

# Bridging the gap

A rough guide in talking to bereaved people



# Grief is part of everyday life

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 Webchat service: **crusescotland.org.uk**

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## Helping to bridge the gap

When faced with a bereaved relative, friend or colleague, many of us are not sure what to say or do.

As a result of our unease, we often say or do nothing. Here we try to “bridge the gap” to show a few simple ways or actions that might make all the difference. We are using the example of Mr Smith below to help tell the story.

***SMITH** – peacefully, on 29 June, after a short illness, Jim, loved husband of Jean, father of Peter and Ann and Margaret.*

- 1 The death of Jim Smith did not make the headlines. His death was not news. The short lines in the death notices were read by a few, and ignored by the most. But for his wife, his children and grandchildren, his death was the most shattering event of their lives so far.

### **Grief is part of everyday life – it is important to understand that.**

Around 60,000 people die in Scotland each year. On the assumption that each death leaves around 4 people who are closely related and deeply bereaved, there are almost 250,000 bereaved people – spouses and partners, sons and daughters, mothers and fathers – in Scotland in any year.

## Loneliness can be social & emotional

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**2**

Their close friends attended the funeral and they promised to call afterwards. Others set cards or flowers, and a few wrote letters, saying how sorry they were. For a few weeks people showed concern for his wife, but soon they were caught up again in their own lives. The promised visits never happened, nor did the invitations for the coffee.

### **Offer bereaved people your time, your companionship, your listening.**

The loneliness of grief is something very real. Once all the business that surrounds a death – the funeral and the multitude of things that have to be done – have been dealt with, the bereaved person begins to realise just how lonely life can be.

That loneliness is both social – the feeling of being on their own – and emotional – the deep aching void inside which feels almost as though a part of themselves has died.

And all too often the loneliness sets in just about the time that other people are beginning to forget.

## Bereaved people may want to talk

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**3** Some unexpected people stopped her in the street and asked how she was but the people she expected to speak seemed not to see her, or turned away in embarrassment.

**Recognise the pain that bereaved people carry. And allow them to share it.**

Close family and friends are really important – they have shared in the story of the person who died. Other people are also important – because bereaved people may want to talk, to share their grief, and most of all they need someone to listen.

**4** When she returned to work, colleagues fell silent, or they chattered rapidly about the weather or their holidays. Her children seemed to be coping and tried to change the subject when she started to speak about Jim.

**Don't avoid bereaved work colleagues – tell them you are sorry – allow them to talk about their loss.**

Many people feel that getting back to work will be helpful and indeed it often is. Bereaved people do not grieve all the time – and it can be helpful, when, when they are ready, to assist them to reclaim some of the “normal” dimensions of their life.

# All the feelings are normal

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**4** *Cont'd...* For others, employment policies may mean that the compassionate leave is limited and a return to work is a necessity. It can help to take that step gently – maybe visiting work first to break the ice or starting with part-time hours.

**5** After just a few weeks, it seemed to Jim's wife that she must be going mad, because she still felt sad, and lonely, and she still wanted to talk about him. She wasn't sleeping very well, she missed his cold feet. And she was losing weight too, but then she didn't see the point in cooking for one.

### **Reassure people that what they are feeling is normal.**

There are many different "symptoms" of grief – and often bereaved people feel that nobody else has ever felt the way they do. If grief is natural then all these feelings are normal, they are part of the way we react to bad news and part of the way we start to recover.

*For further information, resources and company training, please visit our website [cruse.scotland.org.uk](https://cruse.scotland.org.uk)*



**Registered Office:**

Cruse Bereavement Care Scotland,  
Suite 4/2, Great Michael House,  
14 Links Place, Edinburgh EH6 7EZ.

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is a company limited by guarantee,  
no. SC218026 and a registered  
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