

# **SUPPORT SYSTEMS FOR BEREAVEMENTS AND FUNERALS WITHIN FAITH COMMUNITIES IN SUFFOLK**

An overview prepared by  
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**THE FAITHS AND SPIRITUALITY  
NETWORK (SUFFOLK)**

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**THE EAST OF ENGLAND  
FAITHS AGENCY CIC**

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# Support systems for bereavements and funerals within faith communities in Suffolk

The current crisis offers an opportunity to contact faith communities to hear what the impact has been on them and how they are coping in the light of their faith and support systems. The overall impression is that they are responding to the challenge in a positive and creative way.

For example, a Baha'i contact writes: *"Whilst we are anguished at the terrible loss of life in this crisis, the Corona Virus has forced the Baha'is like other faith communities into using Zoom type meetings for our events and consequently has facilitated greater participation in training and celebrations than might otherwise be possible, given the geographically diverse nature of many of our communities.*

*At "Naw Ruz" (spring festival) the Universal House of Justice wrote this message to the world. "However difficult matters are at present, and however close to the limits of their endurance some sections of societies are brought, humanity will ultimately pass through this ordeal, and it will emerge on the other side with greater insight and with a deeper appreciation of its inherent oneness and interdependence." (Universal House of Justice, March 2020)*

Nevertheless, there are many individuals and families who describe themselves as belonging to a particular religious tradition but do not identify with a formal group. They may struggle to get the help and support they need in times of trouble, especially at a time of bereavement, as is illustrated by the recent funeral of a day-old Nepalese baby.

The BSC Multicultural Services in Tower St. Ipswich is generally available to support anyone whether or not they are Muslim. It has been offering advice and practical support to people of over 40 different nationalities. It has continued to offer a telephone service during the crisis.

The East of England Faiths Agency is providing an overview of the status of Norfolk's and Suffolk's minority faith communities in this time of crisis and has identified appropriate people as ongoing contacts. EEFA can help to find officiants from its community chaplaincy team who are sensitive to the diverse spiritual needs of families and individuals and who are able to provide culturally competent care.

The Faith and Spirituality Network (Suffolk) is a small charity set up by EEFA to make it easier for individuals of all faiths and none to keep in touch and to share their perspectives. It is guided by a group of trustees who are currently focusing particularly on matters concerning death and bereavement.

**Every crisis brings with it opportunities for improvement and growth and this one challenges all of us to consider the principles on which we conduct ourselves and the most appropriate and creative ways in which we can respond to death and bereavement. The dying and those who care for them, the bereaved and those who support them, the funeral directors, ministers and others involved in caring for the dying and bereaved, will all have been deeply affected and more aware of their own strengths and weaknesses. We need to help each other as we engage with this task.**

### **Some General Advisory Contacts**

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### **Websites**

East of England Faiths Agency – <http://www.eefa.net>

Faith and Spirituality Network Suffolk: - <http://www.fsns.org.uk>

Ipswich Mosque – <http://www.ipswichmosque.org>

Shahjalal Mosque – <http://www.shahjalalmasjidipswich.co.uk>

Suffolk Liberal Jewish Community – <http://sjc.onesuffolk.net/>

Ipswich Buddhist Centre – <https://ipswichbuddhistcentre.org.uk/>

Ipswich Hindu Samaj – <http://www.ipswichhindusamaj.org.uk/>

## Faith Communities in Suffolk

**Baha'is:** The Baha'i community in Suffolk is small and scattered. Locally, they have no designated place of worship or community centre but meet in each other's houses or in public places as needed. They know and rely on each other. They are generally very involved in interfaith and community affairs and expect to support others. They have no priests and conduct themselves democratically on a local basis. Baha'is do use counsellors and there are Baha'is who work as counsellors, but they do not have designated Baha'i counsellors. The Baha'is view life and death as a continuing process and believe that they will be reunited with their loved ones after death.

