

Preparing for the death of a loved one

A guide for families, loved ones and carers



At Heart of Kent Hospice, we understand how difficult it is to face the reality that someone you love is dying. Grief often begins before the death itself. This guide is here to support you through this time - to help you feel less alone and more prepared.

This guide gives you information about the practical steps that follow a death and bereavement advice. We understand that this may be one of the most difficult journeys you and your family will ever face. Our hope is that these pages offer comfort, clarity, and reassurance as you prepare for and navigate the days ahead.

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When someone dies

When a person dies, their death needs to be verified by a healthcare professional. This is a standard process to confirm death has occurred and allows the next steps to begin.

Depending on where the person dies:

- **At the hospice:** this will be carried out by a member of our experienced nursing team.
- **In hospital:** a doctor or trained nurse will carry out verification.
- **At home:** your GP (during working hours), a district nurse (if known to them), or another healthcare professional via 111.
- **In a care home:** if staff are trained, they may verify, or a GP/district nurse will attend.

A death is expected when healthcare professionals have agreed that a person is dying and death is likely to occur within a short time frame. Even if the person dies a little bit before anticipated this does not constitute an unexpected death.

If death is not expected then a nurse/allied healthcare professional can't complete verification. If death is not expected i.e. sudden or suspicious then ambulance and police may need to be contacted to

If a death was not expected, or happens suddenly, it is sometimes necessary to involve the police or **Coroner** to ensure everything is in order. Please don't worry – this is a routine safeguard.

When verification is complete, you can contact your chosen funeral director. They will help support the next steps and arrange for your loved one to be moved with dignity and care.

It is usual to provide personal care after death (sometimes called 'last offices'). At the hospice, this is carried out by our nursing team. In other settings, this may be done by district nurses, carers or family members, depending on circumstances. Medical devices are usually discontinued or removed by a healthcare professional. Cultural or religious wishes will be respected wherever possible and where these are known.





The Medical Examiner

Before a death can be registered a **Medical Certificate of Cause of Death** must be completed by a doctor. This will be done following a review by the **Medical Examiner**. A referral to a **Medical Examiner** must be done by a doctor involved in the patients care at the time of death.

The **Medical Examiner Service** is a statutory requirement for an independent review of all deaths by a senior doctor. Their role includes:

- Advice on whether the law requires the **Coroner** to be informed about a death
- Agreement on the medical cause of death
- Identify situations where healthcare could have been improved and suggest when further investigation or review is recommended.
- Give the bereaved an opportunity to raise any concerns about the care and/or death of their relative

The **Medical Examiner** will either confirm the cause of death or refer to the Coroner for post-mortem or further investigation.

Where the **Medical Examiner** can confirm the cause of death, they will then share the **Medical Certificate of Cause of Death** with the local registrar service.



Registering the death

Registering a death can feel like a daunting step, but we hope this information is helpful and will support you through it.

When someone dies you should register their death within five days from when the **Registration Service** receive the paperwork from the **Medical Examiner**. The registration must take place in the district where the death occurred.

If a **Coroner** is involved, the period in which you have to register the death is extended.

If you live out of the county and it would be difficult for you to travel to Kent, then you can visit your local registration office and declare the necessary information. This process is called **Register by Declaration**. In this case, your local registration office will then send the details to **The Kent Registration Service**, who will then issue the documentation that you will require to move forward with funeral plans.

In the case of a death that has been reported to the **Coroner** you must receive confirmation from the **Coroner's** office that the relevant paperwork has been issued to the local registrar.



Who can register a death?

The death can be registered by the following people, in order of priority:

- A relative (e.g. by blood, marriage or civil partnership)
- Partner of the deceased
- Someone present at the time of death
- Personal representative of the deceased
- The manager of the nursing/residential home/official from the hospital or hospice where the death took place
- The person making funeral arrangements
- The person who found the body
- The person in charge of the body

Where to register:

Kent History & Library Centre, James
Whatman Way, Maidstone, ME14 1LQ
Monday to Friday, 9.30am – 4.30pm

Book an appointment:

Online: kent.gov.uk/births-ceremonies-and-deaths

Phone: 03000 415151 (option 2)



