

## **More about Dudley Bereavement Charter**

This Charter is for everyone who lives or works in Dudley borough. Death is a natural part of human life and bereavement will affect each of us at some stage. The Charter describes how each of us can become more able to support someone who has been bereaved. Using the Charter can help us to talk more openly about death, dying and bereavement, something that will help those who are bereaved. We hope that by becoming confident in supporting others with kindness and compassion in times of difficulty that Dudley will become an even more kind and caring community.

The Charter has been developed by individual Dudley residents from a wide range of community groups and organisations, with widespread consultation on content. While our larger health organisations have added their endorsement, it is the personal adoption of the Charter by individuals that will make the biggest difference to the experience of living with grief in Dudley borough.

### **How to use the Charter:**

You might consider:

- Talking about its content to family and friends.
- Supporting a friend who has been bereaved by listening, being kind and offering practical help.
- Using the Charter to influence the bereavement support offered to staff in your workplace.
- Using the Charter in a school or college setting to encourage kind conversations about grief.
- Using the Charter to ensure those involved in service delivery are grief aware and equipped to support those who have been bereaved.
- Using the Charter in training volunteers and community members to develop a culture of kindness and confidence in supporting those who grieve.
- Displaying a copy of the Bereavement Charter in as many places as possible, such as in workplaces, schools, shops, places of recreation, on public transport and in places of faith.

### **Charter statement explanations**

By keeping the Charter simple we have inevitably omitted details of the thinking behind many of the points included. For those who want to know more, please read the additional comments below:

The Charter starts with a set of aspirations based on what we know helps those at end of life and in bereavement.

**“Whenever possible, people can die peacefully in a place of their choice surrounded by those they choose”**

While this is always desirable sometimes medical needs take priority. Decisions are best taken in consultation with those providing all the types of care needed to ensure a peaceful death. While bereavement is often hard, it can be easier for people if they have the comfort of knowing that they are able to follow the wishes of the dying at the end of life and in their funeral.

**“We value and respect the life of every person and recognise grief as a normal response to death”**

While grief can be a very emotionally painful experience to live with, it is a natural human response to the death of someone we love. Grief is not a condition to be medicalised and typically, 85% of people will learn to live well with their grief simply with the love, care and support from family and friends.

**“Family, friends, colleagues, and wider social networks feel able to support those who grieve”**

With the development of professional healthcare, as a society we have become more distanced from the realities of the process of dying. Many find they are uncomfortable talking about death, dying and bereavement. With longer life expectancy fewer people have a personal experience to draw on in offering support to those who are bereaved. Dudley residents have highlighted a lack of knowledge and confidence in people knowing what to say or how to be supportive to the bereaved. Many bereaved people report feeling hurt and rejected by people who crossed the street to avoid them although this may simply have been because they felt uncomfortable and didn't know what to say. We hope that by using the principles contained in the Charter that people will have the confidence to acknowledge someone who is bereaved and be able to say “sorry” for their loss in a way that is kind, compassionate and shows empathy.

**“Care for both the dying and the bereaved is improved through listening and reflecting on the lived experience”**

More people are choosing to die at home, and it is important to learn from the experiences of those who are caring for and those who vigil with the dying. The pandemic has highlighted the impact of lack of opportunity to be with loved ones at the end of life and the additional emotional pain experienced by those unable to meet with loved ones who share their grief. Restrictions on funerals have had an adverse effect on many of the bereaved. By listening, reflecting and learning from lived experience services can be improved and those close to the bereaved can learn how to help them to live well with their grief.

**“Health inequalities are recognised and unbiased inclusive access to both pre and post bereavement support is available”**

Currently people who experience the greatest deprivation are more likely to die in hospital, yet most people say that they would prefer to die at home. If a loved one is approaching the end of their life, we might ask if they have had an opportunity to share their wishes on their preferred place of death and if their preferences have been recorded in an Advanced Care Plan. Local hospices aim to ensure that their

offers of end of life and bereavement care are accessible to all and are reaching out to people who may be less likely to access their services. Pre-bereavement care may be the offer of formal legacy work from carers that helps us to create good memories and to say the things that matter while there is opportunity to do so. It may also be the informal help of a neighbour in the days leading up to an expected death.

### **And everyone recognises...**

#### **“That every life should be valued and respected”**

Everyone should have their wishes, choices and beliefs listened to, considered and respected by all.