**EEFA Advisory contact – Jean Powis**

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**Buddhists:** The Ipswich Buddhist Centre at 4 Friars Bridge Rd. IP1 1RR is part of the worldwide Triratna Buddhist Movement and offers a welcome to everybody. In times of crisis like this, members of the order would willingly give support and advice to those with whom they were in contact. Buddhists accept that suffering is part of human existence and that there is a way of life to overcome it and achieve Nirvana. Compassion for all living things is at the heart of their teaching. There are several individuals within the local group who have experience of arranging funerals and cremations for Buddhists of all traditions and ethnicities and of presiding over them, including Bodhivamsa, the Chair of the Trustees.

**EEFA Advisory contact – Dayasara (Martin Hillary)**

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(There are various other strands of Buddhism in Suffolk, some of which consist of a few individuals who relate to temples or monasteries in other parts of East Anglia or further afield.)

**Christians:** There are so many Christian places of worship in Suffolk representing different branches of Christianity as well as independent Churches, that it is impossible to give space to them all.

In general, it can be said that caring for others is seen as important a task for the Churches as caring for their own members. It involves being there for people through all stages of life, from the cradle to the grave, offering pastoral care to all, providing rites of passage like baptisms and marriages and especially being present for the dying and bereaved.

Although the Churches, alongside other places of worship, have been shut during the lockdown, services have continued to be held virtually which have attracted many more people than would normally actually attend in person. In particular, this has been a special support and comfort for the elderly and isolated. Churches have also continued to fulfil their caring role as best they can, often taking the lead in community neighbourhood schemes like food banks, and keeping in touch with people by phone and other media.

As the Church of England is the established Church it has a unique role and is often expected to show leadership in times of crisis. At this time, for example, the Diocese of St Edmundsbury has offered unlimited support especially to NHS staff.

As the coronavirus pandemic continues to impact us all in Suffolk, The Bishop of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich, Martin Seeley, has set up a personalised support service for NHS staff of **all faiths and none**. – **01473 563563 – available 24/7**

From 10.00am Friday 10 April, NHS staff can call this number to talk to a vicar or minister with a background and training in chaplaincy, healthcare or community engagement offering a wealth of experience helping people at this different and stressful time. They can offer:

- **Pastoral support:** providing a 'listening ear', offering support through conversation, personal reflections and similar.
- **Spiritual support:** where appropriate prayer, faith-based discussions and practical resources such as the Church of England online 'light a candle' service, and inclusion on the diocesan prayer diary.
- **Signposting:** to practical resources.

{Taken from [www.cofesuffolk.org/bishops/nhs-support](http://www.cofesuffolk.org/bishops/nhs-support)}

**Hindus:** The Hindu Community Centre and Mandir in Ipswich Town Centre, at 5 Thoroughfare IP1 1BX, was established by the Ipswich Hindu Samaj under the leadership of Dr Sushil Soni who continues to take a guiding role. He can be approached regarding arrangements for rites of passage and can act as an officiant at cremations and other ceremonies. The Chair of the Trustees, Umlesh Patel, and his colleagues would give personal support to the bereaved. For Hindus, death is seen as part of the natural order and is to be welcomed when life's journey is complete. The soul discards the worn out body and migrates to another until full consciousness of God is achieved.

**EEFA Advisory contact - Martin Spettigue.**

**01473 423247; 07909527547/martin.spettigue@hotmail.co.uk**

(Hindus living in north Suffolk are more likely to relate to centres in Norfolk especially the new temple at Acle)

**Jews:** There is a small but thriving Liberal Jewish community in Suffolk. The nearest synagogue which is in Colchester is attended by some people from Suffolk; others may have links with synagogues in London or elsewhere. It has been customary for Jewish people to pay into a Jewish funeral fund so that support is readily available and necessary arrangements can be made when the time comes. Traditionally a dying person is not to be left alone and the bereaved stay at home for a week supported by the presence of members of their community who also provide food. The Suffolk Jewish community has no Rabbi of its own but can call on support from the national Liberal Jewish community as needed. Members take their turn at leading worship and other events locally. Beverley Levy is the main point of contact and deals with enquiries from Jewish people who have not been known to the local group. She can

recommend people to take the funeral and will help with a conversation around arranging a funeral.

