

Islam and Bereavement



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There are many situations in life that might lead you to experience grief and the associated feelings of sadness and loneliness.

Losing a loved one can be one of the most difficult things you have to deal with and you may have thoughts that life is unbearable.

But grief is not always associated with death – you might also experience it in other aspects of life, such as when you have a chronic illness or financial worries or when a key relationship comes to an end.

If a relative or close friend is grieving, you may feel responsible for providing comfort to ease even a small amount of the pain they are going through. You may feel at some sort of loss when supporting them.

This guide explains how you can offer support to Muslim family, friends and colleagues in your life during such a difficult time, specifically where death is concerned.

“And we shall surely test you with something of fear and hunger and a loss of wealth and lives and fruits....”

[Qur'an 2:15]

Death in Islam



In Islam, death is considered a transition to another phase of existence – the eternal Afterlife. Aside from comforting the bereaved, this difficult time offers an opportunity for Muslims to ask Allah (SWT) to have mercy on the deceased.

For Muslims, there are certain actions to implement in the last few moments of a person's life:

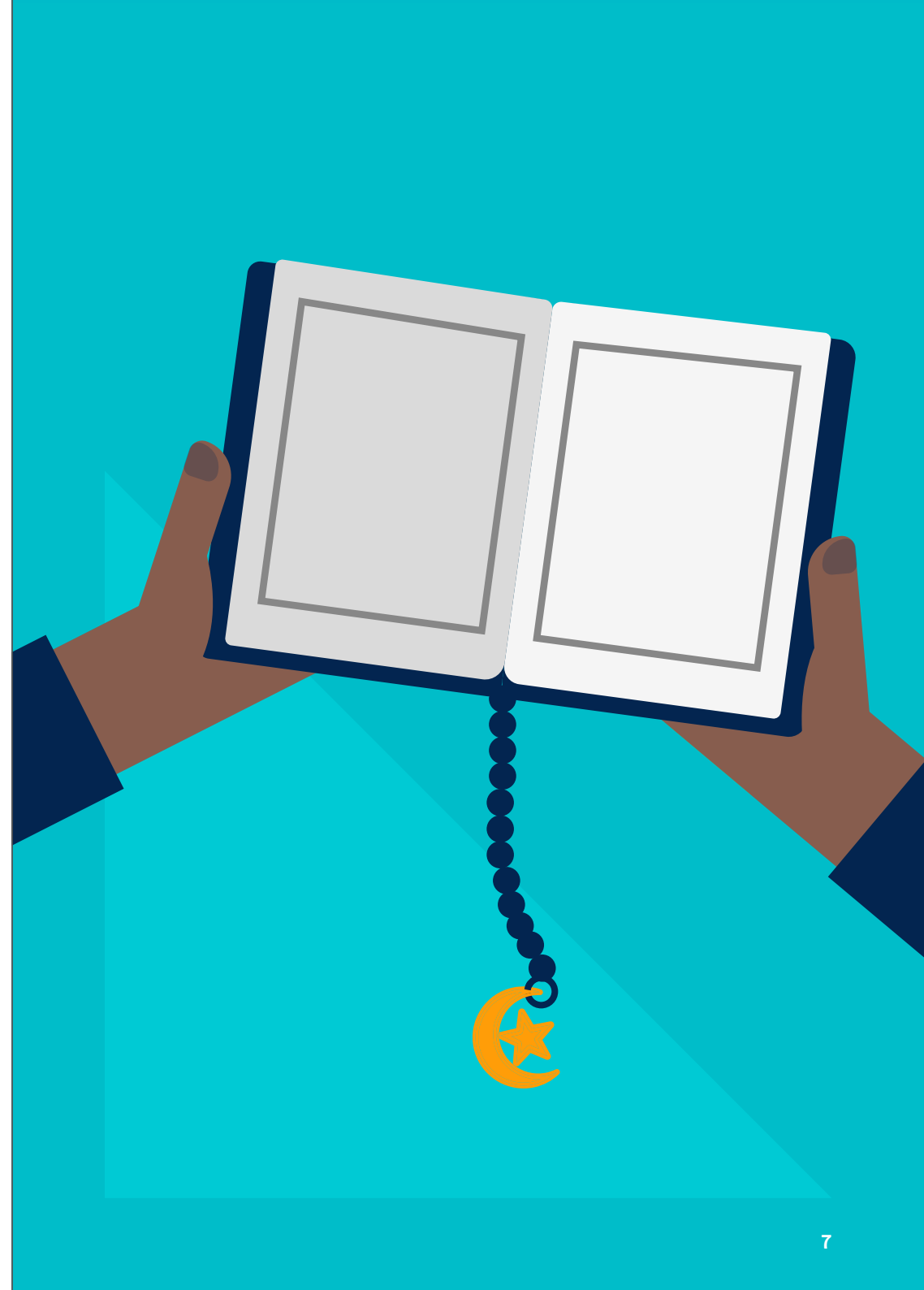
- The dying person is asked to recite the *Shahadah* (one of the Pillars of the Muslim Faith) in their last moments. This is an Islamic oath that declares one's belief and allegiance to the deity of Allah (SWT), also accepting that the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) was the final messenger of Allah (SWT).
- Reciting the *Shahadah* out loud is viewed as essential before passing away. If the dying person cannot utter it by themselves, someone else may lead them, and they may follow suit by reciting it back verbally or mentally, depending on their condition.
- The dying person or their loved ones can also recite verses directly from the Qur'an. It is a belief that these verses can alleviate the pain associated with death for the dying person.

