



From the Deputy National Welfare Advisor

16 April 2020

Dear Area/Branch Secretaries, Welfare Officers and Shipmates

CORONAVIRUS (COVID 19) – BEREAVEMENT UPDATE

Today (Thursday) the reality of what a wicked, random and vicious thing Covid 19 is came home to me as I attended the funeral of a friend and shipmate of long standing. As I write, I am trying to reflect and focus on the positive things and good times we shared over many years, including a few wets. Sadly he died alone in hospital and very few of us were able to say farewell today.

I write to distract myself but also to remind shipmates who have suffered or may suffer bereavement in their families of the help out there.

How do I know what to do when some one dies? Many will have prepared for this but many more, sadly, will not have. If you or someone you support has become bereaved it can be a confusing time following their crossing the bar and difficult to know what you need to do first, especially when you experience it for the first time. There can be some complex procedures to follow, depending on whether the person died in hospital, at home or a public place. Where the person has died will also affect the type of documentation that you are given. However there are good summaries of all aspects at <https://www.bereavementadvice.org/topics/what-to-do-when-someone-dies/> or call 0800 634 9494 (Mon-Fri 0900 -1700)

Remember you are not alone! As I said in my previous note on bereavement, help and support is out there. Lockdown has restricted the usual in person support from family, friends, Branch Welfare Officer and other shipmates although they will be there for you. Just ask and try talking about your feelings.

Grief is natural. When someone close dies, family and shipmates close to them can feel a spectrum of emotions that change over time. Every person's journey through grief will be different. There is no right or wrong way to grieve nor is there a timetable for how long your grief will last or how you should feel after a particular time. It is up to you and no-one's perceptions.

Are there any quick fixes? The answer is no, it will take time but everyone finds what helps them adjust to bereavement. However there are 6 ways to feel happier (see NHS suggestions at <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/feel-better-and-happy/>, which are simple lifestyle changes to help you feel more in control and able to cope.

1. **Manage your stress levels** by finding ways to reduce it and getting regular exercise.
2. **Enjoy yourself** by doing things that you enjoy and help your emotional wellbeing by simple activities such as having a soak in the bath. Other options such as meeting up with friends for coffee can't happen due to social distancing and isolation. Try to avoid things that seem enjoyable at the time but make you feel worse afterwards, such as drinking too much alcohol or eating junk food.
3. **Boost your Self-esteem** by treating yourself as you would treat a valued shipmate, in a positive but honest way. Tell yourself positive things.
4. **Try for a healthy lifestyle** by **Limiting** your alcohol intake, **Choosing** a well-balanced diet, **Doing** some exercise and **Getting** enough sleep
5. **Talk and share** - We are social beings and communication is important to us all. Talking things through helps you to release tension, rather than keeping it inside. It will help strengthen your relationships and connect with people.



6. **Build your resilience** - Resilience helps us to cope with life's ups and downs and making something worthwhile out of painful times helps your resilience grow. Why not make something creative out of bad experiences to ease the pain?

Who can help me cope? I previously mentioned Cruse for adults (see <https://www.cruse.org.uk/get-help/coronavirus-dealing-bereavement-and-grief> with Free Helpline of 0808 808 1677) and Winstons Wish (see <https://www.winstonswish.org/coronavirus/> with Freephone Helpline 08088 020 021 and other e-support) for children and young people. The Sue Ryder site (<https://www.sueryder.org/support-if-you-have-been-bereaved?>) also provides much useful information in question format.

What about the Navy family? The Navy and seafaring family is there for you as well in times of bereavement through a number of charitable organisations starting with the RNA itself as a signposter. Although Central Office staff are not trained bereavement councilors in their own right they can always talk and point you in the right direction for more targeted support – **if you need assistance call the RNA Helpline on 07542 680082**. Those mentioned below do not include some such as The Royal Navy and Royal Marines Charity (RNRMC) that you may be aware of as they fund the other naval charities to do their work. There are a number with specific target groups they support. The list below covers a number in no order of priority. **Please note that due to Covid 19, many will be operating remotely and services may be restricted or even closed, do ring or check the website.**