**EEFA Advisory contact - Beverley Levy**

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**Muslims:** There are 2 established mosques in Ipswich, in Bond St. and Argyle St. both of which were founded by the Bangladeshi community. They have excellent facilities and offer a welcome to all. Two other community facilities for Muslims are being developed in Ipswich through local Kurdish initiative. There are sizeable groups of Muslims in Bury, Newmarket, Haverhill and Lowestoft. The Muslim graveyard was established in the Ipswich Cemetery in the early 1970s as an exclusive area for the burial of Muslims in Ipswich and Suffolk. It is serviced and managed by Ipswich Borough Council Bereavement Services.

The Shahjalal Mosque at 15 Argyle St. Ipswich IP4 2NE has an Imam who would, in normal circumstances, be the one to provide formal bereavement support and to conduct funerals and there is a designated person to deal with enquiries and arrangements concerning death and bereavement (Moshud Ali). The community would also be involved in supporting the bereaved and preparing the body after death for the funeral which ideally takes place within 24 hours. The Imam is currently being furloughed but can be contacted for advice.

The Ipswich Mosque at 32-36 Bond St. IP4 1JE has a body wash facility and welcomes everyone to the services they provide. They have meeting rooms and prayer halls for use by guests. They have trained male and female volunteers to undertake the final bathing. The Imams and trustees are available to provide support and counselling to the family of the deceased. The Ipswich Mosque works with all local Funeral Directors to give the best possible service to the local community.

It is distressing that normal procedures cannot be followed during the present crisis. However, the fact that Muslims have been observing Ramadan during this period has given them the opportunity to draw on their inner resources to deal with the challenges and to grow spiritually.

**EEFA Advisory contacts**

Ipswich Mosque – Tunu Miah: 07855 540993 /[info@ipswichmosque.org](mailto:info@ipswichmosque.org)

Shahjalal Mosque - Moshud Ali: 0788 5269296 [moshudali@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:moshudali@hotmail.co.uk)

Other Muslims groups in Suffolk – Mohammed Mainul Alam – 07932 644466/  
[info@bscmulticulturalservices.org.uk](mailto:info@bscmulticulturalservices.org.uk)

**Pagans:** There are many different Pagan paths represented in Suffolk. The total number probably includes over 800 individuals, many of whom are drawn together by the Ipswich

Pagan Council for regular monthly meetings, courses and special events. As Pagans believe in living in harmony with the natural rhythm of life and the changing seasons, death and decay are seen as part of the cycle of life and to be accepted., though mourned. There are counsellors within the Pagan community, but their support is more likely to be needed to deal with painful experiences arising from the ignorance in the public domain of Pagan beliefs and practices. This can lead to discriminatory practices and, in some cases, misdiagnosis and inappropriate treatment by mental health professionals. During this time of isolation, Pagans are likely to suffer from their enforced separation from the natural world.

**EEFA Advisory contact – Robin Herne**

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**Sikhs:** The Sikhs of Suffolk generally look to the Guru Nanak Gurdwara at 719 Bramford Rd. Ipswich IP1 5BD as their centre of worship and social life. They are a closely knit community, consisting mainly of several generations of two families. These extended families would support each other in times of crisis and members of the family prepare the body for cremation, along gender lines. In principle any member can lead worship, including death ceremonies, but in Ipswich male leadership has been the norm. The reading of the Guru Granth (Sikh Scripture) is central to all their worship. It is customary for a large number of Sikhs from other parts of the country to attend funeral service. The suspension of normal arrangements would be difficult to bear. However, a key principle of Sikhism is service to others and the Sikhs of Ipswich are proud of the way in which their fellow Sikhs in larger cities have been able to run continuous food distributions to people in need from their Langars (food halls).

