

# CHILD DEATH HELPLINE

A Helpline for all those affected  
by the death of a child

[www.childdeathhelpline.org.uk](http://www.childdeathhelpline.org.uk)  
[contact@childdeathhelpline.org](mailto:contact@childdeathhelpline.org)

To lose a child is the most devastating experience any parent has to face. In the UK alone, thousands of children under 19 die each year. Thousands more young adults in their twenties and thirties also die, and grief is no less intense for the surviving parent(s) of an "adult child". (For up to date figures see [www. Statistics.gov.uk](http://www.Statistics.gov.uk))

The effect of the death of a child upon all members of the family may be far reaching and life long, with many others not of the immediate family also badly affected e.g.:- friends, teachers, support professionals, medical and emergency services staff.

Organisations offering support to those bereaved of a child frequently hear from people where such a death occurred twenty, thirty or even more years previously. It has long been recognised and acknowledged by professional and volunteer counsellors, that bereaved parents and relatives find that the most valuable support is provided from others who have suffered a similar experience.

A telephone helpline for those affected by the death of a child (The Alder Centre Helpline) was established at the Alder Centre, Royal Liverpool Children's NHS Trust, Alder Hey Hospital in Liverpool in June 1989. A similar helpline, the Child Death Helpline, was established at Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children NHS Trust in 1992. In October 1995, the experience and tradition of both centres were brought together in the setting up of the national freephone Child Death Helpline, staffed by the same experienced and trained bereaved parent volunteers.

Callers to the Child Death Helpline may be anyone affected by a child's death in whatever circumstances, from pre-birth to the death of an adult child, however long ago, and whatever the circumstances (stillbirth, illness, accident, murder, suicide...). For parents, their son or daughter will always be their child, irrespective of age. We receive calls, and support, parents whose child was 30, 40, 50 years old when he or she died.

The Child Death Helpline is staffed 7 nights a week from 7.00 p.m. to 10.00 p.m., Monday to Friday mornings 10.00 a.m. to 1.00 p.m. and Tuesday and Wednesday afternoons 1.00 p.m. to 4.00 p.m. The number is:

Freephone 0800 282986

We do hope this information will be beneficial to any person affected by the death of a child with whom you come into contact. If you would like more information about the Child Death Helpline or further supplies of leaflets, information packs and cards please contact:

- London on 020 7813 8416, Fax: 020 7813 8516,
- Liverpool on 0151 252 5391, Fax: 0151 252 5513

Run from Great Ormond Street Hospital from Children NHS Trust  
and Royal Liverpool Children's NHS Trust, Alder Hey Hospital  
A Member of the Telephone Helplines Association

Registered Charity Numbers: GOSH 235825 Alder Hey 1049275

Child Death Helpline Administration  
Centre  
York House  
37-39 Queen Square  
London WC1N 3BH  
Tel: 020 7813 8416 / 020 7813 8551

## **A Volunteer's View**

**What does a Child Death Helpline volunteer do? First and foremost we listen. Often, in the first weeks and months following a child's or young adult's death, many bereaved parents feel they cannot continue to burden others. They find it very beneficial to talk to someone who is impartial, has some understanding of their day to day struggle, and recognises their need to re-tell the story of their child's death even though others may appear to want them to "get over it" and return to normal.**

**Anger, guilt, anxiety, hopelessness, and having no idea how to cope are commonly experienced emotions. Many bereaved parents temporarily feel they are going mad. "Heavy with grief" is a telling phrase, as it is experienced physically as well as emotionally.**

**Family life can feel shattered – in different ways for each member. Often, relationships within the family become strained, and misunderstandings can develop.**

**The circumstances surrounding the death of a child are many and varied, and the child may be of any age, including adult children. Every story is unique. Whatever the particular situation, the common link between volunteer and caller is the feelings that surround the separation of parent and child. We know we cannot take away their pain. We do not try to tell people what to do or to offer solutions.**

**What we are able to do is be alongside our callers, lessening their sense of isolation and encouraging them to give expression to whatever their thoughts may be. People can contact our Helpline whenever they need to talk, over the course of a lifetime.**

**Although a good and enjoyable, though different, life emerges again, there are still times, even many years on from a child's death, when memories, sadness, and the different ways in which the loss is experienced as life goes on, need a listening ear.**

**For a period of time we enter someone else's world. What we have learnt, and what we continue to learn, enables us to offer worthwhile support to all those affected by the death of a child.**

**The following comment was made by a bereaved parent who wished to express her thanks to the organisation for the befriending and support she had received:**

*“The Child Death Helpline offered a pocket of time and a climate of safety that was entirely for me. It was my opportunity to talk openly about my son’s life and death. I needed to continue to talk about my son’s life and death and to express the raw powerful emotions that would overwhelm me unexpectedly. I felt weighted down. How was I going to cope? During Child Death Helpline conversations I did not feel that I had to edit my conversation or worry what the person listening may be thinking. Being able to identify with someone who recognised, accepted and reassured me that what I was going through was normal, gave me hope that I would myself one day gradually move away from the raw emotions and feelings of despair that I was experiencing. I cannot imagine sharing my experience or feeling so accepted by a non bereaved parent.”*



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**Calls to the Child Death Helpline continue to increase and the organisation would be interested to hear from bereaved parents who may feel able to offer telephone befriending to others who have been affected by the death of a child e.g. parents, siblings, grandparents, friends and professionals.**

**Potential volunteers must be bereaved parents who are a minimum of three and a half years bereaved.**

**No previous qualification is necessary, as training will be given.**

**Potential volunteers should be able to travel with relative ease to either Liverpool or London on a regular basis. It is hoped that volunteers will be available for at least two duties per month:-**

- **in London on Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday mornings 10.00 a.m. – 1.00 p.m., / Tuesday or Wednesday afternoons from 1.00 p.m. – 4.00 p.m., and / or Monday, Thursday or Saturday evenings from 7.00 p.m. – 10.00 p.m.**
- **in Liverpool on Monday or Friday mornings 10.00 a.m. – 1.00 p.m., Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday or Sunday evenings 7.00 p.m. – 10.00 p.m.**

**For further information please contact:**

- **London – Child Death Helpline Office on 020 7813 8550 / 020 7813 8551 / 020 7813 8416**
- **Liverpool – The Alder Centre on 0151 252 5391**
- **e-mail: [contact@childdeathhelpline.org](mailto:contact@childdeathhelpline.org)**