with their estate (their executor) needs to apply for probate before the will can be carried out (executed). They need to apply to the local probate court. It usually takes several weeks. Probate may not be needed in some situations, for example when the person who died owned everything jointly with their spouse.

If a person dies without making a will, this is called **dying intestate**. If this happens, you should apply for **letters of administration** in England, Wales or Northern Ireland, or for **appointment of executor dative** in Scotland.

The probate process usually takes longer for people who die intestate. You shouldn't sell or give away any of your relative or friend's property until probate is granted.

If you have questions about probate, it might be helpful to discuss these with a solicitor or your local Citizens Advice (see page 70).

It's important that the executors of the will understand their role and keep close family or friends up to date on the progress. If you're likely to be left something in the will (you're a beneficiary), remember that probate can take a long time. Try to make sure you have enough money in your own account to cover the first few weeks and months. Some money can be released early to pay for immediate costs, but it's much easier to have your own funds.

You can find more information about wills and probate at [gov.uk/wills-probate-inheritance](https://www.gov.uk/wills-probate-inheritance)

Financial help

If your spouse or civil partner has died, you may be entitled to a Bereavement Payment or Bereavement Allowance. You may also be entitled to extra pension payments from your spouse or civil partner's pension or National Insurance contributions.

If you live in England, Scotland or Wales, you can find out more at [gov.uk/browse/benefits/bereavement](https://www.gov.uk/browse/benefits/bereavement) If you live in Northern Ireland, contact your local Social Security Agency benefits office. To find it, visit [dsdni.gov.uk](https://www.dsdni.gov.uk) You can also contact Macmillan's Support Line on **0808 808 00 00**.

Social media accounts

Your relative or friend may have one or more social media accounts, for example Facebook or Twitter. You may not be sure what you want to do with these accounts.

Some people want to close them, while others want to convert them into a memorialised account (see page 46). There's no hurry to do either. Take your time and look at the options when you feel ready. You can find information about closing accounts and converting them to memorialised accounts on most social media websites.





Precious Memories of
ELIZABETH JEAN BURNETT
DIED 10th JULY 2010
BETTY
A DAZZLING WIFE, MOM, DAUGHTER,
SISTER AND DAUGHTER
SADLY MISSED BUT
IN OUR HEARTS FOREVER

EMOTIONAL INFORMATION AND SUPPORT

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Grief

Grief is a word for the range of feelings you may have following the death of someone close to you.

Grief can begin before the person dies. You may already have felt a sense of loss. You may have missed the way your relationship used to be and all the things you used to do together.

The thoughts and feelings you have will vary. At times they may be very intense and stop you doing things. At other times they may be in the background and you'll find you can still do your day-to-day activities.

How you feel and react will depend on a number of different things, including:

- the relationship you had with the person who died
- whether their death was expected
- how they died
- any previous experience of death you have had.

Some people describe being overwhelmed and even frightened by the intensity of their feelings. Others describe feeling numb and that they can't believe what has happened. You may have regrets about things you wish you had done or said. Or you may just wish you had more time together. Some people may feel relieved that their relative or friend is no longer suffering.

There is no right or wrong way to feel. Your feelings may change from day to day or even hour to hour. One day you may feel you are coping. The next day you may be overwhelmed by feelings of sadness and loneliness. It is quite normal to have ups and downs like this.

The information in this section is about the thoughts and feelings you may have following the death of your relative or friend. There is also information about the support that may be available and what you can do to help yourself.

The feelings we describe are ones you may feel soon after the person has died, some weeks or months afterwards, or both. They may come and go. Some may last a short time, while others go on for longer. There is no 'normal' for how you will feel. You will need to take things day by day.

It isn't possible for us to fully understand how you are feeling and talk about all the different emotions in this short booklet. But we have included information on some of the more common feelings and experiences people often describe. We have also included quotes from people who have been bereaved, to help show how intense and deep the feelings may be. We hope this will help you know that you are not alone in your feelings, and that what you are going through is normal and understandable. These quotes are from the two bereavement groups on Macmillan's Online Community ([macmillan.org.uk/community](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/community)) and from [healthtalkonline.org](https://www.healthtalkonline.org)

The next few pages describe some of the feelings you may have. There is information about what may help you deal with these feelings on pages 46–49. On page 49 there's a table you can use to write down your feelings and what you find helps.