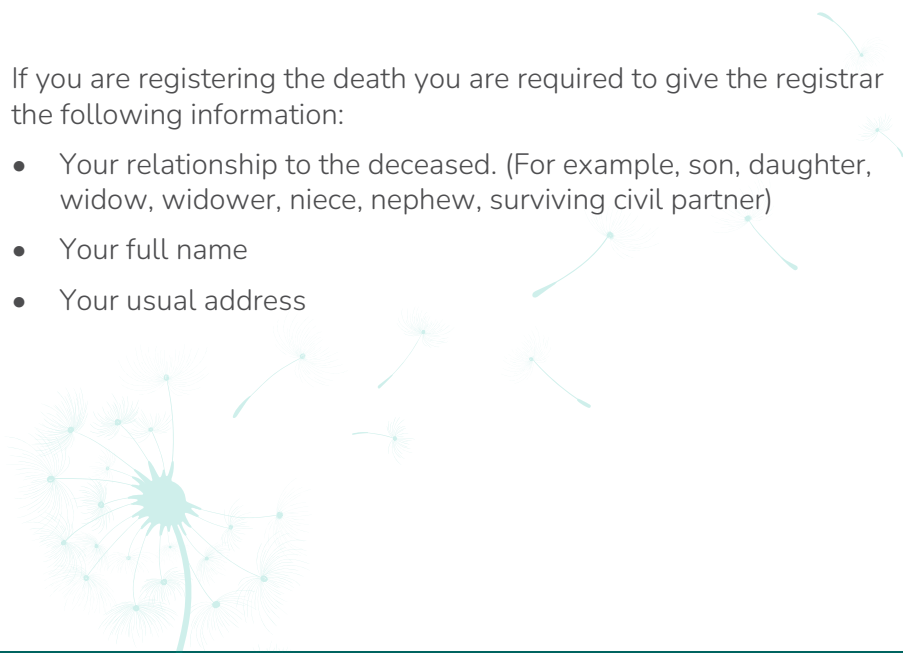
Registrar information

The information you will need to provide to the registrar about the deceased is:

- The date and place of death
- Their full name, and any other names they are known by or have been known by, including maiden surname
- Their date and place of birth
- Their last main paid occupation (also if the deceased was married, widowed or had a formal civil partnership, the full name and occupation of their spouse or civil partner)
- Their usual address
- The date of birth of surviving spouse or a civil partner
- Details of any public sector pensions e.g. civil service, teacher or armed forces

If you are registering the death you are required to give the registrar the following information:

- Your relationship to the deceased. (For example, son, daughter, widow, widower, niece, nephew, surviving civil partner)
- Your full name
- Your usual address



Registration documents

The documents that will be issued after the registration are:

- Certificates the executor or administrator will need to sort out the affairs of the deceased person.
- A certificate for burial or cremation (called the green form) giving permission for the body to be buried or for an application for cremation to be made (unless this has been previously issued by the **Coroner**). This is usually received electronically.
- Tell Us Once unique reference number (see pages 12 and 13 for more details).

You will be able to buy certified copies of the entry in the death register (death certificate).

If the deceased is to be buried or cremated outside of England or Wales the **Coroner** will issue the necessary forms.



Tell Us Once and notification services

When someone dies there are lots of things that need to be organised. One of these is contacting government departments and local council services. The Tell Us Once service has been set up to help you through this difficult time. Rather than you having to contact lots of organisations to notify them of a death, they can do it for you. All you need to do is provide some information at the death registration and they'll do the rest.

The service is split into two stages:

First stage

The first stage is a legal requirement where the registrar enters the deceased details on the Tell Us Once national database. This is carried out immediately after the death registration.

Second stage

The second stage is completed at home by telephone or online, using the unique reference number given to you by the registrar at the appointment. You will need the following information about the deceased to complete the second stage:

- Their national insurance number or date of birth
- Name of their local council service
- Details of any benefits or services they were receiving

If applicable:

- Passport number
- Driving licence number
- Blue Badge number
- Dates of last hospital/hospice/care home stay

You will also need:

- Name, full address, and telephone number of next of kin
- Name, full address, and telephone number of the person dealing with the estate
- Name, full address, telephone number and either national insurance number or date of birth of surviving husband, wife or civil partner

You must obtain the permission of the persons listed above before you provide information about them.

Organisations Tell Us Once can inform:

Local council

- Housing benefit office
- Council housing
- Council tax
- Collection of payment for council services
- Library services
- Electoral services
- Blue Badge
- Adult services
- Children's services
- Concessionary travel

Department for work and pensions

Pensions and benefits

HM Revenue and Customs

- Personal taxation
- Child benefit
- Tax credits

HM Passport Office and Driver Vehicle Licensing Agency Public Sector Pensions

- NHS, Civil Service and Armed Forces pensions
- Compensation scheme administered by Veterans UK
- Local Government pension funds



The Coroner

What happens when the death is referred to a Coroner.

A **Coroner** may order a post-mortem to take place. In cases where the cause of death is unnatural, remains unknown or unexplained, the **Coroner** will decide to hold an inquest and the registration of the death will be delayed.

If the **Coroner** determines the death is the result of natural disease or illness, additional paperwork giving the cause of death will be sent to the registrar on completion of the **Coroner's** enquiries. You can then proceed to register the death.

However, if the **Coroner** requests a post mortem examination to be held, they will issue paperwork in place of the doctor's medical certificate. You will be able to register the death once the registrar has received this paper work from the **Coroner**.

In cases where the cause of death takes longer to establish, the **Coroner** will first issue an interim certificate relating to the death for you to use to settle some of the deceased person's affairs. The death must still be fully registered with the local registrar once the **Coroner's** proceedings are concluded.

