



When someone dies...

The management and staff of the Sunshine Coast Hospital and Health Service wish to express to you and your family our sincere condolences.

We hope the information included in this booklet will be helpful at this time and in the future.

Grief

Grief is a normal emotional and physical response when we have experienced a significant loss or change in our lives. The death of someone we love and the grief which follows are, for many of us, the most painful experience imaginable. You are entering into an experience of grief—an experience which may be new to you. Bereaved people often find themselves worried and confused by the intensity of their thoughts and feelings and wonder if they are grieving properly.

At the outset, there are two points we need to emphasise:

- Everyone grieves differently. There are no set rules.
- You are the best judge of how you are coping. Trust your feelings.

Most people have an idea about the sort of thoughts and feelings we commonly experience after the death of someone we care about.

They include:

- anger and irritability
- deep sadness, loneliness and sudden crying
- guilt and self-blame
- disbelief, shock and feeling numb
- disrupted sleep and fatigue
- anxiety, headaches and forgetfulness
- constant thinking about the deceased person
- lack of concentration and motivation
- avoidance of people and social situations.

Our thought processes can alter for a time. Being vague and forgetful, fear of going crazy, too much sleeping (or lack of it) are normal. Some people say they see or hear the person who has died. Our bodily systems can change, more infections, coughs, colds and high blood pressure all occur with some grieving people and can be checked by your doctor.

This list shows only some of the more common aspects of grief. They are some of the things you might experience, not the things you should experience in order to grieve properly. Don't worry if you have not felt everything included in the list, it doesn't mean that you are grieving the wrong way or any less. Grief is an individual response to an individual loss.

What can help

Although there is no guaranteed way of coping with grief, there are some things you can do which to help make the time ahead a little easier.

- Talk about the person who has died as much as you need. Putting feelings and memories into words and sharing those words with others is how we heal.
- Keep a diary or a journal. Recording feelings, special events or significant memories can help bring a more complete understanding of how you are coping and can gradually help to ease the pain. Write as much as you need, as often as you need.
- As time passes set yourself small challenges. These can be very simple, for example, making lunch for yourself, going to the shops, phoning a friend, or even cleaning the bathroom. Don't make the challenge too hard and don't worry if you don't manage it straight away. Over time this exercise will slowly get you into the habit of focussing on tasks in a relaxed way.
- Take time out to be alone. For many people the most significant grieving they experience happens when they are spending some quiet time in solitude. These times, without the distractions of other people, are moments which can dedicate to the person who has died and to your feelings for them.
- Gentle exercise helps clear the mind and to release nervous energy. A brief walk every day can make an enormous, positive difference.

Problems?

Grief can become a problem for people if they find themselves acting in ways which could lead to harm for themselves or people around them. These can include:

- not eating or drinking for extended periods
- not resting or spending any time at home or alone
- not seeking medical advice about health issues
- refusing to see or speak with supportive friends or relatives
- continued lapses of concentration when driving
- difficulty controlling temper with family and friends
- flashbacks or intrusive memories or images of the death
- avoidance of particular places or activities which are associated with the person who has died or their death itself
- thoughts of suicide.

These are all common experiences following a sudden death and can generally be resolved simply by talking about your thoughts and feelings with a close friend, your doctor or counsellor. They are not something to become anxious about, but it's worth being aware of them. If you find they are continuing to bother you following the death, consider talking with your doctor or a counsellor about the situation. Contact numbers for support are provided on page 20 of this booklet.

The future

The most common pattern for grief is for people to go through a series of highs and lows, their emotions going from laughter to sadness to hope to despair, often in the space of a few minutes. As the months pass, the mood swings become less drastic: the periods of happiness less over the top, the periods of sadness less painful.

When we are grieving, we need to be kind to ourselves and not make judgements on our own behaviour.

For most people the period of intense grief lasts for six months to a year. It's a good idea to avoid making any big decisions (like selling the house or moving) until the first anniversary of the death has come and gone.

At a certain point you will realise that you haven't cried for a whole day, or that you've slept through the night without once waking up suddenly. This won't mean that you have forgotten the person who has died, or that you love them any less. It simply means that you are starting to heal.

