

# Supporting People Within the First 3 Months After the Death of a Loved One via a Check In Service

Jennie Clews and Deborah Pennington, Compton Care

bereavementandfamilycareteam@comptoncare.org.uk

## BACKGROUND

Historically, bereavement counselling at Compton Care has been offered as the first-line support for individuals meeting referral criteria. However, research indicates that counselling within the first 12 weeks following a bereavement is often too soon, as grief is still in its early, natural stage (Irish Hospice Foundation, 2025).

Counsellor feedback and clinical experience highlighted the need for an alternative early intervention - a lighter-touch, listening-based approach - to normalise grief and provide emotional containment during this critical period.

Additionally, the counselling service faced extended wait times for initial assessment, due to the absence of an alternative one-to-one support route, prompting the urgent need for a responsive, evidence-aligned service that prioritised safe and timely care.

## AIM

To deliver Level 1 and 2 bereavement support (Irish Hospice Foundation, 2025) within the first 12 weeks following a death, via a structured Check In Service—up to six 30-minute telephone sessions—providing timely, compassionate, and appropriate care.



## METHOD

**Eligibility:** Bereaved relatives of patients cared for by Compton Care. Referrals can be professional or self-initiated (phone/online).

**Triage:** All referrals are triaged by the Bereavement and Family Care Team. Those less than 12 weeks bereaved are offered the Check In Service and, where appropriate, access to group support.

**Delivery:**

- Six 30-minute sessions over the phone (flexibly arranged weekly/fortnightly)
- Adaptable duration and frequency based on individual needs
- Delivered by staff trained in Mental Health First Aid, with clear escalation protocols for risk or complexity.

**Accessibility:** Reasonable adjustments are made for individuals unable to engage via phone.

**Pathway:** If further support is required after six sessions, a 90-minute psychological assessment is conducted for referral into either the Bereavement Listening Service or Counselling.

## RESULTS

**Reduced Waiting Times:** Introduction of the Check In Service significantly decreased waiting lists for initial assessments and formal counselling.

**Improved Access:** Patients can now access one-to-one support within a week of referral - ensuring no delay for early-stage bereavement care.

**Positive Feedback:**

- Verbal feedback has been overwhelmingly positive.
- Group support participation has increased.
- Fewer referrals are escalating to formal counselling.
- Formal written evaluations are underway..

**Staff Satisfaction:**

- Staff report the work as "fulfilling" and "rewarding".
- Opportunity to develop skills in caseload management and advanced communication.
- Regular one-to-one and group clinical supervision supports ongoing development.

## CONCLUSION

Bereavement referrals often occur soon after a loved one's death, previously resulting in extended wait times for initial assessment for counselling with no interim one-to-one support. The Check In Service meets this need, offering responsive, evidence-based, and person-centred support during the early grieving period.

**The initiative has:**

- Reduced service pressure,
- Improved patient and staff satisfaction,
- Enhanced care quality and responsiveness.
- Created a seamless pathway of access from early stages emotional support through to a listening service, counselling service and bereavement support groups.

Though still early in development, the Check In Service has clearly met an unmet need and will continue to evolve to further strengthen bereavement support at Compton Care.



Thank you so much for all you have done for me.

The support from you each phone call was just what I needed.

