

St Christopher's

Help during your bereavement

An introduction to
the St Christopher's
Bereavement Service

Help during your bereavement

When someone who is important to us dies, it can leave an empty space in our lives and it is natural to experience strong feelings.

Perhaps you feel sad that they are no longer with you, bad that you could not do enough, guilt about your relief that they no longer have to suffer illness or frailty, anxious about how your life will be changed. There may also be practical problems for you and other people who share your loss, such as children or family members.

In this leaflet, you will find details of the St Christopher's Bereavement Service and how to make contact with us.

'I became more confident. I cried much less. I became less withdrawn, in short – I was happier than before'

'It was something I was not expecting to help, but it did'

Who can use the service and what do we offer?

We offer support in a number of different ways to anyone whose relative or friend was cared for by St Christopher's before they died. You may or may not want to talk about what has happened in your life. Both are fine.

Some people find it helpful to talk about their loss, either one-to-one or in a group. Others may seek practical advice. Some find it helpful just to visit the building again. Do drop in for a cup of coffee, spend some quiet time in the Pilgrim Room at St Christopher's Hospice or in the Caritas Centre Quiet Room or relax in the gardens.

Bereavement evenings

Around three months after your bereavement we will invite you to an evening meeting. This offers you a chance to meet with other people in a similar situation and to talk together in a small group. You might want to talk about difficulties you have had and how you have been coping.

There will be several dates offered and you will be able to choose whether you want to attend at St Christopher's Hospice in Sydenham or St Christopher's Bromley, Caritas House in Orpington. Anyone over the age of 18 years is very welcome. Our experience has shown that the evening is generally not suitable for younger children.

Bereavement groups

You can also join a bereavement group which meets once a week over seven weeks. From week to week the group will focus on different topics. We find that group members sometimes get to know each other well and some continue to meet informally after the seven sessions have ended.

Groups run both in the day time and the evening and again both at St Christopher's Hospice and at St Christopher's Bromley, Caritas House.

A monthly social group for bereaved people meets at St Christopher's Bromley. We will write to you with details of these groups at around six months after your bereavement but please feel free to get in touch for information.

Thanksgiving and memorial service

This service is open to everyone and takes place around the first anniversary of the death in various churches around the hospice areas. It is an opportunity to remember and give thanks for the person who has died. You will be invited along with your family and friends.

One-to-one bereavement support

One-to-one bereavement support is an opportunity to talk about the consequences of your loss, in confidence, with someone who will be able to listen to your experience of grief. They can help you think through any changes you may need to make and find a way to a new life that includes remembering the person who has died in the way that you want.

Every loss is a very personal experience and no two people experience loss in the same way. Many people find that it helps to talk with someone who is not part of their family or close circle of friends.

Sometimes people find that at first they do not want support but then later change their mind. If this happens to you, please contact us.

Who would you see for one-to-one support?

The Bereavement Service Volunteers bring a variety of experience to their work for the hospice. They are carefully selected and follow a comprehensive training programme, which includes learning about

bereavement and the effect that loss can have on our lives. Their work is regularly supervised by experienced staff.

How long does the one-to-one support last?

We mostly work in a time-limited way as we find this to be most effective. The Bereavement Service Volunteer will initially meet with you for about an hour. At the end of this first meeting you will normally decide together to meet up to ten or twelve times. The support will end at that point. However, you are welcome to contact us again three months later should you wish to have further support. You may be able to see the same Bereavement Support Volunteer again, depending on availability. Of course you can also join one of the other forms of support (e.g. the group or social programme) in the interim.

The bereavement helpline

We run a bereavement helpline Tuesdays 11am-7pm and Thursdays 9am-5pm. At other times leave us a message and we will return your call as soon as we can. Sometimes a one-off conversation on the phone is all you need. Contact the helpline on **020 8768 4595**.

The Social Programme at St Christopher's

For full details of the Social Programme at St Christopher's Hospice please visit **www.stchristophers.org.uk** or pick up a leaflet from reception at St Christopher's Hospice. All activities are open to our current patients and families, bereaved family members and members of our local community.

Likewise we have some activities at St Christopher's Bromley which you are welcome to join. For details please contact the social worker at St Christopher's Bromley on **01689 825755**.

Bereavement support for children

Children grieve too. Usually parents and carers are best placed to help their children. We can help you to support them in their bereavement. Contact one of the social workers for advice on **020 8768 4599** (St Christopher's Hospice) or **01689 825755** (St Christopher's Bromley, Caritas House).

The St Christopher's Candle Project offers specific counselling support for children who are bereaved. For details visit www.stchristophers.org.uk or call **020 8768 4500**.

Welfare advice

Main carers can ask to be referred for welfare advice at the time of the death and up to three months afterwards. The welfare officers can be reached on **020 8768 4599** (St Christopher's Hospice) or **01689 825755** (St Christopher's Bromley, Caritas House).

If you are in financial need and need support to plan an affordable funeral we can refer you to Down to Earth, a project supported by the Quaker Social Action charity, or you can of course contact them yourself direct and in confidence on **020 8983 5055**.

What happens after someone has died

On the wards, families are offered a meeting with nursing staff on the day after the death. For home deaths, our home care and Anniversary Centre nurses will also usually try to make contact with you to see how you are getting on. Sometimes we can find it hard to get hold of you, especially in the weeks after a death. Please make contact with us yourself should you wish. We like to hear how things are for you and whether there is any further support we can offer. Our nurses will also want to say goodbye to you.

A few weeks after the death we will write to the main carer inviting them to the above bereavement evening, groups, memorial service and to offer one-to-one support. We can only do so if you have been named as the main carer and we have complete address details for you. Please help us to do so by providing us with details and sharing with family members the information we send.

Sometimes your nurse may be particularly concerned about you. In these circumstances we will complete a bereavement needs assessment and forward this to our bereavement service. The bereavement staff may contact you to offer support. Of course you do not have to accept the offer.

Our bereavement team do not routinely make telephone contact with everyone who has been bereaved. Usually people themselves know best what support they might benefit from and when. By giving you this leaflet we hope to encourage you to contact us yourself. We will be very pleased to hear from you. For contact details see the back page.

How much does it cost?

The Bereavement Service is free. St Christopher's is a registered charity and relies on gifts and donations to carry out its work. Because of people's generosity it is possible to offer bereavement support free of charge to everyone who needs it. We receive only a third of our budget from the NHS. We do not expect donations but any contributions you might like to make will be gratefully received. Every donation, large or small, helps us to make a difference.

How can I contact the Bereavement Service?

You can contact us via the Bereavement Service administrator on **020 8768 4599**. You can also write to us at the St Christopher's Hospice address below or email us at the email address below.

StChristopher's

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