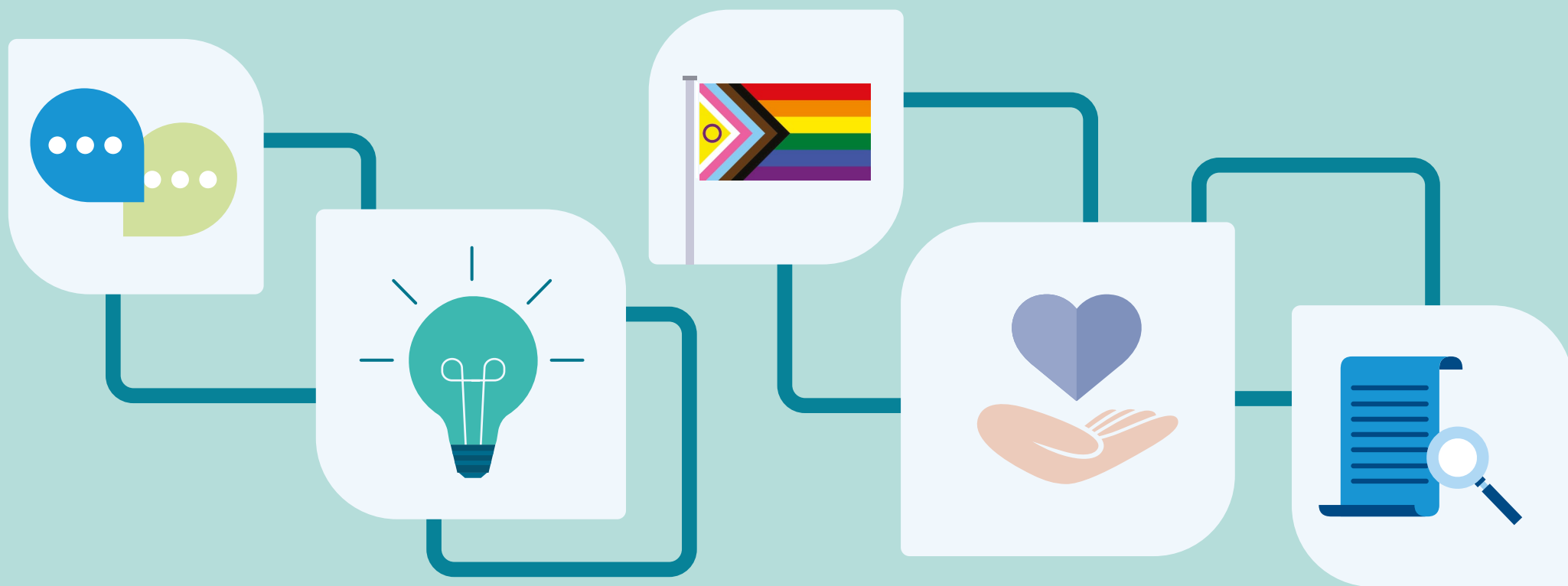


Supporting LGBTQ+ people around death and bereavement

A summary information leaflet for health and social care staff



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

<https://www.sad.scot.nhs.uk/bereavement/supporting-lgbtqplus-people-around-bereavement/>

Person-centred care

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

LGBTQ+ people 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. LGBTQ+ people are also more likely to be estranged from their families of origin. This can lead to complex relationships between a family of origin and others who are close to the person who has died e.g., partner(s), chosen family, friends and a person's community.

Interactions with those working in health and social care can shape experiences of bereavement. The way in which staff engage and communicate with people who are bereaved can have a significant impact and long-lasting effect.



Language and attitudes

- + Deliver care and communicate in a way that is inclusive, affirmative and respectful.
- + Visual signals that you are an ally can be useful (e.g. a Progress Pride lanyard or badge).
- + Foster trust and empathy to 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 person who has died, 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?"**

**"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 partner who is bereaved 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(s).
- + 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 LGBTQ+ status in line with legal regulations.
- + In certain situations, sharing information with other professionals about a person’s LGBTQ+ status may be necessary. If in doubt, seek advice before sharing.



Definitions

Asexual: Someone who does not experience sexual attraction, although they may still be sexually and / or romantically partnered.

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

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

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.

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

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.

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



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".

Lesbian: A woman who is attracted to women.

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

Non-binary: Identifying as either having a gender which is in-between or beyond the two categories 'man' and 'woman', as fluctuating between 'man' and 'woman', or as having no gender, either permanently or some of the time.

Pansexual: Someone who is attracted regardless of gender. Can be synonymous with bisexual.

Polyamory: Where people might have more than one romantic / sexual partner.

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 LGBTQ+ community or in relation to someone who has not explicitly self-identified as 'queer'.

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.

This resource may be made available, in full or summary form, in alternative formats and community languages. Please contact us on **0131 656 3200** or email **altformats@nes.scot.nhs.uk** to discuss how we can best meet your requirements.

© NHS Education for Scotland 2025. You can copy or reproduce the information in this resource for use within NHSScotland and for non-commercial educational purposes under creative commons CC BY-NC 4.0 Deed | Attribution-Non Commercial 4.0 International | Creative Commons. Use of this document for commercial purposes is permitted only with the written permission of NES.