Even at that point, be prepared for ups and downs. Grief is slow and confusing. It doesn't go through a clear set of stages and it doesn't suddenly go away.

Children and young people

What do we tell the children?

All children grieve differently based on their age, level of maturity and personality. Younger children, while not understanding exactly what has occurred, will be aware that something has happened. They will connect with the emotions of those around them.

Children under the age of three sometimes respond better by keeping to their usual routine with primary care givers as much as possible. Older children may respond better with open and honest communication explaining, in simple terms what has happened and what will happen next.

As the person closest to the children you are their best guide to helping them come to a decision about matters such as attending the funeral or viewing the deceased.

Communication

Children need communication that is open and honest about the person's death. They need to hear this from people within their family. Children who hear information from other sources or who overhear conversations often then lack trust in that person. Communication can be both verbal and non-verbal. One way to express your sadness is through tears. This demonstrates to a child that it is okay to cry. Verbal communication includes providing a clear and honest explanation of the cause of death.

Make the loss real

Allowing children to participate in any ceremony, funeral, having children help you pack away the deceased's belongings, having them write a poem or draw a picture to be placed with the deceased in their coffin, are all ways in which you can help make the death real for children.

Give time for your loss to sink in

Children often take time to fully understand the person's death. This is because death is often an abstract concept. Children will not often understand death is permanent and therefore will ask questions about the person like "When are they coming back?" and "Where has the person gone?" Ways you can help children could be to visit the place of the person's death, make a memory box or photo album or visit their burial or cremation site.

Providing safety

Children thrive on routine during times of crisis. Knowing that they will continue to be cared for is important for them. Trying as much as possible to keep to their normal routine will help your child adjust to life without the deceased person in it.

Returning to kindergarten or school is often very important for a child, as it symbolises a place of safety for them. Advising their teacher what has happened in your family also provides another person who the child can go to for support.

Children also need to be allowed to do the things children do every day. This includes allowing children time to play. This is a way they can have some time out from the enormous grief that is around them.

If you are not able to provide a lot of support it is okay to ask relatives or close friends to help you.

Children's needs often change over time

As children grow and develop so will the way that they grieve. Often as children's level of understanding of death increases, they will revisit questions that they have previously asked searching for new explanations.

Children grieve differently to adults

It is important to remember that children will not grieve in the same manner as adults. Adults generally express their grief through crying and talking about it. Children will express their grief through play and often changes in their behaviour.

Changes may include:

- wanting to sleep with a trusted adult
- restlessness, frustration or angry outbursts
- reduction in concentration, energy and achievement at school
- increased physical complaints
- regression to behaviours like thumb-sucking and bed-wetting.

Usually, such changes are temporary and encouraging their questions, talking about the death, sharing feelings and comforting the child will help return to normal behaviour.

Children also do not grieve for long periods of time, they will often have short periods of time when they are sad, this is normal.

Helping children and teenagers cope with their grief

Children are deeply affected by the death of someone they love or care about. Even the youngest children are able to sense loss and experience grief. They may express their reactions and emotions directly or they may outwardly appear unconcerned about the event.

In either case, they will be trying to make sense out of what has happened and there are ways adults can be of help. Children, like adults, have their own individual ways of grieving, depending on their age and development stage and it is important that they are not left out when a death occurs.

There seems to be no best way to give children sad news except perhaps to tell them immediately and to tell them the truth in a simple, straightforward way. Words may not come easily when talking about death to children.

However, it has been found using concrete words like 'died' and 'death' is easier for children than abstract expressions such as 'passed on', 'lost', 'sleeping' or 'gone away', which can be confusing to a young mind.

Sometimes there is a strong impulse to comfort children by using religious explanations of death, such as saying that the person has 'gone to heaven'.

Children are sensitive to the possibility that such statements were designed just for them. In general it may be best for adults to only give religious explanations they actually believe themselves.

Activities you can do with children

How to make a memory book:

A memory book is a book of memories in the form of stories or pictures children can create to remember the person who died. Some suggestions of things that children can put in their memory book are:

- photos of the person who died
- drawings that the child has done of the person who died or of things that they did together
- drawings, photos or stories about the funeral or about visiting the grave/crematorium site
- photos or drawings of the flowers from the funeral
- a ‘special things we did together’ page. This is where children can write stories or draw pictures about things that they did together
- the ‘things most missed about the person who died’ page
- an ‘if you could come back to life I would ...’ page
- a list of special things about the person—their favourite food, drink, place to go, holiday destination, colour etc.