Emotional symptoms of grief

Shock and numbness

Many people describe feeling shocked and numb in the days and weeks immediately after the death of a relative or friend. This can happen even if the death was expected. People sometimes talk about ‘going through the motions’ as they make arrangements for the funeral and start to sort out practical things (see pages 5–27).

‘I think that in times of great shock, the brain somehow “shuts down” in order to try to protect us until we are ready to process the emotions. I think that dealing with the practicalities that follow the death of a loved one does divert you and somehow forces you to carry on.’

Sam

Anger

Anger is a common feeling following the death of a relative or friend. Some people describe being shocked at how angry they feel. Try not to worry about it, because it's a normal feeling to have. Anger may be directed at different people. You may feel angry with:

- the doctors for not being able to cure your relative or friend's cancer
- your relative or friend for leaving you on your own with so much to sort out
- the people around you for not understanding how you feel.

'I was very angry. I was angry with the hospital too, but I was very polite. I think being very organised and keeping myself very busy got me through it.'

Cassie

Guilt

People feel guilty for different reasons after the death of a relative or friend. You may think that if you had said or done something differently, they might not have died. If you are feeling like this, you might find it helpful to talk to the doctor or a nurse who was caring for your relative or friend. You could also talk to your GP.

There may be some things you wish you had been able to say to your relative, or friend or do with them while they were still alive.

Some people feel guilty because they are relieved that their relative or friend has died (see page 41).

'The guilt is difficult to deal with. I beat myself up about whether I did enough. Could I have cared for them better? Did they know how much I loved them? The list is endless, but the one thing I have come to understand over the past year is that the guilt element is perfectly normal. For me it emphasises just how much I loved my other half and that if I could, I would have changed places with them.'

Fiona

Loneliness

Many people describe feeling intensely lonely following the death of a relative or friend. This is very understandable, particularly if the person who has died is someone you have shared your life or your home with for a long time.

Loneliness is often described as a constant feeling that doesn't go away. People describe feeling lonely even when they are going about their everyday lives and surrounded by family and friends. This is not unusual and it will take time to get used to the person not being around. You may think you see a glimpse of the person and then remember they are no longer here. You may find yourself talking to the person who has died. It is fine to do this and you may find it helpful.

'She would want me to get on with things, but I feel lost and unable to know where to go with this. I don't feel like I have anyone to turn to any more. Mum was my best friend as well, and I feel so lost and lonely without her.'

Alison

Fear

Fear is another common and natural feeling following the death of a relative or friend. For example, you may be fearful of having to do things on your own and how you're going to manage. Or you may feel afraid of going back to work. Some people are frightened by the intensity of their feelings.

Many people are scared they will get cancer themselves and feel anxious every time they feel unwell. These feelings are understandable and usually get better with time.

'I have developed a fear that I'm going to get cancer. Any pain could be it, at any time. I worry I'm going to have to go through it all again, but this time it's going to be me, without my mum by my side to go through it with me.'

Allison



Sadness

The sadness you feel following the death of a relative or friend can be overwhelming. Some people describe it as a physical pain. It can stop you wanting to do things like going out with friends, going to work or even getting out of bed. Some people become very depressed and stop looking after themselves properly. If this happens, they may need extra support. You can read more about this on page 55.

'I'm living life, but not really living it. I feel really sad out of the blue, which catches me out. I'm always thinking about him, even at work. I get that sick feeling in the pit of my stomach too. I'm just trying to put one step after the other every day.'

Ros

Longing

Some people describe a feeling of intense longing to see, speak to or hold the person who has died. They desperately wish the person could come back again. This can make it difficult to get on with doing other things. Some people dream about the person who has died. This can be very upsetting when they wake up and realise the person is no longer here.

For some people, the longing is so intense, it feels that life without that person is unbearable. If you feel like you can't continue, ask for extra help and support to help you (see page 55).