**EEFA Advisory contacts- Seva Singh and Prabjot Kaur**

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## Faith Card

Please remember these are only guidelines. All faiths hold human life to be sacred, so when life is endangered, any religious observance which interferes with assistance may need to be overruled. For example, it is not always possible to be treated or assisted by a member of the same sex. You may need to touch or hold someone who is distressed. The most important thing is to respond humanely.

Faith or Culture	Likely languages in UK	Diet	Dress	Physical contact	Medical treatment	Dying	Death customs
Baha'i	Mainly English, also Arabic and Farsi.	Baha'is do not normally drink alcohol, but may take it within medicine if prescribed by doctors.	No special dress code.	Baha'is are unlikely to object to being touched or treated by members of the opposite sex	No special requirements	No special religious requirements, but a family member or friend may read the Baha'i scriptures Baha'is believe in an after-life.	The body is washed and wrapped in white silk/cotton and a special ring placed on the finger of those aged 15 upwards. The body should not be embalmed and should be buried in a durable coffin within an hour's travelling time from place of death. A special prayer for the dead is said.
Buddhist	English, Cantonese, Hakka, Japanese, Thai, Tibetan, Sinhalese	Often vegetarian or vegan. Salads, rice, vegetables and fruit are usually acceptable	No special dress code for lay Buddhists.	A Buddhist may be touched by a person of either sex for comfort, treatment and medical examinations.	No special requirements	Many Buddhists wish to maintain a clear mind when dying. They may want to have quiet, or time with another Buddhist chanting sacred texts. Non-Buddhists should treat the dying person mindfully. Buddhists believe in rebirth/reincarnation.	The body of the deceased may be handled by non-Buddhists. Many Buddhists believe that the soul does not immediately leave the body after death, so it is important to treat the corpse as a person not as an object. It should be moved as little as possible.
Chinese (Buddhist, Christian, Confucian, Taoist.)	Cantonese, Mandarin, Hakka, Hokkien, English	Cow's milk is avoided. Rice is the staple diet with lots of freshly cooked vegetables, fish and very little meat.	Both men and women usually wear shirt /blouse and trousers / slacks	Women usually prefer to be treated by women.	Injections are preferred to pills	Usually family members gather at the bedside, so it is important that the dying person is not left alone. Although beliefs about the after-life vary according to faith, all respect their ancestors.	Undertakers handle the deceased after death. Chinese people are usually embalmed and are dressed in their best clothes. White is the colour of mourning. Grief may be expressed loudly.
Christian	English, and many other languages	Generally, all foods are permissible. Some follow Jewish customs. Some are vegetarian. Some are forbidden to use alcohol and other stimulants.	Most have no dress code except for clergy and members of religious orders. Some women cover their heads.	Most Christians would have no objection to being treated or comforted by members of the opposite sex.	Some may decline conventional medical treatments. Jehovah's Witnesses have special procedures regarding blood transfusions.	Some appreciate quiet when they are dying; others value prayers or scriptures being read. Some may require Holy Communion and / or the Sacrament of the Sick. Christians believe in the resurrection of Jesus and that they too will be raised .	Choice of cremation or burial is personal. The wishes of the family should be sought
Hindu	English, Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Punjabi, Tamil	Hindus do not eat beef. Some Hindus are strictly vegetarian and also avoid fish, eggs and animal fat. Salads, rice, vegetables, yoghurt, milk products and fruit are acceptable.	Modesty and decency are essential.	Some Hindus would prefer to be comforted or treated by someone of the same sex.	Generally no special requirements, though some Hindus prefer Ayurvedic medicine.	Most fatally ill Hindus would want to pray with a mala (rosary). The dying person may prefer the company of someone of the same sex. Hindus believe in re-incarnation.	The body should be undressed and washed, preferably by someone of the same sex. Jewellery and religious items should not be removed. Hindu bodies should be placed together with head facing north and feet south, arms placed to the sides and legs straightened.
Humanist	English or any other language.	No particular requirements. Some Humanists are vegetarian or vegan	No particular requirements	No specific restrictions on physical contact	No special requirements.	Humanists prefer to have family or close friends with them. They might object to prayers being said or reassurance given based on belief in God or afterlife.	No specific requirements. Many Humanists request a non-religious celebration for their dead.
Jain	English, Gujarati, Hindi, Punjabi, Rajasthani, Tamil.	No alcohol, meat, fish, poultry or eggs. Salads, fruits, grain, vegetables, bread or biscuits made without eggs or dairy products are acceptable. Some do not eat root vegetables or honey.	Unless they are monks or nuns, Jains may follow a western dress code, while avoiding leather. Females may dress traditionally.	Jains may prefer to be treated by people of the same sex.	Blood transfusions and organ transplants are acceptable if these are not at the expense of another life	Jains seek mental detachment from all desires and wish to concentrate on the inner self.  Jains believe in reincarnation.	No specific rituals. Bodies are always cremated and never buried except for infants
Japanese (Buddhist, Shinto, Christian)	Japanese, English	Preference for rice	No religious requirements	Japanese people may prefer to be treated by people of the same sex.	No religious requirements	Dying Japanese may wish to meditate.	Preference for cremation.

