

Understanding Your Grief

A free and confidential interpreter service, including Auslan, is available 24 hours, 7 days a week on 13 14 50.
Ask staff to arrange an interpreter for you.

Carers provide care and unpaid assistance to others. They may be family members, friends or neighbours. Please tell staff if you have a carer.

All our health facilities and grounds are 100% smoke free. Fines apply.
Contact Quitline: 137 848 or www.icanquit.com.au

Parking is available on the hospital campus for a fee.

We welcome further feedback on this brochure as a way of continually improving our service.

Send your feedback to:
WSLHD-Get_Involved@health.nsw.gov.au



Social Work Services

Prepared by the Social Work Services of Auburn,
Blacktown, Mt. Druitt and Westmead Hospitals

When a Death Occurs

After losing a person who is close to you, it is likely you will feel a range of emotions. At times, for example, you may feel overwhelmed and confused, or you may feel hurt, sad, guilty or angry. All of these feelings are natural and normal and part of the grief process.

Even though most people experience a broad range of reactions which sometimes progress through stages, not everyone will grieve in the same way. Some of the following reactions are common to grief:

- Shock
- Despair
- Regret
- Guilt
- Longing
- Blame
- Searching for Reasons
- Anger
- Tiredness
- Helplessness
- Numbness
- Withdrawal from social activities

Some common physical sensations can include an uncomfortable feeling in the stomach, tightness of the chest and throat, breathlessness, weakness of muscles, dry mouth, over sensitivity to noise and lack of energy. If these symptoms persist for an extended time, see your GP.

You may be aware of different thought patterns that are sometimes disturbing to you such as: disbelief that the death has occurred, a sense of presence of the deceased, hallucinations and difficulty concentrating, poor sleep and nightmares.

These are all considered normal reactions by people experiencing loss. You may feel overwhelmed in the first few weeks to months and life can seem meaningless. Grief takes time to work through, as it is a gradual process that does not end immediately after the funeral.

General Grief Services continued:

- Salvation Army Careline & Suicide Support Line
(24 hour phone Counselling for any one who is suffering loss and grief, including thoughts about suicide)
(02) 9331 6000
- SIDS & Kids for Stillbirth, SIDS, Miscarriage and Neo Natal Death
(24 hour contact)
1800 651 186
- Solace
(Widow/Widowers Support Group)
(02) 9519 2820

Suggested Reading

Coping with Grief by Mal McKissock

Understanding Grief by Dr. Geoffrey Glassock

Life After Loss by Francis McNab

What's Dead Mean? By Doris Zagdanski (for children)

Your Social Worker:

Name: _____

Phone: _____

Local Community Health Centres:

- Auburn (02) 8759 4000
- Bankstown (02) 9790 0055
- Baulkham Hills (02) 8853 4500
- Blacktown (02) 9881 8700
- Doonside (02) 9881 8650
- Mt. Druitt (02) 9881 1200
- Parramatta (02) 9843 3222

General Grief Services:

- A Friend's Place (cost involved) 1300 654 556
- Bereavement Care Centre 1300 654 556
- Compassionate Friends (for those who have suffered the death of a child) (02) 9290 2355
- Coroners Court (Glebe) Counselling (Coroners Cases only) (02) 8584 7800
- Grief Support Line (24 hour phone Counselling Services) (02) 9869 3330
- LifeLine 131114
(24 hour phone Counselling Services)

In the first few weeks after the death there may be a sense of unreality and numbness. Then in the days and weeks following, reality can begin to break through.

Family and friends are often attentive and supportive at this time. Visiting often stops being as frequent around the 4 – 6 week period and this may leave a void and an increasing sense of loss. There is often an expectation by others that you will be moving on and getting on with your life.

Sudden Death/Loss

Although reactions to sudden death may be similar to those experienced when the death is expected, they may be particularly intense.

When a loss occurs unexpectedly, you can experience profound shock, numbness or disbelief.

Sudden death allows for no preparation and can leave you in disbelief for days, weeks or months. Emotions can be extremely intense and confused at this time.

Many people say one of the difficult things about sudden death is that they were unprepared for the death and that many things were left unsaid. These can include: 'saying goodbye', 'I'm sorry' or 'I love you'. It can be helpful to say the things you have not had the opportunity to say, and to express your feelings in a way and a place that is most comfortable for you - for example going to a special place.

Anniversaries and Special Occasions

Certain events and times of year can trigger and heighten our sense of loss. If you feel that a particular event or time of year will be difficult for you, it may help to plan your activities around that event.

What Others Can Do To Help

Seeing a person close to you who is grieving can be difficult. We often would like to do something to make them feel better, something to stop them from hurting. We can often feel helpless and uncomfortable. These feelings can cause us to react in ways which may not always be helpful to the bereaved. For example: not allowing them to cry or express their thoughts and feelings, avoiding them, telling them it will be okay: virtually dismissing their grief.

A bereaved person needs time to talk about the deceased, when they are ready and time to acknowledge and make the loss real to themselves. You do not need to find the right words to take away the pain- there are no right words. Sometimes silence and listening are the most helpful courses of action.

Children and Grief

We all talk and think about death differently. Children go through the same process as adults but it may be shorter and more intense.

Refer also to pamphlet “Assisting Children with Grief and Loss”

Another pamphlet in this series is “When Someone Dies in Hospital” (A Practical Guide).

Practical Suggestions

People who have experienced grief report that you must be patient with yourself. It may be helpful to talk about your loss with someone close to you. This can be especially helpful when you are feeling desperately lonely or in distress. Being able to talk with someone who wants to listen can be beneficial and a source of comfort. This may be in person, or by phone.

Writing your feelings down may also assist you to unburden yourself. Alternatively, some people prefer to spend time alone or to focus on practical matters. Everyone is different.

Gradually you will be able to think of your loss with less pain and be able to put new energy into life and living.

People who have experienced grief report that the first year is the most difficult, and particular times such as birthdays can be very painful. In the early days after a loss it is hard to believe that with the passage of time the pain will lessen, yet it seems to be so.

Many people are able to cope with the broad range of reactions to grief. Some people may feel that they are struggling with particularly intense emotions that will not fade and continue to interrupt day to day life. In such cases counselling may assist and support you in your grief.

Where to Seek Help

Hospital Social Work Services:

- Auburn (02) 8759 3000
- Blacktown (02) 9881 8000
- Mt. Druitt (02) 9881 8000
- Westmead (02) 8890 6699

Hospital Pastoral Care Services:

- Blacktown (02) 9881 8193
- Mt. Druitt (02) 9881 1599
- Westmead (02) 8890 5083