'It is so very hard. I so much want to see my wife there sitting next to me again and be able to talk to her. I miss her voice so much. A year has gone past now, but I just can't let go of that feeling. She was everything to me – my whole point of being alive and happy.'

Gerry

Crying

Many people find that they cry easily after the death of a relative or friend. Crying can be a response to all the emotions we describe here. People often say they suddenly start crying when they least expect it, and often many months or years later. This may be triggered by hearing a song on the radio, or visiting a place that has happy memories for you and your relative or friend. Try not to worry about how often you cry. It's a healthy response to your feelings.

Some people find they can't cry, and this may worry them. There is no need to worry if you don't cry. It doesn't mean you don't feel the loss. Crying can't usually be forced. Just do what feels right for you.

'For six months after she died, I was regularly in tears. But I just assumed that was normal. It was very difficult – it's just the pain of the loss. But I'm three and a half years on now, and even though I feel quite emotional at the moment, things have moved on. We are going forward.'

David

Relief

Some people describe feeling relieved when their relative or friend dies. This may particularly be the case if they were very ill for a long time, needed a lot of care from you, or had symptoms that were difficult to control. When someone is suffering, it is natural to wish for their suffering to end. There is no need to feel guilty about this.

If you had a difficult relationship with the person who has died, you may not feel any of the emotions we have described here. Or you may be surprised at how intense your feelings are.

'I thought nothing could be worse than watching someone you love suffer so much. I think I felt relieved when he slipped peacefully away.'

Debbie



Physical symptoms of grief

Many people have physical symptoms after the death of a relative or friend. These can be frightening. Some people say the symptoms are so strong that they worry they are seriously ill or may have cancer themselves. But physical reactions are quite common. They can include:

- feeling sick
- difficulty sleeping
- exhaustion
- poor concentration
- your heart beating fast (palpitations)
- dizziness
- a poor appetite
- losing weight.

If you have any of these symptoms and they continue for more than a week or two, you should discuss them with your GP.

'My concentration and co-ordination were poor. Nobody tells you about the physical effects – the emphasis seems to be on emotional effects. This physical reaction took me completely by surprise.'

Denise

Your feelings

All the emotions and physical symptoms we have described in this section have been used by people to describe how they feel after the death of a relative or friend. You may experience some or all of these feelings. You may have them at different times and in different ways. But you may not have any of them, and you may experience your grief differently.

Although they may be extremely difficult and painful, they are all natural. No one can take away the pain and anguish you might feel. But there are different things you can try that may help.



The words on this page describe some of the feelings people told us they'd had after the death of a relative or friend. These are words used by people on Macmillan's Online Community – [macmillan.org.uk/community](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/community)
The size of each word shows how often it was used.

Unbearable Scared
In shock Numb
Nightmare Lost confidence
Alone Stressed
Emotional wreck
Guilty Flashbacks Exhausted
Painful Empty
Sad Heartbroken Robbed
Angry Brain fog
Distracted

Things you can try that may help

There is no one type of support that will suit everyone. Just as different people have many different emotions, they will find different types of support helpful.

Talking to the person who has died

Even though your relative or friend has died, you may find it comforting to talk to them. Some people like to go to a special place to do this, for example the crematorium or graveyard. Others find it helpful to do this at home as they go about their day-to-day business.

If you find it difficult to talk to them, you may prefer to write a letter or set up a memorialised account on a social media site (see page 26).

Talking to family and friends

Some people find it helpful to talk to family and friends about how they are feeling. You may talk regularly or just occasionally.

Sometimes it may be difficult and painful – you may cry or shout and scream. But at other times you may find you can share stories about your relative or friend and be able to smile at happy memories. As time goes on, it often gets easier to talk about times you shared together.

Try to remember that how you are feeling is normal, and sharing your feelings with family and friends can be helpful.

Support groups

You may find it difficult to share your thoughts and feelings with family and friends. They may also be grieving, and you may feel you need to support them. Or you may not have any close family or friends, or just want to keep your feelings to yourself.

People often say that only others who have experienced the death of a relative or friend can really understand how they are feeling.

