

Facilitation Guide

Learning from the Sheffield Life, Loss and Death Festival 2024

This guide has been created following reflections from the Sheffield Life, Loss and Death Festival 2024.

It is based on feedback from both participants and facilitators, some of which is shown as quotes throughout.

It also builds on learning the Compassionate Sheffield team have developed through their wider work delivering creative, and other, activities related to death, dying and bereavement.



Background

Death is a part of life. Let's talk about it.

In May 2023 and May 2024 Compassionate Sheffield hosted a month of free events in Sheffield exploring why life, loss and death matter. These took place in community centres, libraries, woods, pubs, places of worship, cemeteries, online, universities, and more.

Events included creative workshops, exhibitions, music, activities in nature, writing, open mic nights, and much more. Some events were facilitated by the team at Compassionate Sheffield, some in collaboration with others and some solely by other facilitators.

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It is based on feedback from both participants and facilitators, some of which are shown as quotes throughout. It also builds on learning the Compassionate Sheffield team have developed through their wider work delivering creative, and other, activities related to death, dying and bereavement.

From our experience, taking time to consider the following aspects, is key to creating an environment in which people feel comfortable to share and participate. They include:

- ☐ How sessions are delivered
- ☐ By who
- ☐ In what environment
- ☐ How you will support the emotional wellbeing of both participants and facilitators

Who is this guide for?

This guide aims to support anyone planning to deliver one or more (creative) in-person group sessions on the topic of death, dying or bereavement. It hopes to offer tips and ideas to reflect on when designing your own sessions, rather than an exact guide to specific session outlines.

It was initially designed for people delivering creative sessions related to death, dying and bereavement - anything from collage, drawing or painting, to poetry, gardening, storytelling or music-based sessions. However most of the guide will also apply to non-creative sessions such as death cafes, panels and talks.

When we refer to creative sessions here - we mean using creativity to support conversations on these topics. We are **not** providing or talking about art therapy (a form of psychotherapy) which should only be provided by HCPC registered art therapists or art psychotherapists.

Similarly, this guide is not referring to sessions that provide any formal therapy or counselling.



People

There are a number of things you can do, or think through, in advance of your session to help the session run smoothly and to support you as a facilitator, your team and attendees.

You as a facilitator:

- ☐ Enlist a “critical friend”-someone to chat through any worries about the session with
- ☐ Think about your personal boundaries. What are you as a facilitator willing to share?

Your team:

- ☐ How many facilitators are needed for the session; to facilitate, welcome participants, provide emotional support etc.
- ☐ Allow time for you and your team to discuss any topics, or conversations, that may feel especially sensitive for you as individual facilitators. Consider what could happen if these come up and how you might support one another during and after the session
- ☐ Clarify your roles-is there a lead facilitator whilst a co-facilitator supports in the background (eg. welcoming people, making drinks, organising activities)

Collaboration:

- ☐ Build on connections and relationships you already have e.g. work with a community, or in a venue, you already know or have links with
- ☐ Agree from the start what information you will be able to share with collaborators such as attendee details, demographics, photographs or feedback. Outline on any sign-in sheets or evaluation forms who the information will be shared with.

Attendees

Who will be participating and who is your target audience?

- ☐ Will the session be open to everyone or specific communities? At Sheffield Life, Loss and Death Festival 2024 we had events open to:
 - ☐ everyone,
 - ☐ adults only
 - ☐ and events specifically for: children and families, neurodivergent and LGBTQ+ communities, people living with dementia, unpaid carers and women.
- ☐ Consider how you can ensure that spaces created for specific communities feel as safe as possible. Considerations might include the location and timing of an event, the identity of facilitators, and clear communication about who is welcome to attend.

"Having a death cafe specifically for LGBTQ+ people was absolutely invaluable, and I really hope that more will be held."

"I have been given a snapshot of different perspectives on death, from people I otherwise wouldn't have met and who are quite different from me."