The Royal Naval Benevolent Trust (RNBT) provides support and financial assistance to Royal Navy and Royal Marines personnel and their families in times of need. See <http://www.rnbt.org.uk/> with contact number 02392 690112. However RNBT is closed at moment but if you are serving you should consider contacting your local RN or RM Welfare first or contact your local branch of SSAFA or TRBL who will arrange for a caseworker to visit you to complete an application form. The **Royal Navy & Royal Marines Widows' Association (RNRMWA)** supports widows and widowers and recognised partners of service personnel. Find out more at <http://www.rnrmwidows.org/> or telephone 023 9265 4374

The Women's Royal Naval Service (WRNS) Benevolent Trust (www.wrnsbt.org.uk or call 023 9265 5301) provides relief in cases of necessity or distress amongst its members and their dependants. Members are those who served in the WRNS and transferred to the Royal Navy before 1 November 1993, or anyone who has served in the WRNS since 3 September 1939. It is co-located with RNBT in Portsmouth.

The Naval Children's Charity at <https://www.navalchildrenscharity.org.uk/need-our-help/> or call 023 9263 9534 provides assistance for the children of those serving in or veterans of the Royal Navy or Royal Marines. The Fund is co-located with RNBT in Portsmouth.

The Sailors Childrens Society (www.sailorschildren.org.uk or call 01482 342331) is a maritime charity supporting families with a seafaring connection and receiving a means tested benefit with a child under the age of 18. This includes Royal Navy, Royal Marines, Merchant Navy and Fishing Fleet and includes families who may be divorced, deceased or disabled.

Tri-service veteran and family support is available from:

Soldiers, Sailors and Air Force Association (SSAFA) (www.ssafa.org.uk or call 0800 731 4880) aims to relieve need, suffering and distress amongst the Armed Forces, veterans and their families in order to support their independence and dignity. SSAFA often acts as the casework organisation for the Royal Naval Benevolent Trust.

The Royal British Legion (TRBL) was founded by veterans after the First World War and still helps today's Service men and women, veterans, and their families in almost every aspect of daily life. TRBL provides advice and information on housing and residential care and often acts as the



casework organisation for the Royal Naval Benevolent Trust (see www.britishlegion.org.uk or call 0808 802 8080)

The Seafarers Advice and Information Line (SAIL) is an advice service that's completely free for seafarers and their families. See <http://sailine.org.uk/about-sail/our-funders> or call Freephone 0800 160 1842.

Veterans UK (<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/veterans-uk> or call Freephone 0808 1914 218) is part of the MoD and provides free support for veterans and their families, including a helpline, Veterans Welfare Service and injury/bereavement compensation scheme payments

The War Widows Association (WWA) at www.warwidowsassociation.org.uk or call local rate 0845 2412 189 works to improve the conditions of War Widows and their dependants in Great Britain. Its work includes those who have suffered bereavement from the last World War and from more recent conflicts such as Korea, the Falklands, the Gulf and Afghanistan but in addition those who have suffered the loss of their husband in peacetime, when his death was attributable to his service life.

The Forces Children's Trust (FCT) at www.forceschildrenstrust.org (website being revised) is a charity devoted to helping dependent children that have lost a parent whilst serving with the Armed Forces. The FCT, by reason of its aims and size, has the flexibility and ability to make decisions and offer help as needed, with minimum fuss and consequent time-loss. It can help both an individual and a group of children in similar circumstances.

Welfare Officer or Case Worker looking for a maritime charity? Try the **Seafarer Support** online search engine www.seafarerssupport.org/self-help/ which helps you or the person you represent find the maritime charity you need. Alternatively call Freephone Helpline (0800 121 4765)

The other financial help there available eg Bereavement Support Grant will be covered in a further update together with changes to access at end of life and celebration of lives well lived.

It may be of some comfort to know that there has already been discussion regarding a memorial service in the future for those who crossed the bar during the crisis. In many cases, it has sadly not been possible to attend those funerals and commemorate our departed shipmates with the marks of respect we would normally wish to observe; this gives us the opportunity to redress that.

Please distribute this widely, keep following government public health guidelines and look after your shipmates and oppos by phone, text, e-media or letter.

Finally, the Chaplain of the Fleet has been in touch with the General Secretary to say that while serving padres don't normally conduct veterans funerals, he is aware of the difficulties in these unprecedented times and is prepared to assist where families of bereaved are having difficulty locally in finding someone suitable to conduct funerals. Again, if you need assistance call the RNA Helpline on 07542 680082.

Stay safe, stay well and stay at home,

Geoff Apperley