

Coping with grief and loss of a loved one

If you are reading this leaflet it is likely someone close to you has died. The purpose of this handout is to help you understand the grief process that you may be experiencing, and to walk you through the next steps to take.

The loss of a loved one is a difficult and emotional time. You may feel overwhelmed with emotions, such as shock and a feeling of 'numbness'. This is normal.

Grief

Grief is a normal process in response to loss. You may notice changes in your emotions, thoughts, behaviours and physical wellbeing. Initially, your emotions may include feelings of:

- Shock
- Sadness
- Anger
- Disbelief
- Regret
- Numbness

This will be particularly intense in the first few days, but will subside with time. Grief has no set time frame and can vary from one person to another.

Whether the loss was anticipated or unexpected, there is no 'right' or 'wrong' way to grieve. People cope with loss and grief in different ways. This will depend on the person lost, the circumstances of the death, your experiences, beliefs and/or culture.

What happens now?

While in the emergency department, it is important to use the opportunity to help you understand as much as possible about what will happen next.

Ask the medical staff questions

You may want to write thoughts and questions down, so when you have the opportunity to ask questions, you don't forget.

The medical staff are more than happy to answer questions and provide support.

View the deceased

It may sound daunting but it is often helpful to see your loved one at peace, and say your final goodbyes. This is limited to close family members only. Be prepared that he/she may still have medical equipment attached to them including intravenous lines or breathing tubes. (This only occurs if the case is referred to the coroner.)

Contact close family members for support

The social worker and/or other staff in the emergency department can provide assistance contacting close family members who are not in attendance and a clergy member for support if you wish.

Paperwork

The medical officer who was caring for your relative will need to complete several pieces of paperwork. In order to do this they may have to ask you confronting questions, such as 'does the deceased wish to be cremated?'. This allows paperwork to be completed accurately and in a timely manner, and avoid delays in the future.

If the death was expected and the cause known, a death certificate will be completed.

If the cause for death is unclear/unknown, secondary to trauma/injury or unexpected, the case will be referred to the coroner. The coroner will investigate further by performing an autopsy to identify a cause of death, in order to complete a death certificate. This is usually performed within 3 days. Should you wish to object to an autopsy, please contact the state Coroner's Office without delay. (Phone: 02 8584 7777 Email: local_court_glebe@agd.nsw.gov.au).

Coping with grief and loss of a loved one

What happens next?

If a funeral director has not already been nominated, it is up to you to contact and organise one. An easy way to do this is through the Australian Funeral Directors Association (details below). The funeral director will then be responsible for collecting the body from either the hospital or the Coroner's Office, ready for the funeral. They will also be able to assist you with organising aspects of the funeral, such as flower arrangements and order of service.

Often, a funeral director will collect the appropriate information in order to register the death and notify the relevant state or territory government office. Otherwise it defaults to the person organising the funeral.

There are a number of organisations that need to be notified of someone's death. It is possible to access 'Notification Checklists' online to help with this process. (*Centrelink P: 132 300*)

Look after yourself

- Allow yourself to grieve and heal: grieving is a natural process and allows acceptance
- Do not be afraid to ask for support and express yourself
- Look after your health
- Eat healthily
- Try to get enough sleep
- Avoid using alcohol or un-prescribed medications
- Continue to exercise and meet up with friends

Support Services

Beyond Blue

P: 1300 22 4636

W: www.beyondblue.org.au

Grief Line (1200 noon til 3am)

P: 1300 846 745

E: www.griefline.org.au

Life Line (24 hours)

P: 13 11 14

SIDS and KIDS (24 hours)

P: 1300 30 83 07

W: www.sidsandkids.org

State Coroner's Office

P: 02 8584 7777

E: local_court_glebe@agd.nsw.gov.au

The Compassionate Friends NSW

(Supporting Family after a Child Dies)

P: 1800 671 621

W: www.tcfnsw.org.au

Veterans Line (24 hours)

P: 1800 011 046

Useful Information

Australian Funeral Directors Association

P: 03 9859 9966

W: www.afda.org.au

Notification Checklists and NSW Government Bereavement Advice

P: 132 300

W: www.humanservices.gov.au/customer/subjects/what-do-following-death