How to make a memory box:

A memory box is a very special and personal treasure children can dip into whenever they need to be close to the person who has died. It can be made from an old shoebox that you cover, a box from the supermarket or a special trinket box that you have at home.

Some suggestions of things that children can place in their memory box include:

- a lock of the person’s hair
- a photo of the person
- items that were special to them, i.e. jewellery or a toy, sympathy cards and letters

- special mementos of things that the person sent the child e.g. postcards, letters, birthday cards, Christmas cards, stories
- funeral order of service or video of the service
- stories, poems or letters that the child has written about the deceased person or that they have written.

Any memory that is special to children can be put into their memory book or memory box. This can be a very special and creative way for them to keep their treasured memories and reassure them that they will always remember the person who has died.

Teenager's reactions to grief (13 to 18 years old)

When children reach this age group they have an adult understanding of death. They will understand that death is permanent and it happens to all people. As their body is changing and they grow through puberty their body changes. This will emphasise growth and life and death is seen as a direct contrast and also an interruption to life.

The implications for themselves and their family are at the forefront of their mind as they come to terms with the death.

Often adolescents participate in increased risk taking activities (drinking, smoking, drugs, or driving their car fast) in order to reduce their anxiety and fear and often to defy fate.

This is part of them coming to terms with what death means.

In order to protect themselves from the feelings of sadness associated with the death of someone close to them teenagers will often appear indifferent and not react a lot to the death. They will try and not think about the death and not want to talk about it. This is normal. On the other hand, the teenager might display a full range of emotions.

Coping with grief

Know that you are stronger than you think and deal with your grief in the way that is most comfortable for you. There is no 'right' or 'wrong' way and each day may be different for you. Although it might feel difficult, ask for help when you need it, you may find you are helping others by doing this as they often don't have words but can show their care by actions. Be aware that there is support available and see your G.P. if you feel you are at a stage of feeling you need this.

Getting through special occasions

Holidays and special occasions such as Christmas, birthdays and anniversaries are often difficult for anyone who has had someone close to them die. These events are usually occasions of celebration and are supposed to be times of enjoyment and relaxation, spent with family, friends and those we care about. However, many people find they can be times of great sadness and isolation particularly the first occasions that have to be faced without the person who has died. Memories of happier times and a constant yearning for the person who has died can make the holidays seem endless. Some of the following suggestions may be helpful to you:

If you are spending the holidays alone:

- Consider telephoning someone you trust at least once a day. This will provide you with the opportunity to talk about how you are doing and any concerns you have.
- Try and do something you would normally enjoy each day. This can be as simple as watching a video, reading a book, listening to some music or having something you particularly like for dinner.
- Make a plan for the day. Set a time to get up and a schedule of things to do. Whether it is watching television, or doing some cleaning, do whatever you need to fill in the day.
- Set some time aside in your schedule to sit and think about the loss you have suffered and the person who has died. Dedicate this time to them and your grief.

If you will be spending the holidays with other people:

- You and your family may like to sit down and decide what you want to do together in order to make the holiday meaningful and bearable. This is a good way to ensure that everyone gets what they need.
- Set some time aside to talk together about the memories you are having and how you are feeling.
- Remember that it is okay to enjoy the holidays and go on fun outings, this does not mean that you have forgotten the person who has died.

Whether alone or with people, acknowledge your limits by listening to what is right for you. Don't push yourself before you are ready. You know what you need. Friends and family will understand if you do not feel able to attend a social occasion.

Many people find the anticipation and lead up to a special day is often worse than the occasion itself. It is important that you do what is right for you and allow yourself to make changes to your plans according to how you feel at the time.

The following pages contain some practical information that might help you.

Who do I notify after someone dies?

When someone dies a number of people and organisations need to be told. This helps to finalise the person's affairs and makes sure you can get the help you need. These organisations can be contacted when you feel ready to do so. There is no hurry.

