

Supporting LGBT+ people around death and bereavement

A summary information leaflet for health and social care professionals



This leaflet provides a limited summary of the information available on:

www.sad.scot.nhs.uk/bereavement/supporting-lgbtplus-people-around-bereavement

Person-centred care

It may not be evident or known that a person is lesbian, gay, bi and/or trans (LGBT+) – don't make assumptions about a person's sexual orientation, gender identity or relationship status.

LGBT+ people and their partners can face particular challenges, and may have specific fears about death, dying and bereavement e.g. being outed in death, fear of inappropriate curiosity, misgendering, deadnaming or being misremembered. LGBT+ people are also more likely to be estranged from their families of origin which can lead to complex relationships between those who are bereaved.

Interactions with health and social care professionals can shape experiences of bereavement.



Language and attitudes



- Deliver care and communicate in a way that is inclusive, affirmative and respectful
- Foster trust and empathy which will make it easier for people to discuss and disclose their needs
- If unsure, or if it has not been otherwise specified, use neutral language, such as 'partner' or 'spouse' rather than 'husband' or 'wife'
- When referring to the deceased, use language e.g. pronouns that they had chosen for themselves. If you are unsure, ask those who were important to them...

... for example:

“how would X have wanted to be referred to?”

or

“how would X have described their gender?”

Supporting those who are bereaved



- Avoid the assumption that someone is a friend; instead ask e.g. *“How would you and X describe your relationship?”*
- Recognise that those who will need support around death may include same-sex partners, chosen family and families of origin
- Be sensitive; a bereaved partner may be expecting to face discrimination
- Acknowledge and affirm the relationships that the deceased person had. Consider asking e.g. *“Who was important to X?”*
- Be respectful of intimate relationships and, when appropriate, ensure that discussion and decision-making involves a person’s partner
- Where possible, communicate with, and support all those who are bereaved (including next of kin, families of origin, chosen families and a person’s community) in line with clinical confidentiality regulations
- Signpost all those who are bereaved to appropriate sources of support

Legal considerations and confidentiality



- Sexual orientation and gender reassignment are protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010
- Gender is not recorded on a Medical Certificate of Cause of Death, but is recorded on the extract of the death certificate that is supplied by a Registrar to the person who registers the death
- A Gender Recognition Certificate is not essential for the accurate recording of a person’s gender identity at death registration, however it can be more complicated in the absence of one, and hence may be a source of anxiety prior to death
- There is no legal requirement for the gender recorded on a birth and death certificate to be the same
- After a death, maintain clinical confidentiality regarding a person’s LGBT+ status in line with legal regulations
- In certain situations, sharing information with other professionals about a person’s LGBT+ status may be necessary. If in doubt, seek advice

Definitions



Cis/cisgender: a person whose gender matches the sex they were assigned at birth - note this term might be controversial to some

LGBT+ Definitions

Lesbian: a woman who is attracted to women

Gay: a term for people who are primarily attracted to people of the same gender

Bi/bisexual: a person who is attracted to more than one gender

Trans: an umbrella term to describe people whose gender is not the same as, or does not sit comfortably with, the sex they were assigned at birth, including trans men, trans women, non-binary people, and cross-dressing people

+ : other non-heterosexual identities, e.g.

- **Asexual:** someone who does not experience sexual attraction, although they may still be sexually and / or romantically partnered
- **Pansexual:** someone who is attracted regardless of gender. Can be synonymous with **bisexual**

Queer: A term that may be used by non-heterosexual and / or non-cisgender people to describe themselves. This is a reclaimed slur and so should not be used by people outside of the LGBT+ community or in relation to someone who has not explicitly self-identified as 'queer'

Misgendering: referring to a person as the wrong gender (either accidentally or intentionally)

Deadnaming: referring to a trans person by the name that they used before they transitioned. This may be done either accidentally or intentionally

Family of origin: the family in which a person was raised

Chosen family: a group of people who are committed to supporting each other, as society expects families to offer support. This can be a group of friends or partners who live together, or a broader community support network

Being out: being openly LGBT+. 'Outing' someone is the non-consensual disclosure of someone's LGBT+ identity

Gender Recognition Certificate (GRC): as permitted by the Gender Recognition Act 2004, this amends a person's birth certificate to reflect their gender identity. However, not having a GRC does not make someone "less trans"