There are a number of organisations that offer support and can put you in touch with other people who are grieving. They may offer one-to-one or group support. Some organisations also offer telephone support. You can find details of these on pages 68–70.

Your local hospice or hospital may run a bereavement support group, or have details of a local one.

Macmillan has two bereavement groups on its Online Community, which many people find very helpful. Visit **community.macmillan.org.uk** and search for bereavement under 'groups'.

You can also phone the Macmillan Support Line on **0808 808 00 00** for information and support.

'After we lost Betty, our Macmillan nurse Tony used to pop in to see how we were coping. And I know he's always at the end of a phone if I need him. Without Macmillan, it would have been one hell of a bad journey.'

Bill

Religious and faith groups

If you have a particular religion or faith, you may find this comforting following the death of your relative or friend. Or you may find that their death challenges your faith or beliefs. Some people find meaning in a faith or belief they have not previously had.

Faith leaders are always happy to talk to people about their feelings and beliefs. They won't mind you crying or being angry. They may be able to tell you about other sources of support in their faith communities. You don't have to have a particular faith to get support from a faith leader.

Writing down your feelings

Some people find that it helps to write down how they feel. Keeping a diary, journal or online blog can be a way of expressing your feelings without having to talk them through.

If you want to write down how you're feeling but are not sure where to start, try using the tool on the page opposite. You can use this to write down how you feel and what makes this feeling worse or better. We have written one feeling as an example.

**How I'm
feeling today**

**What makes this
feeling worse**

**What makes this
feeling better**

I'm feeling angry

Sitting on my own
and thinking

Going out for a
long walk

Moving on

You may continue to have days when you feel overwhelmed by grief for many months and sometimes years. But as time goes on, most people will begin to adjust and have more good days than bad. They find they start to have times when their feelings are less intense and they can begin to look to the future. Life will never be the same again following the death of a relative or friend. But it can continue and be fulfilling in a different way.

As time passes, most people reach a point where they are able to remember their relative or friend and talk about them without feeling overwhelmed by their feelings. They start to enjoy things again, feel more comfortable at work and feel able to join in and enjoy different activities.

Things might continue to be difficult from time to time, and you may sometimes feel overwhelmed by your emotions again. This is not unusual, but it tends to happen less often as time goes on.

Returning to work

The time to return to work will vary for each person. Some people feel able to carry on working and need to take very little time off, while others need longer. Sometimes people who return to work quite quickly find they need to take some time off later on.

Let your employer know how you're coping and talk to them about the best way for you to return to work. You may find it easier to work from home or work part-time for a while, if it is possible. It can also be helpful to talk to your employer about telling your colleagues, and about whether you're happy for them to contact you while you're off.

There are many organisations that can support you at this time, including the ones listed on pages 68–70.



Special dates

You may find anniversaries, birthdays and festive occasions very difficult after the death of your relative or friend, particularly during the first year. People describe beginning to feel better and then suddenly feeling shocked about the strength of their emotions again.

With time, these feelings will often get less intense. Some people find it helpful to do something special to mark an anniversary or birthday. Or they make time at a celebration to remember their relative or friend.

For example, you could:

- sit quietly in a place that has special memories for you
- let off balloons at a family celebration
- post on a memorial page on a social media site (see page 26)
- organise an event in memory of your relative or friend (see page 54).

Social events

Social events can be very difficult after the death of your relative or friend. This can be especially true if it's your partner who has died and you are not used to going to things on your own.

Going out with family or friends can also bring back memories of similar occasions when your relative or friend was with you, which can be upsetting.

You may find it helpful to start off by going to social events for a shorter period of time, instead of staying for the whole thing. You could also ask if you can take a relative or close friend along with you.

Some people find it helpful to join a support group (see page 47). Other people join a club or start a new hobby where other people may be joining or starting on their own.

'I see myself as quite radically changed in many ways. I don't have that very rich tapestry of life that I had before. But I can survive badly or I can survive well, and so I try to survive well. So I build into my days a certain amount of social activity, so that I get to see other people and I know what's going on in the world around me. And I try to do interesting and enjoyable things.'