Before you start, it might help to have a look around and see if the person who died had a filing cabinet, folder or document case. They may have records that show dealings with any of the contacts on the checklist. You can use these records to find out important reference numbers such as a customer reference number (e.g. Centrelink, Medicare number or health fund membership number).

Some important documents to look for:

- Will
- Birth and marriage certificates
- Property deeds and mortgage papers
- Loan details (home loans, personal loans etc.)
- Lease agreement (setting out legal entitlements for a rented property)
- Taxation records (with details of income and assets)
- Insurance policies such as home, contents and car
- Life insurance and superannuation policies
- Bank account details
- Any documents about prepaid funeral arrangements or burial plots.

While many organisations may require a copy of the death certificate before they take action on your advice, it is wise to provide advice of the death as soon as possible.

Death certificate

A death certificate is the official registration of death. The Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages is responsible for the issuing of the death certificate. The funeral director usually notifies the registrar of the death, and will usually organise a copy of the death certificate for the next of kin, this may take several weeks. In unusual cases, for example if an autopsy or coronial inquiry is conducted, the original death certificate may be issued with no cause of death noted and a second one issued once a cause of death is determined. You can, however, use the first one for most matters.

Organising the funeral

A funeral director can arrange the funeral for you. They will arrange for certificates for the burial or cremation service and can arrange a viewing if you wish. The funeral director can also arrange other things like newspaper notices, flowers and religious services. Remember, while you do need to engage the services of a funeral director to arrange a burial or cremation, you do not need to have a formal funeral service.

Insurance policies

Sometimes private health insurance, sickness and accident insurance or life insurance policies may contribute toward funeral and other payments. Each company will have their own conditions.

If you find out the person who died had any insurance like this, speak to your chosen funeral director who can help you with the required paperwork for the insurance.

Funeral bonds and prepaid plans

If you think there was a prepaid funeral or funeral bonds, but cannot find the relevant papers, the papers may have been left with someone responsible such as a next of kin, solicitor, the public trustee, a trusted friend or the executor of the will. You can also phone the local funeral directors as they usually have their own lists of pre-paid bonds/plans that they can check on your behalf. If one is found, speak with your chosen funeral director about how to access the money.

The will

The will is a legal document that sets out the wishes of the deceased in regards to how their belongings are to be distributed after their death and may include information regarding their wishes for funeral arrangements.

The executor of the will is responsible for distributing the persons assets to the people named in the will as beneficiaries. This happens after any debts are paid. You may wish to obtain legal advice to help. If you are unable to find any will legal advice may be necessary.

Checklist you might find useful

The checklist within this booklet shows you most of the people and organisations you may need to contact. It might be easier for you to notify some of these people and organisations in writing. You can use the sample letter provided within this booklet as a guide for this.

Removing someone's name from mailing lists

If you want to have the name and telephone number of the person who has died removed from mailing lists, you can ask the Australian Direct Marketing Association to do it for you.

To register details, write to:

**ADMA
Reply Paid 38
PO Box 464
Kings Cross NSW 1340**

You can also register the details on the association's website:
www.adma.com.au

Sunshine Coast funeral director information

Bare Cremation

Phone: 1800 071 176

Cremations Direct

Phone: 1300 854 363

Drysdale Funerals

1/48 Aerodrome Road, Maroochydore
Phone: 5479 1055

33 National Park Road, Nambour
Phone: 5441 1366

27 Butler Street, Tewantin
Phone: 5449 9383

Dignified Cremation

Phone: 1800 11 33 55

Gregson and Weight

5 Gregson Place, Caloundra
Phone: 5491 1559

159 Wises Road, Buderim
Phone: 5443 9953

34 National Park Road, Nambour
Phone: 5476 2866

202 Eumundi-Noosa Road, Noosaville
Phone: 5470 2664

Gympie Funeral Services

236 Brisbane Road, Gympie
Phone: 5482 8400

Holy Cross Funerals

5 Moorindil Street, Tewantin
Phone: 3293 0555

Just Cremate Me

Phone: 0433 185 514

Premier Funeral Services

Including Teddy Bear Garden,
Buderim 676 Nicklin Way, Currimundi
Phone: 5493 5422