Other things to consider at this time include:

- 1 Preparation of the will of the dying person.** It is common practice to write a will that ensures the financial security of loved ones. The civil courts are able to honour Islamic wills as long as they are written in accordance with the Islamic Guidelines. There are services available to assist with writing wills, such as [Unite Wills](#).
- 2 Assigning a certain percentage of wealth to charity.** Typically, people allocate around one third of their property holdings to different charitable organisations or individuals. It is worth noting that charitable donations should also be included in the will.
- 3 Settling of debts of the dying person.** According to requirements outlined in the Qur'an, when someone of the Islamic faith dies, they should be debt free in order to further secure their wellbeing in the Afterlife.
- 4 Ensuring that the dying person asked forgiveness** from anyone they might have wronged.

The Prophet (ﷺ) said, "The soul of the deceased believer remains pending on account of the debt till it (the debt) is repaid."

[At-Tirmidhi]



Ghusl, burial and Janazah



It is best that the immediate family has reduced responsibilities in the subsequent weeks after the death of their loved one and it is hoped that, during this time, the wider community steps in to attend to their needs.

Upon learning that someone has died, it is common to exchange and hear Islamic expressions of condolences. When doing this, share your hope that family members and friends will eventually be reunited with the deceased in Jannah ('Heaven').

It is important to note that a few common practices in relation to death are forbidden in Islam:

Post-mortem

Routine post-mortems are strongly discouraged in Islam as they are seen as a desecration of the body. Muslims may refuse to have an autopsy performed. They will only commit if there is no other option and this can cause huge distress to the deceased member's family. If an autopsy on a deceased family member or friend does occur and it is beyond your control, know that Allah (SWT) has your best interest and it is Allah (SWT) who has ordained for it so. There is also an increasing availability of post-mortem MRI scans which may be an option to explore.

Cosmetology and embalming

Cosmetology and embalming are not permissible in Islam and, again, are practices considered to be a desecration of the body. It is important in Islam for the deceased to be buried as quickly as possible and engaging with these practices can be seen to only delay the burial process.

Cremation

Cremation is forbidden within Islam as Muslims believe that the deceased should be treated with the same respect and care as the living. For example, Muslims share the view that to break a deceased person's bone is equivalent to breaking a person's bone when alive.

Organ donation

There is a difference of opinion on this amongst religious scholars. It is deemed acceptable by some Muslims as this practice complies with the following teaching from the Qur'an:

"Whoever saves the life of one person it would be as if he saved all of mankind."

[Qur'an 5:32]

If you are unsure about the Islamic view of organ donation, speak to a local Imam or Sheikh who has a thorough Islamic understanding of this matter.

Steps of *Ghusl* ('Ritual Washing') and shrouding

The preparation for burial should take place as soon as possible after death. The deceased person's body is ritually washed in accordance with Islamic practices via a process called *Ghusl* and then wrapped in a clean white shroud. The hair is combed and, if female, braided and the cloth of the shroud is perfumed.

It should be noted that, in some circumstances, it is not possible to wash and bury the deceased immediately after death. Due to policies in the UK, this could take a few days.

The steps of the *Ghusl* include:

- The stomach being pressed gently and massaged downwards to evacuate the deceased person's bowels.