Mary

Social media and memorialised accounts

Your relative or friend may have had a Facebook or other social media account. When someone dies, it is possible to convert some of these accounts into a memorialised account. This allows you and other family members and friends to share memories. You can get information about these accounts from most social media websites.

You can also create a new group on a social media site, where you and other people can share memories of your relative or friend.

In-memory events

Some people find it helpful to remember or celebrate the life of their relative or friend by donating or raising money for charity. It is one way that people can:

- express their grief
- channel their energy
- focus on moving forward.

If you would like to raise money for Macmillan Cancer Support, you can find more information about remembering someone in this way at [macmillan.org.uk/donate/remember-someone](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/donate/remember-someone)

If you would like more information about life after the death of a relative or friend, you can call the Macmillan Support Line free on **0800 808 0121**.

Prolonged grief

Some people continue to find life very difficult following bereavement. They are still overwhelmed by their feelings many months and sometimes years after their relative or friend has died. They may find it difficult or impossible to return to work or socialise with friends. Some people find it hard to even get out of bed in the morning. They may stop washing and taking care of their appearance, and not eat properly. Some people may start to comfort eat or drink a lot of alcohol. Others may have suicidal thoughts.

There is no right or wrong way to grieve. And there is no set period of time to grieve for. But if you continue to be overwhelmed by your feelings in some of the ways described in this booklet, it is important to discuss how you are feeling with your GP or other health or social care professional, so you can get the right help and support.

They will talk with you about how you are feeling and may suggest some extra support for you. This may include:

- referring you to a bereavement support group
- referring you to a bereavement counsellor, psychologist or psychotherapist
- prescribing you medication to help with the way you are feeling.



IF SOMEONE ELSE HAS BEEN BEREAVED

Supporting someone who is grieving

58

Supporting someone who is grieving

If you are supporting someone who is grieving, it can sometimes be difficult to know what to do and say.

Reading this booklet may help you understand some of the thoughts and feelings the person may have. It's important to remember that everyone will experience and express grief in their own way. One of the most helpful things you can do is to simply be there and listen.

The following things may also be helpful:

- **Encourage them to talk and express their feelings.**
Don't worry if they cry or get angry. These are normal emotions after the death of a relative or friend. Remember they may need to do this on many occasions over a long period of time.
- **Don't feel you have to provide answers or solutions.**
Just listening is really important and helpful.
- **Allow the person to grieve in their own time.** Some people will need a short time, while others will need many months and sometimes years.
- **Contact them at difficult times.** This might be on special anniversaries and birthdays.
- **Offer practical help.** This could be with things like cooking, shopping, gardening or cleaning. Ask the person if there is anything in particular they would like you to do.

If you are concerned that the person you are supporting is not making any progress, or if they are not looking after themselves properly, try to encourage them to speak to their GP. They may need some extra help (see page 55).

You can find information about supporting someone who is grieving at dyingmatters.org and goodlifedeathgrief.org.uk (see page 69).



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About our information

We provide expert, up-to-date information about cancer. And all our information is free for everyone.

Order what you need

You may want to order more leaflets or booklets like this one. Visit **be.macmillan.org.uk** or call us on **0808 808 00 00**.

We have booklets on different cancer types, treatments and side effects. We also have information about work, financial issues, diet, life after cancer and information for carers, family and friends.

All of our information is also available online at **macmillan.org.uk/cancerinformation**. There you'll also find videos featuring real-life stories from people affected by cancer, and information from health and social care professionals.

Other formats

We also provide information in different languages and formats, including:

- audiobooks
- Braille
- British Sign Language
- Easy Read booklets
- ebooks
- large print
- translations.

Find out more at **macmillan.org.uk/otherformats**

If you'd like us to produce information in a different format for you, email us at **cancerinformationteam@macmillan.org.uk** or call us on **0808 808 00 00**.

Help us improve our information

We know that the people who use our information are the real experts. That's why we always involve them in our work. If you've been affected by cancer, you can help us improve our information.

We give you the chance to comment on a variety of information including booklets, leaflets and fact sheets.