#### **“Grief is unique with no right or wrong way to feel and with no set time”**

Each of us will experience grief in a different way and how we choose to respond to our grief will be different for each of us. A wide range of [types of bereavement support](#) are now available in Dudley. While most people find that their grief becomes easier to live with over time there is no set time for grief. For some grief may last for their lifetime and others may experience a resurgence of the emotions of grief that may be triggered unexpectedly by sights, sounds, smells or memories.

#### **“Human vulnerability and the contribution that love and care from family, friends, colleagues, wider social networks and workplaces can make”**

Each of us can be very vulnerable in grief that can be painful, exhausting and overwhelming. There may be intense feelings of sadness, anger, fear, or shame. There may be difficulties in memory, concentration and motivation. Grief can affect all areas of life at home, at work and in relationships. The simplest task can seem impossible. Those supporting the bereaved can help by being kind, compassionate and empathetic. They can reassure that the experiences, although powerful, are normal and will pass. They can demonstrate care by good listening, making specific offers of practical help and by keeping in touch with offers to include them in social occasions. Offers to go with someone as they resume “normal” life can be appreciated. Kindness, love and care from others can act as a buffer from the very depths of the emotional pain of grief. Being invited to join in something with others can protect from the loneliness and isolation known to make grief worse.

#### **“Recognise the importance and value of active listening to those who want to talk”**

People may feel anxious about talking with someone who is bereaved in case they say the wrong thing or make someone upset. There is no one right thing to say and being listened to helps people feel respected and connected to others. If a death has been sudden or unexpected the bereaved may need to keep repeating their story with others listening. The repetition is helping them to absorb the news that their loved one has died. Providing opportunity to share memories is helpful.

#### **“Recognise the contribution of being kind and offering practical help and support to those who grieve”**

Kindness soothes those in emotional pain. Grief can be exhausting. Offers of specific practical help might include hanging out washing, mowing the lawn, help to sort through belongings, taking something to a charity shop, or taking a meal round - perhaps one that can be frozen if not needed immediately.

**“Recognise the importance of taking manageable steps to remembering and celebrating good times”**

Some dates and events can be particularly hard for those who have been bereaved. Planning how to spend key dates can be helpful in managing the pain of grief. Including times to celebrate key family memories can be helpful and keep key memories alive in those who have been left behind.

**“Recognise grief and where possible honour and remember the lives of those who died”**

Most people will have good memories and be grateful for the love they have had from the person who has died. Many find their own unique way of remembering their loved one. Others find services of remembrance and reflection to be helpful. In some situations of abuse there may be few, if any, good memories and there may be a need for help to reframe the grief of bereavement.

**“How to use the words “death” “dying” “bereavement” and “grief” gently and with kindness”**

Our discomfort can lead us to use euphemisms such as “lost” or “passed” instead of died. This minimises the reality of death and can be confusing for children, those with learning needs and those living with dementia. It’s more helpful to use the correct words in a sensitive way.

**“Recognise that easily accessible bereavement support, including counselling on prescription, is available to those who need it “**

For around 15% of people the normal support from family, friends, neighbours and colleagues will not be sufficient and they will benefit from accessing additional help from their GP. This may be medication or access to a Talking Therapy such as professional counselling.

**“Recognise the importance and contribution of ongoing support from family, friends, neighbours, colleagues, and wider social networks, in addition to professional bereavement support”**

In situations where professional bereavement support is needed, it is important that those who have been bereaved continue to receive love and care from those around them to complement the additional support needed from professionals.

**“Recognise grief does not get smaller, but we grow around it”**

Those who grieve will cope with their grief in different ways at different times. At times they may face their loss head-on and at other times they will focus on fulfilling practical needs and life tasks. Initial grief can feel all-consuming. In time there might be space in a bereaved person’s life to try something new, perhaps to learn a new

skill, or plan a different type of holiday. For many, healing is not a case of “moving on” from grief, but instead growing around it.

**“Recognise the contribution that the 5 ways to wellbeing can make to everyone, including those who grieve”**

Supporting someone who is grieving can take time and can feel tiring. Taking time to refresh using the [5 Ways to Wellbeing](#) can be helpful.

The [5 Ways to Wellbeing](#) can also be helpful steps for those who have been bereaved to follow each day. Dudley has many lovely parks and nature reserves that can be helpful places for the bereaved to spend time in.

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