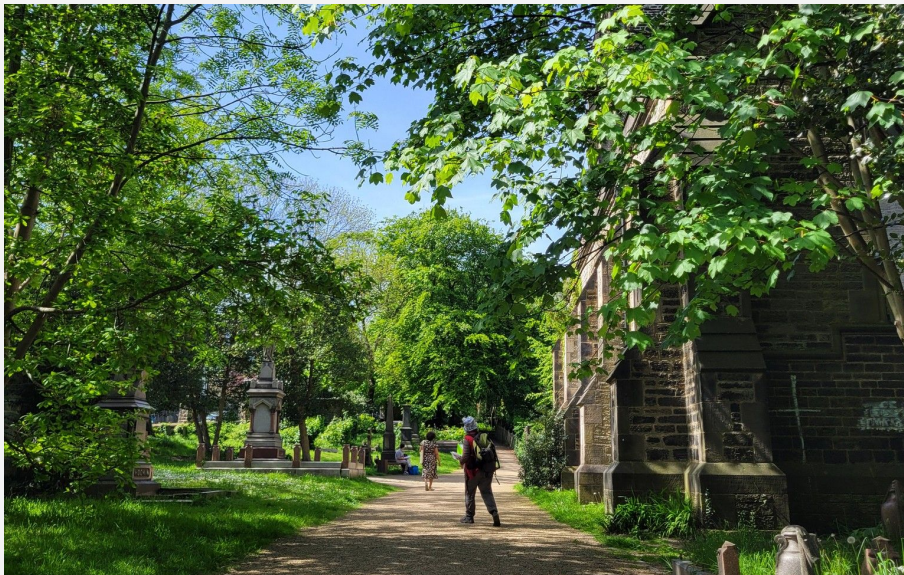


Place

Picking the right venue can influence the session atmosphere and ensure participants feel welcome and able to access the session.

Visiting the venue in advance can help mitigate unforeseen issues. Here are some questions you might ask or things to consider:

- ☐ Think about the atmosphere you'd like for your session - would you like a cosy, relaxing atmosphere or creative and energizing, for example. Does the venue feel how you'd like it to feel?
- ☐ Is it easy to find?
- ☐ What else is happening in the building and who else is using the space? How might this impact your session?
- ☐ If using IT or a projector, check how it works and have a back up plan for if the connection fails



- ☐ How easy is the venue to get to by public transport? If at night - what is the lighting like on the way in and the surrounding area? Consider visiting at the time you would be delivering the session.
- ☐ Could you use an outdoor space (with a back up for bad weather)?
- ☐ Is there a separate space which could be used for people who need a break - and what might be there e.g. nature, creative resources, somewhere comfortable to sit, refreshments
- ☐ Is there flexibility in how the room can be set up - and will the venue help with this?
- ☐ Is the venue wheelchair accessible? Double check that this includes all facilities including toilets.
- ☐ Are there other things which make the venue more accessible such as a hearing loop, clear signage and a quiet space?

Space for any other questions you might have for the venue:

- ☐
- ☐
- ☐
- ☐
- ☐

"Loud noise upstairs was distracting. especially given sensitive subject"

"It is so inspiring to be in the gardens for the workshop"

Approach

Creating a space where people feel comfortable to share and express emotions is key. Thinking through what facilitation style and method of delivery will support this is important.

Looking after everyone:

- ❑ An understanding of safeguarding is key to this. Plan in advance what you would do if you had a safeguarding, or other, concern about an attendee on the day, and which organisations could support you if needed.
- ❑ Anticipate topics which might come up in the session e.g. suicide, assisted dying. How would you approach them sensitively and objectively?
- ❑ How might you respond to a participant who is rude or unkind to others?
- ❑ Is there anything you could do to make your session more trauma-informed?
- ❑ It is good practice to contact attendees before the session to remind them of key details such as time, location, directions, parking, accessibility, what to bring, what is expected of them, how to cancel if needed and who to contact with any questions.

Facilitation:

- ❑ Think about what facilitation style your session will require and who in your team has these skills
- ❑ This might differ depending on your audience and what the aim of your session is.
- ❑ In the “During” section of this guide we outline facilitation styles participants said they valued throughout the Sheffield Life, Loss and Death Festival 2024.

Session Framework and Planning

- ❑ What method of delivery will you use to support conversations around death, dying and bereavement?
- ❑ How might you ensure people with different communication and learning styles, or preferences for ways of engaging, can take part in your session?