If you'd like to hear more about becoming a reviewer, email reviewing@macmillan.org.uk You can get involved from home whenever you like, and we don't ask for any special skills – just an interest in our cancer information.



Other ways we can help you

At Macmillan, we know how a cancer diagnosis can affect everything, and we're here to support you. No one should face cancer alone.

Talk to us

If you or someone you know is affected by cancer, talking about how you feel and sharing your concerns can really help.

Macmillan Support Line

Our free, confidential phone line is open Monday–Friday, 9am–8pm. Our cancer support specialists can:

- help with any medical questions you have about your cancer or treatment
- help you access benefits and give you financial advice
- be there to listen if you need someone to talk to
- tell you about services that can help you in your area.

Call us on **0808 808 00 00**
or email us via our website,
macmillan.org.uk/talktous

Information centres

Our information and support centres are based in hospitals, libraries and mobile centres.

There, you can speak with someone face to face.

Visit one to get the information you need, or if you'd like a private chat, most centres have a room where you can speak with someone alone and in confidence.

Find your nearest centre at **macmillan.org.uk/informationcentres** or call us on **0808 808 00 00**.

Talk to others

No one knows more about the impact cancer can have on your life than those who have been through it themselves. That's why we help to bring people together in their communities and online.

Support groups

Whether you are someone living with cancer or a carer, we can help you find support in your local area, so you can speak face to face with people who understand. Find out about support groups in your area by calling us or by visiting [macmillan.org.uk/selfhelpandsupport](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/selfhelpandsupport)

Online community

Thousands of people use our online community to make friends, blog about their experiences and join groups to meet other people going through the same things. You can access it any time of day or night. Share your experiences, ask questions, or just read through people's posts at [macmillan.org.uk/community](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/community)

The Macmillan healthcare team

Our nurses, doctors and other health and social care professionals give expert care and support to individuals and their families. Call us or ask your GP, consultant, district nurse or hospital ward sister if there are any Macmillan professionals near you.

'Everyone is so supportive on the online community, they know exactly what you're going through. It can be fun too. It's not all just chats about cancer.'

Mal

Help with money worries

Having cancer can bring extra costs such as hospital parking, travel fares and higher heating bills. If you've been affected in this way, we can help.

Financial guidance

Our financial guidance team can give you advice on mortgages, pensions, insurance, borrowing and savings.

Help accessing benefits

Our benefits advisers can offer advice and information on benefits, tax credits, grants and loans. They can help you work out what financial help you could be entitled to. They can also help you complete your forms and apply for benefits.

Macmillan Grants

Macmillan offers one-off payments to people with cancer. A grant can be for anything from heating bills or extra clothing to a much-needed break.

Call us on **0808 808 00 00** to speak to a financial guide or benefits adviser, or to find out more about Macmillan Grants. We can also tell you about benefits advisers in your area. Visit **[macmillan.org.uk/financialsupport](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/financialsupport)** to find out more about how we can help you with your finances.

Help with work and cancer

Whether you're an employee, a carer, an employer or are self-employed, we can provide support and information to help you manage cancer at work. Visit **[macmillan.org.uk/work](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/work)**

Other useful organisations

There are lots of other organisations that can give you information or support.

Emotional support organisations

Bereavement Advice Centre

Tel 0800 634 9494
(Mon–Fri, 9am–5pm)
www.bereavementadvice.org

A national organisation offering advice on all aspects of bereavement, from registering the death and finding a funeral director to probate, tax and benefit queries.

Child Bereavement Network

8 Wakley Street,
London EC1V 7QE
Tel 020 7843 6309
www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk

Search for a local organisation to help you provide support to a bereaved child or young person.

Cruse Bereavement Care

PO Box 800,
Richmond TW9 1RG
Tel 0844 477 9400
(Mon, Wed, Fri, 9.30am–5pm,
Tue, Wed, Thu, 9.30am–8pm)
Email helpline@cruse.org.uk
www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk

Provides bereavement counselling, information and support to anyone who has been bereaved, with a network of branches across the UK.