- Wudu ('ritual ablution') is then performed on the body – with the hands washed first, the outside of the deceased person's mouth and nose next, moving onwards towards the arms (elbow down) and ending with the feet.
- The entire body is then washed thoroughly from head to toe, using water and soap.
- The body is turned on its left side and washed and vice versa for the right side.
- Finally, the body is washed entirely again but with water alone.
- Once washed, the body is dried with a towel and prepared for shrouding with white cloth anointed with Camphor (optional).

Handling emotions during the *Ghusl*

Those involved in the *Ghusl* are usually relatives of the deceased and the emotional impact of this experience can be significant because:

- These moments serve as a reminder that death is a very real experience and this world is temporary, with the 'real' eternal life being yet to come.
- Relatives have an opportunity to be in close proximity of the deceased person for a final time, caring for their loved one in their last moments whilst making a Du'a ('supplications') for their transition into the Afterlife and their wellbeing.
- Participating in the burial process is seen as something that will be rewarded.

“Whoever attends the funeral procession till he offers the funeral prayer for it, will get a reward equal to one Qirat, and whoever accompanies it till burial, will get a reward equal to two Qirats.” When asked, “What are two Qirats?” He (ﷺ) replied, “Like two huge mountains.”

[Sahih al-Bukhari]



Burial and Janazah

The Islamic funeral prayer, also known as the Janazah, is regarded as the closing of the chapter of life and signifies the journey to the grave and beyond. It is a Fard Kifayah (‘mandatory on the community’), which involves the Muslim community congregating to pray for the deceased prior to the burial.

The Janazah prayer is unique in the sense that it is a prayer that was authorised only for the Prophet’s (ﷺ) Ummah, which automatically makes it a very important and significant duty to be fulfilled.

An example of one of the Duas that can be supplicated during the Janazah prayer is:

“O Allah, forgive our living and our dead, those present and those absent, our young and our old, our males and our females. O Allah, whom amongst us You keep alive, then let such a life be upon Islam, and whom amongst us You take unto Yourself, then let such a death be upon faith. O Allah, do not deprive us of his reward and do not let us stray after him.”

[At-Tirmidhi]

Mourning: etiquette and expectations



“Inna lillahi wa Inna Illayhi Rajعون”

“To Allah (SWT), and indeed to Him we will return”

[Qur’an 2:156]

Etiquette

It is customary to say the above phrase in the following circumstances:

- Upon receiving immediate news of a death that has occurred, whether the person who passed was Muslim or not.
- When a person experiences a calamity (e.g. loss of wealth, employment etc).

The prayers of the living who ask Allah (SWT) to pardon the deceased are important as are other good deeds that can be done on their behalf, such as:

- Offering Sadaqah (‘giving in charity’)
- Make Istighfar on their behalf (‘asking for repentance’)
- Performing pilgrimage on their behalf (including Hajj and/or Umrah)
- Performing Qurbani (‘animal sacrifice’) and distributing the meat to the poor

Etiquette of attending an Islamic funeral

- Men and women should adhere to full Hijab (‘Islamic dress’) by dressing modestly, wearing clean clothes and avoiding make-up or accessories that would attract attention and could be considered disrespectful.

In some cultures, Muslim women do not attend the Janazah prayers or follow the procession. In Islam, however, the obligation to attend the Janazah is equally important for women and men. In some instances, women watch the burial from a distance and only approach the grave afterwards once the male congregation has dispersed following the burial.

- Mourners should avoid extreme displays of emotion or loud recitation of verses from the Qur'an.
- It is good etiquette to attend the Janazah prayers after attending one of the obligatory five daily prayers.
- Mourners should not record the service using any forms of media as this may be considered disrespectful by loved ones of the deceased.
- It is recommended to throw a handful of dirt three times into the grave [Abu Hurayrah, Ibn Maajah] of the deceased in accordance with Islamic practice.

Muslim cemeteries/graves often do not have headstones or plaques but will have levelled markers so that the family members and friends of the deceased are able to recognise the grave. Additionally, flowers, leaves and plants are not placed near or on the grave for the reason that extravagant forms of display serve no purpose for the deceased and a virtuous person should not be differentiated from a non-virtuous person. Historically, it is these actions that lead to graves becoming places of worship and Shirk ('making a partner with Allah (SWT)). This is further illustrated when the Prophet (ﷺ) said not to make the graves like our homes (Bukhari).

How should Muslims mourn?

The death of a Muslim is regarded as a loss for the whole community and it is not unusual for people to attend the funeral of someone they did not know. In fact, Muslims are encouraged to attend funerals due to their profound significance beyond the individual level, as outlined below.