Perry and Oster

2/19 Endeavour Drive, Kunda Park
Phone: 5445 3490

Simplicity Funerals

214 Nicklin Way, Warana
Phone: 5301 9981

White Lady Funerals

83 Bowman Road, Caloundra
Phone: 5491 4003

33 National Park Road, Nambour
Phone: 5441 1528

27 Butler Street, Tewantin
Phone: 5302 7296

Value Cremations

Phone: 1300 669 722

**Other options may be sourced from
the internet and other directories.**

Complaints

Queensland Funeral Directors
Association
Phone: 3807 0533

Australian Funeral Directors
Association
Phone: 1300 888 188

Organisation or business	Contact person, telephone number and member number	Notified of death
Accountant/Australian Taxation Office		
Allied health professionals		
Banks/building societies		
Centrelink		
Department of Veterans Affairs		
Clubs (RSL, sporting, social)		
Community services (HACC, Blue Nurses)		
Credit card/hire purchase companies		
Australian Electoral Office		
Electricity, gas, telephone		
Employer/s		
Local council		
School/university/TAFE		

Organisation or business	Contact person, telephone number and member number	Notified of death
G.P./specialist practitioners		
Health benefits fund (Medibank Private, BUPA)		
Insurance companies		
Landlord/real estate agent		
Medicare		
Minister of religion		
Preferred funeral director		
Professional bodies (e.g. solicitors)		
Public services (library etc.)		
Public trustee		
Superannuation fund		
Vehicle registration and licence/RACQ		
Post office		
Subscriptions		

Sample letter for informing people/organisations of a person’s death:

To whom it may concern,

I wish to notify you of the death of:

Mr/Mrs/Miss/Ms

Surname

Given names

Date of birth

Street name and number

Suburb.....

State Postcode

I understand the above had dealings with your organisation. The reference number/
membership/client number for your organisation was

.....

Please amend your records. If you need to contact me for further information,

My name is

Signature

.....

Name and Address

.....

Relationship to deceased

.....

Date

.....

Useful contacts and websites:

Australian Funeral Directors Association ph: 03 9859 9966
www.afda.org.au

Births, Deaths and Marriages ph: 13 74 68
www.qld.gov.au/law/rbdm

Queensland Health Scientific Services ph: 3274 9200

Coronial Counselling Service ph: 3096 2794
(a support and information service; the counsellors can provide information about the coronial investigation process)
www.health.qld.gov.au/qhcss/qhss/coroner.asp

Centrelink ph: 13 23 00
www.servicesaustralia.gov.au

Department of Veteran's Affairs ph: 13 32 54
www.dva.gov.au

Australian Indigenous Health Info Net
www.healthinfonet.ecu.edu.au

What if someone dies overseas?
www.smarttraveller.gov.au/while-youre-away/when-things-go-wrong/someone-died

Funerals and costs (including information regarding Burials Assistance)
www.courts.qld.gov.au/courts/coroners-court/funeral-assistance

The Public Trustee Queensland ph: 1300 360 044
www.pt.qld.gov.au

Lifeline (24-hour crisis line) 13 11 14
www.lifeline.org.au

Kids Help Line 1800 551 800
www.kidshelpline.com.au

Men's Line Australia 1300 789 978
www.mensline.org.au

Standby (Suicide Bereavement) ph: 1300 727 247
www.standbysupport.com.au

Homicide Victims Support Group ph: 1900 191 777

Road Trauma Services ph: 5452 6726

The Compassionate Friends Qld ph: 1300 064 068
for parents, siblings and grandparents of a child who has died at any age

Red Nose (SIDS) ph: 1300 308 307
Support for families impacted by the death of a baby or child
www.ednose.org.au/

Red Nose - Grief and loss ph: 1300 308 307
Miscarriage, stillbirth & newborn death support
www.rednosegriefandloss.org.au

Queensland Cancer Council ph: 13 11 20
www.cancerqld.org.au

Your G.P.

Notes

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Notes

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....



Sunshine Coast Hospital and Health Service

This patient publication was developed with input from healthcare consumers. Sunshine Coast Hospital and Health Service is accredited by the Australian Council on Healthcare Standards, for more information see www.safetyandquality.gov.au or ask a member of staff.



© State of Queensland
(Sunshine Coast Hospital and Health Service) 2022
<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/au/deed.en>