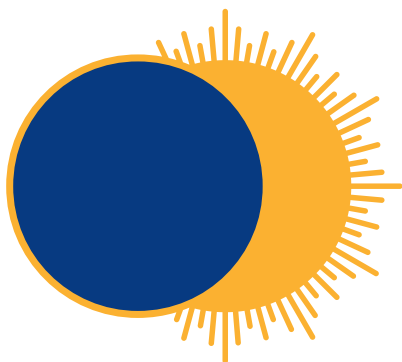




BEREAVEMENT PRACTICES IN DIFFERENT RELIGIONS AND CULTURES



Royal Hospital for
Neuro-disability

This document outlines the potential different bereavement practices of a selection of religions and cultures.

This list is not exhaustive and there are other religions and cultures you might encounter. These examples have been chosen as they are the top recorded religions or cultures across the NHS.

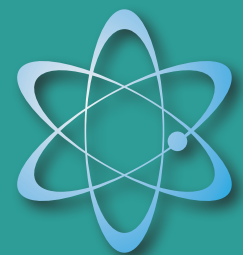
The information in this document is meant as a starting point to encourage staff to consider diversity and be able to compassionately support patients, residents, families and colleagues during a bereavement.

Across all religions and cultures, there will be variances in how people practice, and it is important to communicate with colleagues and encourage open and honest conversations where staff feel comfortable sharing their beliefs.

This booklet has been adapted from 'Understanding different bereavement practices', an NHS document available at www.people.nhs.uk

For further detailed information about specific religious practices, please refer to the 'brief guidelines to spiritual awareness at the end of life' found in the **L:/** drive under **Chaplaincy / Reference documents**

ATHEISM, AGNOSTICISM OR HUMANISM



People who do not identify with a specific religion may consider themselves as one of the following:

- Atheist: those who do not believe or have little belief in the existence of god).
- Agnostic: those who are unsure of their beliefs or who do not believe humans can definitively know if there is a god.
- Humanist: those who believe that human experience and rational thinking provide the only source of both knowledge and a moral code to live by.

For people who identify as one of the above, funeral practices will vary and could include either a cremation or burial. The service might be hosted by a religious practitioner with whom the bereaved had a relationship with, for example a vicar from the local community, or by a life celebrant or humanist celebrant.

It is also possible that colleagues may choose not to host a funeral or mourn the loss of a loved one. This is the choice of the individual and you are encouraged to support people in a compassionate way without questioning their beliefs.

BUDDHISM



The death of a loved one in Buddhism is considered an important event that is marked by specific Buddhist funeral rites. As Buddha himself was cremated, many Buddhist funerals involve cremation rather than burial. It is also possible for Buddhists to request a natural burial as an environmentally-friendly return to the earth that is compatible with the Buddhist beliefs of samsara (the cycle of life).

Buddhists traditionally hold mourning services on the third, seventh, 49th and 100th day after the death of a loved one.

CHRISTIANITY



In traditional Christian theology, after death people encounter the judgement and mercy of a loving God. When a Christian dies, it is seen as the end of his or her life on earth and as such, a funeral is held for friends and family to grieve for the person who has died and give thanks for their life. Christianity is divided into many different groups called denominations, which can more broadly be split into three branches: Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox. Whilst there are variances in the funeral and bereavement practices across the denominations, it is common for Christians to ask the minister or priest of their church to come and offer prayers and comfort during the difficult time, occasionally performing specific rituals during those last minutes of life.

Catholics believe in the afterlife and as such, their funerals include prayers for the deceased's soul and will typically include a mass during the service. Protestant Christian funerals are usually held in a place of worship such as a church or in the chapel of a funeral home. The funeral will often focus on celebrating the life of the deceased, celebrating that a loved one is now in Heaven. In Orthodoxy (including Eastern Orthodox and 'Oriental' or Coptic/Ethiopian Orthodox) cremation is not permitted and funerals will therefore take place as a burial, ideally conducted as soon as reasonably possible after death.

Across the Christian denominations, there are variances in mourning practices. Traditionally, the Catholic Church suggests that a spouse should spend a year and a day in mourning of their loved one. Grandparents and siblings are to spend three months in mourning, with the heavy mourning time lasting 30 days. Other family members should spend thirty days in mourning. Protestant Christianity does not have a prescribed amount of time for the period of mourning. Since the funeral is usually held within a week of the death, that period of time from the death to the burial is considered the time of mourning.

Bereaved members of the Orthodox Church traditionally will not go to work for a week after the funeral. The full mourning period can last 40 days, and usually there will be memorials (called 'panikhida' / 'mnemosynon' / 'parastas') celebrated with a priest (either in church or at home) on the third, ninth, and 40th day, then usually after three and six months, and thereafter usually annually (as well as in many cases on special anniversaries such as birthdays and wedding anniversaries). The departed are also remembered specifically on each Saturday of Souls (or Soul Saturday), a day set aside for the commemoration of the dead.