Faith or Culture	Likely languages in UK	Diet	Dress	Physical contact	Medical treatment	Dying	Death customs
Jewish	English, Hebrew, Yiddish	Pork is forbidden; so is shell-fish. Fish must have fins and scales. Red meat and poultry must comply with kosher standards of slaughter. Milk and meat are usually kept separate. Vegetarian food is acceptable. Alcohol is usually acceptable.	Some Jewish men and women keep their heads covered at all times. Some Jewish men wear black clothes and have side-locks and beards. Some Jews have no strict dress code. Women and girls usually dress modestly.	For some Jewish men and women it is not usually acceptable to be touched by someone who is not a member of their close family. However, the need to save life always takes precedence within Judaism.	All laws normally applying to the Sabbath or festivals are overruled for the purpose of saving life or safeguarding health	It is usual for a companion to remain with a dying Jewish person until death. The dying person should not be touched or moved. He or she may wish to recite the Shema (The Lord our God is One..). Most Jews believe in an after-life.	The Chevra Kadisha (Jewish burial society) should be notified immediately after death. When a person dies the eyes should be closed and jaws tied. The body should be washed and wrapped in a plain white sheet and placed with the feet towards a doorway.
Muslim	English, Arabic, Bengali, Dari, Farsi, Gujarati, Kurdish, Punjabi, Pushto, Turkish, Urdu and many others.	Pork is forbidden. Alcohol is also forbidden. Meat must be halal. Kosher food is usually acceptable. Vegetarian meals and fresh fruit are acceptable.	Some Muslim women and girls wear a head covering. All are expected to dress modestly. Both males and females may choose to wear clothes that reflect their cultural background.	Treatment by medical staff of any religion is permissible but both men and women usually prefer to be treated by members of the same sex	Blood transfusions are acceptable. In the case of other interventions, such as organ transplants, the views of the family should be sought.	When a Muslim is dying, the face should be turned towards Mecca (south east in UK). A dying Muslim will need to say (in Arabic) or hear "There is no God but The God, and Muhammad is His prophet." You could say it in English for them. Muslims believe in an after-life, and believe illness and death should be faced in a spirit of acceptance of Allah's (God's) will.	Muslim bodies should be kept together in a designated area with men and women separated. Usually Muslim men handle a male body and women a female body. The body should be laid on a clean surface and covered in a plain cloth with the head on the right shoulder and facing Mecca. Next of kin usually make arrangements for burial which should take place as soon as possible.
Pagan	Mainly English	Most Pagans eat meat and drink alcohol. Many Pagans are vegetarian and some may be vegan	Ritual jewellery is common and has deep significance. Some wear a special ring, the removal of which would cause distress	No specific restraints	No particular requirements. Alternative treatments may be preferred.	Most Pagans believe in reincarnation.	The emphasis in funerals is on the joyfulness for the departed in their passing to new life
Rastafarian	English. The vocabulary may include Jamaican patois.	Pork, pork products and shellfish are banned. Most Rastafarians are vegetarian and avoid all stimulants such as alcohol, tea and coffee.	Many wear standard Western dress but some Rastamen wear crowns or Tams (hats) and some Rasta women wear wraps (headscarves)	No specific restraints	The cutting of the hair is prohibited in any circumstances	No particular rituals. The person will want to pray	When a Rastafarian passes (dies) a gathering takes place where there is drumming, singing, scriptures read and praises given
Sikh	English, Hindi, Punjabi, Swahili, Urdu.	Many Sikhs are vegetarian or vegan and do not eat eggs. Those who do eat meat will generally avoid beef. Salads, rice, dahl, vegetables and fruit are acceptable. The use of tobacco, alcohol and drugs is forbidden.	Initiated Sikhs wear five K symbols: Kesh (uncut hair), Kangha (comb), Kara (steel bangle), Kirpan (short dagger) and Kachhera (shorts). Other Sikhs may wear some of these symbols. Most men wear turbans. Women usually cover their heads.	Treatment by medical staff of any religion is permissible but men and women prefer to be treated by members of the same sex.	Some Sikhs prefer Ayurvedic medicine. In general, cutting or removing any body hair should be avoided. If it is necessary to do so, don't throw it away. You should give the hair to another Sikh to dispose of. However, some Sikhs do cut their hair.	The dying person might want to have access to the Sikh scriptures. Sikhs believe in reincarnation.	The five Ks should be left on the body. Deliberate expressions of grief are discouraged. The dead person should be cremated
Zoroastrian (Parsee)	English, Farsi, Gujarati, Persian.	Some avoid pork and beef; some are vegetarian.	Most adult Zoroastrians will wear a sudreh (vest of fine muslin cloth) and kusti (cord around their waist) under western clothes.	No specific restraints	No special requirements	Zoroastrians prefer to die quietly and without being disturbed. They believe in an after-life.	Zoroastrians believe that corpses are polluting and dispose of them as soon as possible, traditionally in a Tower of Silence, but usually by cremation in the UK.