- **Personal:** It serves as a reminder of the ultimate destination (the Afterlife), and that this is a natural part of human existence that will be experienced by all at some point.
- **Social:** Gathering together in times of difficulty can be equally as important as gatherings in times of celebration. These are times to connect with others in the community and can be seen as a sign of unity and solace for those who need it the most.
- **Spiritual:** It is time to strengthen our connection with the Creator, to turn to Him for guidance and in repentance before we experience death ourselves.



“If any part of the body is not well then the whole body shares the sleeplessness (insomnia) and fever with it”

[Sahih al-Bukhari]

The concept of one ‘body’ of Muslims is frequently referred to as the *Ummah*. It serves as a reminder that Muslims are bound together by their religion and should support one another in difficult times.

Bereavement and emotions

In Islam, sorrow and grief are recognised as a natural response to the death of loved ones.

Although the emotions experienced during this challenging time are valid and may be difficult to process by those directly experiencing loss, it is recommended not to:

- Wail or express excessive displays of emotion as life and death are a certainty decreed by Allah (SWT).
- Resort to extreme displays of emotion that cause self harm, such as beating the chest or slapping the face.
- Ignore your emotions, as circumstances of death vary and so emotional outbursts can be natural in unexpected or shocking situations. Displaying patience is preferred but this does not mean withholding emotion completely.

Allah says, ‘I have nothing to give but Paradise as a reward to my believer slave, who, if I cause his dear friend (or relative) to die, remains patient (and hopes for Allah’s Reward)’.

[Sahih al-Bukhari]

It is important to remember that Allah (SWT) has allowed us to cry in such circumstances and shedding tears allows us to soften the heart and release emotion. Remembrance of death and visiting graves also softens the heart.

“Whosoever wishes to visit (the graves of the deceased), he should do so, for it softens the heart, brings tears to the eyes and reminds of the Hereafter”

[Sahih al-Bukhari]

Try to:

- Express grief your own way: tears, crying and weeping are a mercy from Allah (SWT) and therefore permissible. In Islam, the Prophet (ﷺ) was known to sometimes show his grief. There is no right or wrong way, but the concept of moderation is encouraged.
- Turn to prayer, recitation of Qur’an and contemplation, as these can be sources of direct comfort to Muslims during times of difficulty. These acts of worship are a source of connection with Allah (SWT), the Creator, and in death there is a reminder to turn to Him.

“So Blessed is Allah, the Best of creators. After that, surely, you will die”

[Qur’an 23:14-15]

The mourning period

The official period of mourning depends on the relationship with the deceased but feelings of grief might continue beyond this. The mourning period for the loss of a family member or a friend is a minimum of three days, including a male widower, but certain relationships have been highlighted in Qur'an and Sunnah ('way of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ') as severe losses:

→ Grieving parents who have lost children

Children who pass away are viewed as a shield protecting parents from the punishment of Allah (SWT). Muslims believe that a child who has passed away will be waiting for their parents in Jannah ('Heaven'). The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ himself had buried six of his seven children.



Children will naturally have many questions around death so it is best to remain honest and give age-appropriate explanations. Focus on the good deeds of the deceased and how they can continue to support them (e.g. supplicating for them and giving charity on their behalf). Reminders of being reunited in the Afterlife would prove to be beneficial and it may be helpful to describe how life in Jannah will be.

→ Widows

Female widows enter Iddah ('a mourning period') of four months and 10 days (marked in the lunar calendar) following the death of their spouse, during which they cannot marry another male. If the widow is pregnant, her mourning period ends when she gives birth. During this time, she should leave the house only for necessities, such as getting food, going to the doctors and for safety and social support.

Post-Iddah, widows can resume their daily activities and are allowed to remarry. From an Islamic perspective, the female widow also has financial rights over her deceased spouse's wealth regardless of whether or not they bore children together.

"The one who looks after and works for a widow and for a poor person is like a warrior fighting for Allah's Cause."

[Sahih al-Bukhari]

How are mourners treated?

For many, the support of local community members can be invaluable and it is a part of the Muslim faith to positively engage with the community. Support can take various forms, from a prepared meal to lending a listening ear.

For the first few days after death, it is customary for relatives or local community members to arrange cooked food for the household of the person who has passed away in order to alleviate the burden of their daily activities. Mourners tend to receive visitors in the period after death, exchange condolences and avoid wearing decorative clothing and jewellery etc as a sign of paying respects.