An inquest is not a trial. It is a public court hearing held by the **Coroner** in order to establish who died, and how, when and where the death occurred. If the death occurred in prison or custody, or if it resulted from an accident at work, there will usually be a jury at the inquest. The **Coroner** or jury comes to a conclusion, which includes the legal determination that states who died. The **Coroner** or jury also makes findings to allow the cause of death to be registered and the next of kin will be given details of how to obtain a copy of the death certificate.



Bereavement support

Grief doesn't follow a timetable – and it doesn't begin only after death. You may already be feeling its weight.

Whether you're in shock, overwhelmed, numb, angry or even relieved the end has arrived – please know your feelings are valid and understood.

About 6-8 weeks after you have been bereaved our **Family Support Team** at the hospice will write to you to remind you about the bereavement support we can offer you at the hospice should you feel you need it.

We have an emotional support booklet for adults (sent when we make bereavement contact and available sooner) and another for younger people (available on request).

At the hospice we offer bereavement support to the family and loved ones of people who have been under our care at any time for up to two years after they are bereaved.

Our weekly **Bereavement Drop-in** is every Wednesday, 10am–12pm at the hospice. You don't need an appointment – just come as you are. You can attend as often as you like, and when you like. Our trained team of colleagues and volunteers are on hand to listen to you, to offer support and guidance, and enable you to meet and be supported by other bereaved people. At the drop-in we can also let you know about other bereavement support services locally.

We also offer **one-to-one Bereavement Counselling** for six sessions with a counsellor either in person or by phone. This is a safe space to work in depth with your grief. There may be a short wait for this service.



Your feelings are valid
and understood.

Please be assured that we are here to support you.

Contact our Family Support Team

Phone: 01622 792200 ext 260 | Email: fst@hokh.co.uk

Occasionally people feel so overwhelmed by grief that they are unsure if they wish to continue to live. If this is you it is essential that you seek urgent support:

You can: Call **111** and select the option for mental health support, where you will be connected to someone specially trained to help you. If you think there is a risk to life for yourself or someone else, call **999** or go to your nearest Accident and Emergency centre.

Speak to **Samaritans** by calling **116 123**. This is a free 24/7 service.

Contact **Release the Pressure** and their support team at anytime, 24/7. Text **SHOUT** to **85258** or call **0800 107 0160**

Contact **Mental Health Matters** on **0800 107 1060** who offer phone support and free in person daily drop-in services.



Ongoing hospice support

It has been our privilege to care for you and your loved one. Thank you for allowing us to support you at this deeply important time. We remain here for you beyond your loved one's death and throughout your bereavement.



Compassionate Café

A welcoming, informal café run monthly, on the third Thursday of the month, in Maidstone town centre. A place to talk, find support and connect with others who have experienced loss or loneliness. Learn more at hokh.org/events

Memory Tree

A beautiful copper tree in our hospice gardens. You may choose to dedicate a leaf or flower in memory of someone special. To find out more, call our [In Memory Team](https://hokh.org/events) on **01622 790195**.

Keep in touch

We are always honoured to stay in touch with those we have supported and those interested in the work we do. If you would like to hear about our latest news, events and activities, please visit our website at hokh.org to sign up to our newsletter.

We will only contact you in the ways you want us to and will keep your data safe as per our privacy policy which you can read at hokh.org/privacy-policy and you can unsubscribe at any time.

Connect with us on social media

You can keep an eye on what's going on in and around the hospice, including dates of our support groups, on our social media channels.

-  Heart of Kent Hospice
-  @heartofkenthosp
-  heartofkenthospice
-  @heartofkenthospice

Choose to make a donation

We rely on public donations for **£4 out of every £5** needed to care for people who need us in your local community. As demand for our services grows, so does our need for your support.

If you can, please choose to make a donation today. Your kindness will help ensure we can be there - now and always - for those who need us most.

You can make a donation online at hokh.org/donate, by calling us on 01622 790195 or by texting ICARE followed by your donation amount to 70460 to give that amount.

Texts will cost the donation amount plus one standard network rate message, and you'll be opting into hearing more from us. If you would like to donate by text but don't wish to hear more from us, please text ICARENOINFO instead.

Fundraise your way

We have several yearly events you can get involved in, plus a dedicated team here to help you fundraise your own way. From jumping out of a plane or running a marathon, to making pickled onions or organising a craft fair, we can support you in fundraising in a way that suits you best. Get started by contacting our [Fundraising Team](https://hokh.org/fundraising) today fundraising@hokh.co.uk or calling **01622 792200**.

You're not alone

This journey can feel overwhelming, but you are not walking it alone. Our whole team is here to support you with kindness, care and compassion – before, during, and after your loss.

If you need to talk, please reach out.

Thank you

-  hokh.org
-  enquiries@hokh.co.uk
-  **01622 792200**
-  Heart of Kent Hospice, Preston Hall, Aylesford, ME20 7PU