Cruse Bereavement Care Scotland

Riverview House,
Friarton Road,
Perth PH2 8DF
Tel 0845 600 2227

Email support@crusescotland.org.uk
www.crusescotland.org.uk
Provides bereavement support to people throughout Scotland.

Dying Matters**Tel** 08000 21 44 66**www.dyingmatters.org**

Promotes public awareness of dying, death and bereavement in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

**Good Life, Good Death,
Good Grief****Tel** 0131 272 2735**www.goodlifedeathgrief.org.uk**

An alliance of organisations and individuals in Scotland that work together to raise public awareness of ways of dealing with dying, death and bereavement.

The Loss Foundation**Email**

info@thelossfoundation.org

www.thelossfoundation.org

Provides support to people who have lost someone to cancer. Has support groups in London and Oxford, and information on its website for people who live in the rest of the UK.

RD4U

Box 800,

Richmond TW9 1RG

Tel 0808 808 1677

(Mon–Fri, 9.30am–5pm)

Email info@rd4u.org.uk**www.rd4u.org.uk**

Part of Cruse Bereavement Care, it supports young people after the death of someone close. Has a private message service.

SamaritansFreepost RSRB-KKBY-CYJK,
PO Box 9090,

Stirling FK8 2SA

Tel 08457 90 90 90**Email** jo@samaritans.org**www.samaritans.org.uk**

Provides confidential, non-judgemental emotional support, 24 hours a day, for people who are experiencing feelings of distress or despair, including those that could lead to suicide. Service provided by phone, email and letter.

Widowed and Young (WAY)

Suite 35, St Loye's House,
20 St Loye's Street,
Bedford MK40 1ZL

Tel 0300 012 4929

Email enquiries@
widowedandyoung.org.uk

www.widowedandyoung.org.uk

National self-help group for people under 50 whose partner has died. Run by a network of volunteers who were bereaved at a young age. Offers practical and financial support.

Practical support organisations

Citizens Advice

Find details for your local office in the phone book or on one of the following websites:

England and Wales

www.citizensadvice.org.uk

Scotland

www.cas.org.uk

Northern Ireland

www.citizensadvice.co.uk

You can also find advice online in a variety of languages at **adviceguide.org.uk**

Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) Bereavement Service

Tel 0345 606 0265

www.gov.uk/after-a-death/tax-and-benefits

Call to find out if any bereavement benefits are due. If you don't use the Tell Us Once service, call to notify the DWP about the death.

HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC)

Tel 0300 200 3300

www.gov.uk/government/organisations/hm-revenue-customs/contact/bereavement-and-deceased-estate

Help with tax, probate and benefits after a death.

National Association of Funeral Directors (NAFD)

618 Warwick Road,
Solihull B91 1AA

Tel 0845 230 1343

Email info@nafd.org.uk

www.nafd.org.uk

Gives help and advice on what to do after a death. Advises on arranging funerals and has information on what you should expect from a funeral director.

The National Society of Allied and Independent Funeral Directors (SAIF)

SAIF Business Centre,
3 Bullfields,
Sawbridgeworth CM21 9DB

Tel 0345 230 6777

(Mon–Fri, 9am–5pm)

Email info@saif.org.uk

www.saif.org.uk

Association whose members are all independent funeral directors. Helps people understand the role of a funeral director and explains some of the procedures and terms you may encounter when arranging a funeral. Links to bereavement counselling providers.

Natural Death Centre

In The Hill House,
Watley Lane,
Twyford SO21 1QX

Tel 01962 712 690

Email

contact@naturaldeath.org.uk

www.naturaldeath.org.uk

Supports people dying at home and their carers. Helps people arrange inexpensive, family-organised and environmentally friendly funerals.

Tell Us Once

Tel 0800 085 7308

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

A free service in England, Scotland and Wales that lets you report a death to most government and local council departments in one go.

Disclaimer

We make every effort to ensure that the information we provide is accurate and up-to-date but it should not be relied upon as a substitute for specialist professional advice tailored to your situation. So far as is permitted by law, Macmillan does not accept liability in relation to the use of any information contained in this publication, or third-party information or websites included or referred to in it.