It is important to note that people experience and display different reactions to loss. Feelings, not just within the Muslim community, can range from:

- **Denial:** They are not gone, they'll phone me any minute now.
- **Anger:** If they cared for themselves more, this never would have happened.
- **Bargaining:** If only I had called them that night, they would still be here.
- **Depression:** What am I without them?
- **Acceptance:** I am so fortunate to have met them, I'll treasure those memories forever.

For each individual, the order and extent to which these feelings manifest in the above stages will be different. It can be helpful for Muslims to seek support from professionals and members of their own community who best understand the cultural and spiritual context.

Post-funeral etiquette

There are prescribed actions in Islam relating to the deceased. These include:

- Visiting graveyards regularly and offering the following salutation upon entering the graveyard: *"Peace be upon you, people of this abode from among the Believers and those who are Muslims, and we by the will of Allah, shall be joining you"*.
- Having Tawakkal ('the concept of relying on Allah (SWT) alone) and accepting the decree from the Almighty as He is the Best of Planners.
- Honouring the dead by offering Sadaqah Jariyah ('perpetual charity') on behalf of the deceased as this has continuous rewards. Examples include planting a tree or providing a regular and clean source of water to people via a water well provided by a registered charity.
- Taking time out to heal and reflect on what has happened, in order to recognise and handle emotions.
- Connecting and talking to others about what we are feeling and going through – perhaps reaching out to those who are in a similar situation.
- Taking care of our physical health, such as getting fresh air and exercise, eating well and sleeping properly.

Specific circumstances

→ Individuals who die by suicide

How a Muslim dies is not relevant to how they are buried. All Muslims are buried in the same manner, regardless of the reason for their death as Allah (SWT) did not specify conditions on this. Although suicide is regarded as not morally permissible in Islam, offering the appropriate Janazah is deemed permissible as the deceased is buried as a Muslim regardless, and the general Muslim community should fulfil this obligation.

→ Death of a revert

It is crucial to look out for those who have reverted to Islam and lost a loved one as they may have no support system or have conflicting opinions regarding the death of someone dear to them if they were not Muslim. Reverts are permitted to attend the funeral of their non-Muslim family and friends but should not participate in the prayers or anything that conflicts with their belief. Additionally, reverts who have passed may not have family members to perform the *Ghusl*, so members of the community are obligated to perform the due processes.

The family and friends of reverts may be unsure if they are permitted to attend the Janazah of their deceased Muslim loved one, or unsure of the process. It is important to know that non-Muslims are allowed to attend the Janazah at the Masjid, follow the procession and visit the grave, but they must be made aware of the etiquettes and processes of the entire event beforehand.

Funeral services for Muslims

It is important to remember that death is an inescapable reality for all humans and, for Muslims, it is just the beginning of the real life ahead of us; the one we spend this life preparing for.

“The rights of a Muslim on the Muslims are five: to respond to the salaam, visiting the sick, to follow the funeral processions, to accept an invitation, and to reply to those who sneeze.”

[Sahih al-Bukhari]

Support organisations

Organisations that provide funeral services

The [London Central Mosque Trust & The Islamic Cultural Centre](#) has a list of organisations in the London area.

The [East London Mosque & London Muslim Centre](#) provides this service within the East London area.

[Muslim Funeral Services](#) is based in South London but provides services across London and across the UK when needed.

[Eternal Gardens funeral services](#) provides national funeral services for Muslims.

Organisations that provide bereavement support services

[Muslim Bereavement Support Service \(MBSS\)](#) is a non-profit organisation offering support for bereaved women who have lost a loved one.

[Sakoon Counselling](#) services provides Islamic counselling for individuals, couples and families to strengthen their mind.

[Inspired Minds](#) is a faith-based Muslim mental health organisation that offers counselling services for bereavement as well as any other mental health issues.

[Children of Jannah](#) provides free resources and support to Muslim parents who have lost children.

[Good Thinking](#) is London's digital mental wellbeing service for all faiths.



About Us

Good Thinking is supported by the NHS and London borough councils. We provide free, 24/7, digital support to Londoners seeking mental health advice and help regardless of where they are on their journey. We offer round-the-clock support and self-care options that are easy to access and simple to navigate.

Our Mission

We support individuals to look after their mental wellbeing in a way that works best for them. We encourage everyone to be proactive about their mental health and we provide tools and guidance to support this.

London Bereavement Support Programme

This resource has been funded and supported by the Mayor of London under the remit of the Mental Health and Wellbeing Recovery Mission, which is being led by Thrive LDN. The mission aims to build a coalition of wellbeing champions and empower Londoners to act to improve their own and their communities' wellbeing. For more information, visit the Thrive LDN website.

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