This card has been provided by The East of England Faiths Agency (EEFA). For more information, consult SIFRE's 'Handbook of Faiths' or visit our web site [www.eefa.net](http://www.eefa.net) or phone 07931 562827) or email [office@eefa.net](mailto:office@eefa.net)

## MOVING ON

### Tolerance, Respect, Understanding, - Mutual Support

The crisis we are experiencing has taken us back to the beginning of all relationships. Things we have taken for granted like hugs and kisses (one, two or three?) and even handshakes have had to be abandoned. We have been pushed into a non-touch society and will perhaps have to remain there for some time. From international leaders down to small children, we are all having to find new ways of affirming and greeting each other. Words and actions, once taken for granted and used spontaneously, or even casually, are being replaced by others, and, in the process, we are having to think what it is all about.



Even Prince Charles, who has always wanted to be called “Defender of Faiths” has struggled to move into an appropriate new mode. On the cover of this document he is using the ancient Hindu greeting of “Namaste”. This word comes from the Sanskrit and is a respectful form of greeting widely used in India and South East Asia when two persons male or female meet and when they depart.

Placing their palms together, fingers pointing upward, they bow and say “Namaste”. By this they are showing the deepest respect to each other, honouring the inner being, the sacred centre or divine spark in the other person, extending friendship and hospitality to each other. Such a greeting puts us all on the same level. It is a good foundation for building community. We may have begun by tolerating each other, and are learning to show respect, but we have a long way to go in understanding each other. The more we grow in understanding, the better we can support each other. The more we support each other, the more we will grow in understanding.

More information about the Faiths can be found on SIFRE’S LEGACY WEBSITE:

**The Handbook of Faiths** - <https://www.sifre.org.uk/SIFRE/viewlib/HoFwebEd4.htm>

**Faiths in Suffolk** - [https://www.sifre.org.uk/SIFRE/faithslib/faiths\\_index.htm](https://www.sifre.org.uk/SIFRE/faithslib/faiths_index.htm)