Thanks

This booklet has been written, revised and edited by Macmillan Cancer Support's Cancer Information Development team. It has been approved by our Senior Medical Editor, Dr Sara Booth, Macmillan Consultant in Palliative Medicine, and by our Chief Medical Editor, Dr Tim Iveson, Macmillan Consultant Medical Oncologist.

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Sources

We've listed a sample of the sources used in the publication below. If you'd like further information about the sources we use, please contact us at **bookletfeedback@macmillan.org.uk**

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National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE). *Improving supportive and palliative care for adults with cancer: the manual* (accessed June 2015).

The Scottish Government. *Shaping bereavement care – a framework for action*. 2011.

Can you do something to help?

We hope this booklet has been useful to you. It's just one of our many publications that are available free to anyone affected by cancer. They're produced by our cancer information specialists who, along with our nurses, benefits advisers, campaigners and volunteers, are part of the Macmillan team. When people are facing the toughest fight of their lives, we're there to support them every step of the way.

We want to make sure no one has to go through cancer alone, so we need more people to help us. When the time is right for you, here are some ways in which you can become a part of our team.



Share your cancer experience

Support people living with cancer by telling your story, online, in the media or face to face.

Campaign for change

We need your help to make sure everyone gets the right support. Take an action, big or small, for better cancer care.

Help someone in your community

A lift to an appointment. Help with the shopping. Or just a cup of tea and a chat. Could you lend a hand?

Raise money

Whatever you like doing you can raise money to help. Take part in one of our events or create your own.

Give money

Big or small, every penny helps. To make a one-off donation see over.

Call us to find out more

0300 1000 200

macmillan.org.uk/getinvolved

Please fill in your personal details

Mr/Mrs/Miss/Other

Name

Surname

Address

Postcode

Phone

Email

Please accept my gift of £

(Please delete as appropriate)

I enclose a cheque / postal order /
Charity Voucher made payable to
Macmillan Cancer Support

OR debit my:

Visa / MasterCard / CAF Charity
Card / Switch / Maestro

Card number

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Security number

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Signature

Date / /

Don't let the taxman keep your money

Do you pay tax? If so, your gift will be worth 25% more to us – at no extra cost to you. All you have to do is tick the box below, and the tax office will give 25p for every pound you give.

- I am a UK taxpayer and I would like Macmillan Cancer Support to treat all donations I have made for the four years prior to this year, and all donations I make in the future, as Gift Aid donations, until I notify you otherwise.

I confirm I have paid or will pay an amount of Income Tax and/or Capital Gains Tax in each tax year, that is at least equal to the tax that Charities & CASCs I donate to will reclaim on my gifts. I understand that other taxes such as VAT and Council Tax do not qualify and that Macmillan Cancer Support will reclaim 25p of tax on every £1 that I give.

Macmillan Cancer Support and our trading companies would like to hold your details in order to contact you about our fundraising, campaigning and services for people affected by cancer. If you would prefer us not to use your details in this way please tick this box.

In order to carry out our work we may need to pass your details to agents or partners who act on our behalf.



If you'd rather donate online go to macmillan.org.uk/donate

Please cut out this form and return it in an envelope (no stamp required) to:
Supporter Donations, Macmillan Cancer Support, FREEPOST LON15851,
89 Albert Embankment, London SE1 7UQ

More than one in three of us will get cancer. For most of us it will be the toughest fight we ever face. And the feelings of isolation and loneliness that so many people experience make it even harder. But you don't have to go through it alone. The Macmillan team is with you every step of the way.

We are the nurses and therapists helping you through treatment. The experts on the end of the phone. The advisers telling you which benefits you're entitled to. The volunteers giving you a hand with the everyday things. The campaigners improving cancer care. The community there for you online, any time. The supporters who make it all possible.

Together, we are all Macmillan Cancer Support.

For cancer support every step of the way, call Macmillan on 0808 808 00 00 (Mon–Fri, 9am–8pm) or visit macmillan.org.uk

Hard of hearing? Use telephone 0808 808 0121, or Text Relay.
Non-English speaker? Interpreters available.
Braille and large print versions on request.

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**WE ARE
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