HINDUISM



Hindu tradition suggests that when a person dies, where practical they remain at home before they are taken to the cremation venue. The cremation is then done as quickly as possible after a person dies (preferably within 24 hours) so that the soul can find a new body to inhabit. Hinduism strongly believes in reincarnation and the belief that the soul is eternal. In some Hindu communities, after the cremation there are rituals bhajans (hymns and songs of praise) as well as the Bhagawad Geeta are sung with loved ones for the next thirteen days. This is because it is believed that for the first nine days after cremation, the soul is still connected to the body. During days ten to twelve, the soul will leave the body. There is then a ceremony called the Shraddha on the thirteenth day to mark that the soul has left the body.

For those living in India, on the day following a Hindu funeral the ashes are scattered in the River Ganges or the nearest river. Hindus living outside India may choose to repatriate their loved one's ashes, but this is not always practical or affordable. Alternatively, many Hindus are now choosing to scatter ashes at a local body of water or at a preferred place of importance.

If the bereavement is of a child, in Hinduism there is traditionally no mourning period.

This is because children are innocent and considered as sinless, therefore no mourning is required.

On the first anniversary of a death, a Hindu family will hold a memorial event that honours their loved one's life. This event is called a 's'raddha' and is an event that pays homage to the person who has passed.

ISLAM



In Islam, death is accepted and viewed as a natural part of life. The belief that the deceased has moved to an afterlife is an important understanding that helps the bereaved cope with their suffering. Islamic funeral arrangements begin immediately after the death of a loved one. According to Islamic law, they must be buried as soon as possible. Cremation is forbidden in Islam, so the body is buried as soon as possible from the time of the death. Traditionally, only men were permissible to attend the burial, however more recently some Muslim communities will allow women to be present.

Upon death, those with the deceased will pray for the departed, and begin preparations for burial. Grief is normal and it is natural and permissible to cry. The main steps involved are washing the body of the deceased, shrouding it, performance of the funeral prayer and finally burial, but never cremation. The washing and shrouding are performed only by selected relatives and community members due to the intimacy involved with the body. Due to the profound personal, social and spiritual significance of such an event, you may find many people attending the funeral prayer.

After a Muslim funeral service and burial, the immediate family will typically gather in their home to pray and receive guests for the first three days. During these three days of mourning, the community will usually provide food for the family as cooking is not done. On the fourth day after death a special prayer ceremony is held. The mourning period may be extended up to 40 days, but this can vary depending on the family or regional customs. Traditionally, a Muslim widow is allowed four months and ten days of mourning, during which she is not permitted to re-marry or interact with other men. This tradition is to rule out whether she is pregnant, as well as give her time to come to terms with the loss.

JUDAISM



In Judaism, the funeral will usually take place within 24 hours of someone passing. Shiva ('sitting' in Hebrew) begins straight after the funeral and lasts for seven days. Shiva refers to the first period of mourning that takes place in the seven days following a Jewish funeral. On the first day of Shiva, a candle is lit and left to burn throughout the week. The bereaved family will stay at home during this time to mourn and pray. No members of the family will work or participate in everyday activities during Shiva.

One Jewish funeral custom that may be observed is of the mourners ripping off pieces of material from their own clothes. This ritual is a demonstration of their grief, with the visibly torn garment traditionally being worn for the week following the death.

After the death of a loved one, there is traditionally an annual memorial on the anniversary of the death. There are also a number of other religious days of remembrance, including the holiday of atonement (known as Yom Kipur), and the Shemini Atzeret holiday at Passover. On both holidays, mourners will attend their synagogue in remembrance of their loved ones.

SIKHISM



The Sikh funeral is known as Antam Sanskaar, meaning 'the last rite of passage'. The focus of the funeral ceremony is not loss and grief, but celebration that the soul has an opportunity to re-join Waheguru, the Wondrous Giver of Knowledge, the Sikh name for God. Sikhs believe in cremation, although in exceptional circumstances a burial may be permitted (if cremation is impossible). A Sikh cremation will usually involve the ashes being submerged into a river, with no monument erected for the person who has passed away.

In Sikhism the time and place of the morning period is determined by the immediate family - starting on the day of death. The bereaved family will carry out a devotional reading of the entire Sri Guru Granth Sahib, the Sikh holy scripture either at the deceased's home or the local gurdwara and will recite religious text daily.

In England, the mourning period is normally from the announcement of the deceased's death until the day of the actual cremation. During this period family and friends attend the deceased's home to pay respect to the immediate family. In India, the cremation takes place as quickly as possible after a person dies, either that day or the next day depending on time of death, followed by the reading of the Sri Guru Granth Sahid.

OTHER CULTURAL PRACTICES

NINE-NIGHTS



Some Caribbean and West Indian cultures may celebrate the passing of a loved one through Nine-Nights, a celebration of life held on the ninth night after the passing. During the service, friends and family are invited to view the body to pay their last respects. Once the coffin is lowered, loved ones will throw a handful of earth on the coffin and male mourners will then cover the coffin with earth. This is traditionally done whilst everyone sings. Female mourners may then cover the mound of earth with flowers, whilst singing a song called 'good night', representing putting the deceased to bed.

