

# COVID-19 AND DEMENTIA: GRIEVING IN EXCEPTIONAL TIMES

**This information should be read in conjunction with official HSE Guidance on [www.hpsc.ie](http://www.hpsc.ie) / [www.hselibrary.ie](http://www.hselibrary.ie)**

(This guidance is to address issues specifically related to implementing COVID-19 measures for people living with dementia in residential care facilities)

During these weeks of isolation, many families are separated from their loved ones with dementia. Family members worry that their loved one may not understand why they can't visit. Residents may also be grieving the loss of friends within the RCF. In normal times death of a loved one is difficult but in these exceptional times, it creates an additional burden.

## SUPPORTING FAMILIES

- Ensure family members are kept regularly updated about their loved one's condition.
- Ensure family members are aware of what will happen at the time of death as procedures will differ to what happens in normal times especially where the death has occurred due to COVID-19.
- At end of life it may be possible for a family member to visit their relative (local guidelines may differ) once infection control measures are followed.
- If family members are not present at time of death – telephone the named contact as per the person's care plan.
- Allow time for them to talk – they will likely seek reassurance about their loved ones last moments.
- It might be difficult to find the right words to say to families especially at this time – a kind word goes a long way.

The Irish Hospice Foundation has published resources which may help families who are grieving during this exceptional time. These are available on the IHF COVID-19 Care and Inform Hub.

## SELF CARE AND SUPPORTING YOUR COLLEAGUES

The spread of COVID-19 is a new and challenging event and a source of anxiety for many. The increased number of deaths in residential care facilities is also a huge source of upset for staff. During this exceptional time:

- Be kind to yourself
- Don't be afraid to seek help from your colleagues if you are feeling anxious
- Support your colleagues where you can

A free staff counselling service is available through the Employee Assistance Programme (see below).

The HSE Workplace Health and Wellbeing unit offers a range of support services to help support staff physically and psychologically at this unprecedented time. The HSE Healthcare Worker Covid-19 Helpline is available on 1850 420 420

The Irish Hospice Foundation has published the following resource: 'Self-Care and Supporting your Colleagues; Tips for Healthcare Workers'. Available on the IHF COVID-19 Care and Inform Hub.

See: 'Grieving in Exceptional Times' and 'Acknowledging and Coping with Grief of a COVID-19 Death'- Irish Hospice Foundation. (Available on <https://hospicefoundation.ie/covid19careandinform/>)

Employee Assistance Programme. Available on <https://healthservice.hse.ie/filelibrary/staff/employee-assistance-programme-contact-details-for-counsellors.pdf>