

In some circumstances a person's family or close friends may be unable to see them before they die or to sit with them at the time of death. This could be for e.g. infection control reasons or geographical distance.

Whilst this may be distressing for the person who is dying and those who are close to them, it can also be upsetting for health and social care professionals.



The points below may help you feel more prepared and confident to do the best you can for everyone involved in difficult situations such as these:

General principles

Acknowledge to yourself, to a colleague or within your team that this can be a challenging and upsetting situation.

Recognise that having to implement any restrictions on visiting can be very distressing for everyone and may feel completely opposite to what would usually be good practice at the end of life.

It is important to show that you appreciate how hard it is for patients and/or families to decide who should visit if not everyone is able to. *"I wish we could let you all visit but..."*

Recognise that there are ways to show compassion, empathy and kindness to families, even if they are not there in person, which may help them to deal with their grief in the future. Your words and some simple actions can act as a comfort and be remembered for a long time to come.

Keeping in touch with families

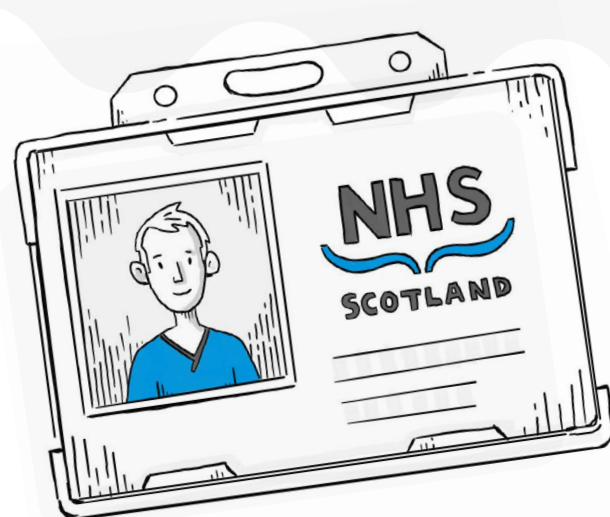
It can be comforting for families to know the name(s) of the staff who are caring for the person who is dying.

Seek out opportunities to reassure families that their relative is being treated with kindness, respect and dignity.

Try to ensure that families feel that they have been kept up to date regarding the person's condition and the care they are receiving, as you would if they were able to attend in person.

Ideally, establish ahead of time, what times of the day or night families would or would not want to be contacted, and in response to what developments.

Try to arrange for a member of the team who has been caring for the person and/or who knows the family to phone with any updates, but don't feel bad if this isn't achievable; it may not always be possible.



Phone and video calls

Offer the opportunity and facilitate contact via video or phone calls, where circumstances allow, and equipment is available. There are various applications available that you may wish to utilise.

It may be appropriate to use video technology to allow communication when important decisions are being made or treatments given or withdrawn.

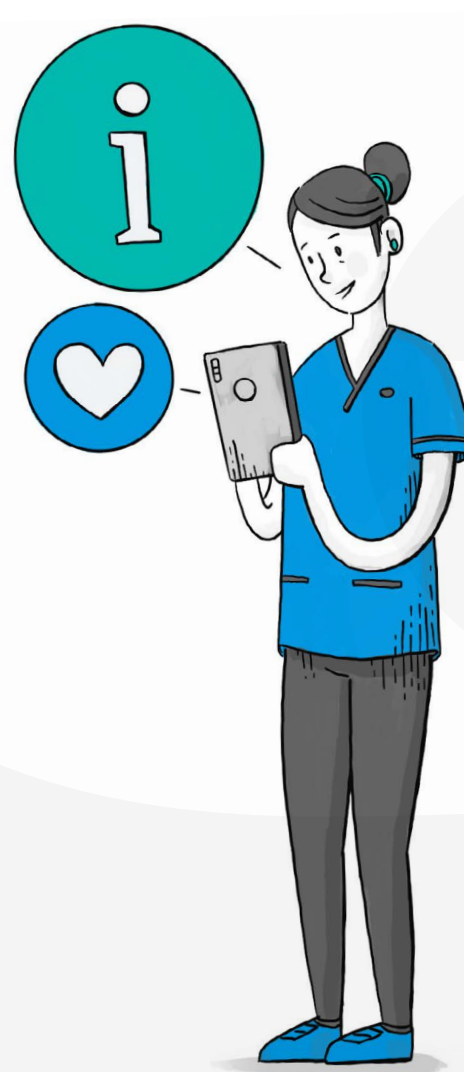
Prepare families about how the person will sound and/or how they will appear.

It can be frightening for families to see staff in personal protective equipment. Where possible, and if safe to do so, an introductory call to allow them to see your face can be invaluable.

Even if someone is unresponsive, consider asking families if they would like to say something to the person who is dying via a video or phone call.

If a video or phone call is not possible or appropriate, ask those close to them if there are any messages that they would like you to relay or read out. Similarly, consider asking the person who is dying e.g. *"Is there anything you would like me to pass on or say to your family?"* if they are able to communicate.

Facilitating contact in these ways can provide comfort to the person who is dying, and to those close to them, in their bereavement.



Other things that can help

Ask families if there are particular cultural traditions or faith rituals and practices that are important to them. Where possible, explore whether you can facilitate these in their absence, perhaps with support from a Chaplain or Spiritual Care Lead.

Consider offering families the opportunity to hand in a keepsake or laminated photo.

Knowing that staff will be with the person who is dying in order that they are not alone, can provide comfort to those who are bereaved.

Staff wellbeing

Take steps to look after yourself, your colleagues and your team.

Caring for those who are at the end of life and supporting those who are bereaved, can be difficult and upsetting, even in normal circumstances. However, the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic may make this even more challenging, perhaps as we witness more deaths and dying at work or work in unfamiliar surroundings.

Seek help and support if you need it.