Participants in the Sheffield Life, Loss and Death Festival 2024 valued the following approaches and methods of delivery:

Creativity

- ❑ including music, poetry, writing and crafting such as collage and painting

Information sharing

- ❑ Practical information that is "clear, relevant and easy to understand" and doesn't use acronyms
- ❑ Signposting to local services and activities
- ❑ Professionals sharing the work they are doing

Story sharing

- ❑ Opportunities to share and be heard
- ❑ Hearing others stories
- ❑ Discussing death and dying openly and positively
- ❑ Some people found facilitators sharing their stories helpful

"Music nourishes memories of dear ones"

"Sharing stories and thoughts about loss helped me feel less alone with my feelings"



Approach

It is really important to make sure you have enough resources, and that attendees know what to expect during the session.

Materials we bring to all sessions:

- ☐ Refreshments
- ☐ Tissues
- ☐ Stickers for name badges
- ☐ Sign-in sheet.
- ☐ Feedback forms

Materials to think about depending on the session:

- ☐ Creative resources
- ☐ Inviting participants to bring something along such as an object, photograph, song, or a question to think about.
- ☐ Something for participants to take away
 - ☐ Such as copies of any slides, key notes, further information or something they have created.
 - ☐ These might prompt further discussions at home.
- ☐ If possible a microphone in a large venue
- ☐ If you are collaborating with an organisation - do they already have these resources for you to use?
- ☐ Can you share any materials such as powerpoints in advance to make it more accessible?

Time and Flexibility:

- ☐ When deciding on a day and time, consider how this might impact sign ups or “no-shows”
- ☐ How long will the session be? Does your room booking need to include: set up time, time for participants to mingle afterwards, clear up time and time for facilitators to debrief?

Marketing

- ☐ Be as clear as possible about what the session will involve in all communications about the event
- ☐ Make use of social media platforms:
 - ☐ invite local organisations to share your posts, either through requests or tags.
 - ☐ invite co-deliverers to "collaborate" on posts
 - ☐ make use of relevant hashtags where appropriate
 - ☐ add easy to access links to bio/posts as applicable
- ☐ Ask local community organisations to share the event:
 - ☐ In their online newsletters -send them information that is easy to copy and paste
 - ☐ By displaying physical posters in their venue

Evaluation

There are many ways to evaluate your session but key things we have learnt that you might want to consider:

- ☐ Think through how your evaluation might make an attendee feel
- ☐ How might you move from facilitating a potentially emotive session to asking attendees for feedback?
- ☐ Could you offer a way for attendees to give feedback later when they have had time to reflect?
- ☐ The experiences and impact on you and your other co-facilitators are really important to include in evaluation

Today's session would have been better if...

“There had been a microphone. ”

“I knew what to expect beforehand”



People and Place

Having a relaxed set-up to the session, where you aren't having to rush, can help your session get off to a smooth start. We have found the following tips helpful.

You as a facilitator and your team

- ☐ Arrive early. Give yourself time with any co-facilitators to run through the session plan, confirm roles and chat through any last minute worries.
- ☐ Be mindful that some attendees will arrive early.
- ☐ Sit where you can see a clock and your co-facilitators.

Venue

- ☐ Ensure there is signage or a member of the team to help attendees find the session
- ☐ When setting up the room think about how this could impact participants' ability to interact, participate and leave if they wish.



Approach

The way in which a session is facilitated, and how this makes attendees feel, is key to their experience and what they remember of the event.

Looking after everyone

- ☐ Facilitation style, paired with creating a space where people feel as safe as possible, is key to looking after everyone.

Facilitation

Participants in the Life, Loss and Death Festival 2024 said they valued a facilitator who was:

Empathetic

Inclusive

Approachable

Sensitive

Open

Patient

Kind

A good listener

Caring

Encouraging

Accommodating

Professional

Supportive

“The facilitators were very approachable and empathetic. They created the right atmosphere to encourage the participants.”

This session has made me feel... "affirmed, appreciated. The presenter... listened to our creations and was very enthusiastic and encouraging"

Approach

Session Framework and Planning

We have found the following session components can help with the flow of the session and setting the tone from the start.

Welcome Participants

- ❑ Welcome participants, encourage them to sign-in and let them know about refreshments and where they can sit.