Family and friends will attend the Nine-Nights celebration, which is often seen as a community event. There will likely be games (for example playing dominoes), music, reminiscing with memories and stories, cultural dancing and the sharing of traditional foods.

CHINESE



A Chinese funeral usually takes place over seven days. The mourning period can last for 49 days, with weekly prayers recited by the family every seven days. A final ceremony, signifying the end of the mourning period, may be held after 100 days. According to Chinese funeral custom, elders should not show respect or offer prayers if the person who died was younger than them. If the person was unmarried, their body is not brought into the family home and will remain at the funeral home as they did not have any children to conduct funeral rites for them. If a child or infant dies, they are buried in silence without a ceremony.

As in many Asian cultures, the colour white is associated with death in China, however if the person who died was over 80 years, guests may wear shades of pink to the funeral ceremony as it is considered a longevity milestone, and people are encouraged to celebrate their life rather than mourn.

DAY OF THE DEAD



The Day of the Dead is an annual Mexican holiday celebrated throughout Mexico and by people of Mexican heritage. The multi-day holiday involves family and friends gathering to pray for and remember friends and family members who have died, helping support their spiritual journey. In Mexican culture, death is viewed as a natural part of the human cycle. Day of the Dead is considered a day of celebration because loved ones awaken and celebrate with you. During Day of the Dead festivities, prayers are said for those who have passed and food is both eaten by living people and given to the spirits of their departed ancestors as ofrendas ('offerings').

FILIPINO



We have seen evidence that COVID-19 has had a disproportionate impact on our BAME colleagues, in particular with colleagues from a Filipino background. As with all the religions and cultures outlined in this resource, there are many regional variances to bereavement practices across the Philippines. A high proportion of the Filipino population follow the practices of Catholicism, and as such from the day of the death of a loved one, friends and family will gather at the home of the deceased in prayer. Traditionally forty days of prayer will then be held to help the deceased reach the afterlife.

Typically preceding a Filipino funeral is a wake that lasts anywhere from three to seven days. This allows family members who live far away to have enough time to arrive. The immediate family members would not usually work during this wake period. After the funeral has taken place, immediate family members and friends will mourn the deceased for a long time. In some cultures it is not uncommon for a widow or a woman who has lost her children to wear black for the rest of her life. It is also not uncommon for the bereaved family to hold a mass for the deceased several times during the year that they pass. In the Catholic Church, which many Filipino colleagues practice, All Souls' Day (2 November) will also be observed and respects will be paid to the dead.

BEREAVEMENT SUPPORT

As well as in-house support options available internally through the NHS organisations that employs you, there are a number of different charities and organisations offering bereavement and suicide support, a selection of these are as below. There are also local organisations that can be accessed through the NHS website and guidance on practical elements of bereavement such as applying for probate, registering a death, informing DVLA, benefits, support and tax can be found on the Government website.



Child Bereavement UK
Call 0800 028 8840
childbereavementuk.org



The Compassionate Friends
Call 0345 123 2304
tcf.org.uk



Cruse Bereavement Care
Call 0808 808 1677
cruse.org.uk



Widowed and young
widowedandyoung.org.uk



StayAlive app
stayalive.app



Muslim Bereavement Support Service
mbss.org.uk



Hospice UK
hospiceuk.org



Talking About Dying
(Christian Bereavement Support)
talkingaboutdying.org



National Bereavement Alliance
nationalbereavementalliance.org.uk



Jewish Bereavement Counselling Service
jbc.org.uk



Samaritans
Call 116123
Access through their app
samaritans.org

LEARNING

How are you feeling NHS

An easy-to-use resource that has been developed to enable us to talk openly and regularly about emotional health and wellbeing.

<https://www.nhsemployers.org/retention-and-ourcolleagues-experience/health-and-wellbeing/taking-a-targeted-approach/taking-a-targeted-approach/how-are-you-feeling-today-nhs-toolkit>

Mind 2019: Bereavement

Understanding grief and bereavement (including from suicide), how to manage and where to get help.

<https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/guides-to-support-and-services/bereavement/about-bereavement>

Mindtools (2020)

Practical advice on leading grieving team members, including acknowledging feelings, showing empathy, avoiding giving prescriptive advice and ensuring, as far as possible, that people's workloads don't become overwhelming.

<https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/manage-grieving-team-member.htm>

National Suicide Stats and Figures: Samaritans

<https://www.samaritans.org/about-samaritans/research-policy/suicide-facts-and-figures/>

Sudden Death 2020: COVID-19 bereavement

COVID-specific guidance on experienced grief and supporting yourself or someone else, particularly during social distancing.

<http://www.suddendeath.org/covid-19-bereavement/help-after-covid-19-bereavement>

Suicide Prevention (We need to talk about suicide)

eLearning for healthcare

<https://www.e-lfh.org.uk/programmes/suicide-prevention/>

Zero Suicide Alliance

Offer face to face and online training

<https://www.zerosuicidealliance.com/>