

Don't be afraid to ask for help

Meeting other young bereaved service parents can be very reassuring. Each service has a widows' association for the partners of people who die in service. Their details are below.

Cruse has been helping bereaved people and their children for over 50 years – our services are free to bereaved people and can be accessed via our website, by email or by telephone.

Useful contact details

www.cruse.org.uk for further information on how to support your child. The website includes a special section for military families. Details of our services and our local branches throughout England, Wales and Northern Ireland can be found in your local telephone directory or on the website, or by calling our national helpline on 0844 477 9400; email Cruse at: helpline@cruse.org.uk

www.RD4U.org.uk is Cruse's website for bereaved children and young people. Your child may find it comforting to share the experiences of other bereaved children and young people. Our children and young people's freephone helpline is 0808 808 1677

Service Widows Associations

Army Widows Association:

www.armywidows.org.uk

Naval & Marines Widows Association:

www.rnrmwidowsassociation.org

RAF Widows Association:

www.rafwidowsassociation.org.uk

Cruse Central Office

PO Box 800, Richmond, TW9 1RG

Tel: **0208 939 9530** | email: info@cruse.org.uk

Cruse Northern Ireland

Knockbracken Healthcare Park

Saintfield Road, Belfast BT8 8HB

Tel: **028 9079 2419** | email: northernireland@cruse.org.uk

Cruse Wales

Ty Energlyn

Gwrt Llanfabon, Caerphilly, CF83 2TP

Tel: **029 2088 6913** | email: crusecymru@cruse.org.uk


Cruse Bereavement Care Scotland

Riverview House

Friarton Road, Perth PH2 8DF

Tel: **0845 600 2227** | info@crusescotland.org.uk




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**Cruse
Bereavement
Care**

Royal Patron: Her Majesty The Queen

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Cruse Bereavement Care
Helping Military Families to
Support their Children

Supporting a bereaved child or young person Information for parents and carers

The death of someone close is a traumatic and devastating event for anyone. Grief is unique and no two children will grieve in the same way.

Younger children may show grief and distress by:

- having nightmares, bedwetting or staying awake to prevent bad things from happening
- behaving like a younger child – thumb-sucking, baby talk, forgetfulness
- complaining about tummy aches, headaches or other pains – sometimes reflecting where the child is hurting emotionally
- searching – looking for the person who has died.

Older young people may experience emotions that seem strong and over-powering, and these may result in:

- disbelief, anger, denial, guilt, relief, depression and mood swings
- withdrawal from family, friends or hobbies
- Refusal to attend school / college
- frustration, angry outbursts or physical violence
- difficulty with concentration
- loss of / increase in appetite
- misusing alcohol and substances to cope with the death
- self-harm.

Service accommodation and other losses

If the family are moving out of service accommodation following the death of your partner, your child will probably be feeling anxious and insecure.

Leaving their home, familiar surroundings, friends and school while they are trying to make sense of their bereavement can increase children's feelings of loss and grief.

Operational death and the child

Children and young people who have lost a parent who was often away from home can take longer to accept the reality of the death.

The child may hope that their loved one will return, even when they have been told about the death. This may result in delayed shock as the child clings to the belief that the person who has died will return at the end of their tour.

Operational deaths can attract media attention and intrusion. The child might become angry or upset and feel that their loved one is "public property".

They should be told about the death as soon as possible, and by someone they know and trust. Explain using words that they can understand and be prepared to answer any questions honestly.

Repatriation ceremonies and homecoming parades may be involved following an operational death. Explain what these are to the child or young person in advance and what will happen – let your child decide whether or not they attend.

It can be helpful for children to participate as it offers them a chance to say goodbye, but if they don't want to go, try to respect their wishes.

If your child does want to attend, make sure that they know they can change their mind at any time. If you cannot be with them, make sure that they are with someone they know and trust so that they feel safe and can leave if they need to. This applies equally to funerals and cremations.

Don't try to do everything yourself – if you have good friends and relatives, let them help you.

How can I support my grieving child?

Remember to:

- be honest and explain in a way your child will be able to understand
- encourage your child to talk about the death and how they are feeling
- recognise that (if you have more than one child) your children may grieve differently
- challenge aggressive or violent behaviour; explain that it is OK to feel angry but it isn't OK to hurt other people or themselves
- keep the school / college informed and meet the staff
- reassure your child that you will be there for them, to listen to them and talk things through as and when they need
- help your child to say goodbye in the way they would like to
- remember that your child is a child and try not to burden them with adult roles; try to keep routines such as mealtimes and bedtime the same as before the death, as this will help to promote feelings of security and a sense of normality.

Try not to:

- use euphemisms for death such as "Daddy has gone to sleep"
- constantly ask your child how they are feeling
- be upset or alarmed when children alternate between play and grief; children don't have the emotional reserves to grieve continuously and will need respite through play
- keep your child away from school; the routine and normality of school may help
- be too concerned if your child wets the bed or sucks their thumb; as they come to terms with the death such behaviours should disappear
- assume you know their wishes about attending the funeral or cremation; talk to them about this
- forget to take care of yourself and your needs; you are grieving too and may need support.