Introductions and Principles

- ❑ Start with introductions of the facilitators and outlining principles or ground rules. These could include:
 - ❑ Sharing the space and time to talk
 - ❑ Confidentiality
 - ❑ Respecting each other's beliefs and opinions
 - ❑ Whether photography or recording is allowed
 - ❑ Being able to leave whenever you want
 - ❑ That any reason for coming is valid
 - ❑ That tears, laughter and silence are all welcome.
- ❑ Think about how you will then ask attendees to introduce themselves. For example, first name and reason for attending. It can be helpful if asking this to reassure people that all reasons for attending are valid.
- ❑ Will you invite attendees to share their pronouns if they wish to?

Main Session Content

- ❑ This will differ depending on whether you are delivering a creative session, workshop or discussion group.
- ❑ However the rest of this framework can be applied to most session types.

Breaks

- ❑ Think about including breaks. Make it clear when these will be and give people the opportunity to step out of the main session.

Questions

- ❑ Ensure you leave enough time for questions or discussion

Ending

- ❑ Have a clear ending to the session and plan how you will bring the session to a close. E.g. will you invite reflections, an opportunity to share creations or an action to take away?
- ❑ Encourage participants to make time for self-compassion, rest and reflection after the session.
- ❑ Schedule enough time to invite people to complete feedback forms and other data collection.
- ❑ If possible allocate some time for attendees to socialise and reflect together after the main session has finished.

"I felt safe. Everyone was welcomed and accepted and it was made clear that we were free to participate or not, in whatever ways allowed us to feel safe. I had been worried that I might need to leave, but these permissions made me feel better."

Approach

Building flexibility into your session plan, being mindful of how you might approach photography and capturing verbal feedback on the day can help with the session itself and promoting future sessions.

Time and Flexibility

Be prepared for and ready to adapt your session for:

- ❑ People dropping in and not booking
- ❑ People turning up at different times
- ❑ Lower attendance than the number of people who have signed up



Marketing

- ❑ Capturing photographs of the session can be helpful for reporting and for letting people know about future sessions.
- ❑ Balance this with how it might impact on people in the room and when is an appropriate time to take photos.
- ❑ Ask for verbal consent as well as consent on the sign-in form
- ❑ Consider just including the backs of people's heads, their hands or creations - this still requires photo consent.

Evaluation

- ❑ Try to capture any verbal feedback during or soon after the event - as this can complement written feedback

"Beautifully led session - just enough guidance/space given. Really well judged"

"It is really important that we have community events where people can talk about death, dying and bereavement"

People and Place

Planning for what happens after a session can sometimes get missed. We've found that the "after" part of a session can be really important for looking after everyone involved.

You as a facilitator:

- ❑ Facilitating sessions, especially ones emotive in nature, can be tiring. Try to give yourself time to reflect and rest after the session.

Your team:

- ❑ Make time to debrief. Whilst this will include some evaluation such as verbal feedback from attendees and things you would change for next time, give time to discuss how the session impacted you emotionally.

Collaboration

- ❑ Follow up with any collaborating organisations who may not be present on the day. Either in way of thanks, seeking feedback, or exploring any future opportunities to collaborate together.

Attendees

- ❑ Follow up with attendees. This could be to thank them for attending the session, share any information or sign-posting you discussed in the session or to let them know about future events.

Approach

Looking after everyone and creating safe spaces

- ❑ Is there anyone you specifically need to follow up with or anything you are concerned about?

Marketing

- ❑ You may wish to contact attendees to let them know about any future events they may also be interested in attending. Ensure this communication is GDPR compliant.
- ❑ It also might be appropriate to share a photo on your social media platforms/website/newsletter to tell people about the event and thank attendees for being there.

Evaluation

- ❑ Consider waiting until the next day to look at feedback. From our experiences giving yourself a bit of time and space before reading feedback, rather than immediately when you might be (emotionally) drained from facilitating, can be helpful.

"I left the session feeling incredibly happy and thankful to have had this opportunity. I have never delivered my workshop to a group of strangers before and it felt very uplifting to connect with others and hopefully support them in some small way."

Thank You

For more information about Compassionate Sheffield please visit: <https://linktr.ee/compassionatesheffield>

We hope the reflections, tips and ideas included in this guide will support you to feel more confident in creating spaces for people to explore death, dying and bereavement.

If you have any questions, or would like to share any feedback about this guide, please get in touch: team@compassionatesheffield.co.uk



Illustrations by Storyset