



# When a loved one dies

INFORMATION & SUPPORT



Western Health



The staff and volunteers at Western Health would like to extend our condolences to you and those affected by the death of your loved one.

We understand this can be a difficult time and there are often unfamiliar decisions and arrangements to be made.

This booklet contains information we hope you will find useful, such as practical matters that may need to be considered, and services where you can seek further support. It also contains information about some of the feelings and emotions that may be experienced when a person dies.

It has been our privilege to care for your loved one, and our thoughts are with you at this time.





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# After a loved one has died

Take your time being with your loved one.

Please let staff know if there are any spiritual or cultural needs you and your loved one may have at this time.

When you are ready to leave the hospital, please notify ward staff. Your loved one will then be moved to a place within a Western Health facility or a nearby funeral director. The funeral director of your choice will then arrange the transfer of your loved one into their care.

## Death Certificate

A doctor will confirm your loved one has died and will notify the **Registry of Births, Deaths & Marriages**. The funeral director you have chosen will usually apply for a standard death certificate on your behalf. Please ensure the funeral director knows to whom the death certificate should be sent.

Please note it can take several weeks for the death certificate to be issued.

For further information, please contact the Registry of Births, Deaths & Marriages on **1300 369 367** or **[www.bdm.vic.gov.au](http://www.bdm.vic.gov.au)**

## Referral to the Coroner

A doctor may refer some cases to the Coroner to find out the cause(s) of death. If this is required, ward staff will discuss the process with you.

For further information, please contact the **Coronial Admissions and Enquiries** on **1300 309 519** or **[www.coronerscourt.vic.gov.au](http://www.coronerscourt.vic.gov.au)**

## Financial Assistance

Depending on your situation, you may be eligible to receive Government financial assistance. For further information, please contact **Centrelink** on **13 23 00** or **[www.centrelink.gov.au](http://www.centrelink.gov.au)**

## Wills

A Will is a legal document that states how a person's assets are to be distributed after their death. The Executor is responsible for carrying out the instructions of the Will. If your loved one does not have a Will or you cannot find it, you may need to seek legal advice from your solicitor or other legal services (refer to page 12) to guide you through this process.

# Funeral arrangements

There are many different ways to plan a funeral in order to meet the wishes of the person who has died and the needs of family and friends. Sometimes a person may have outlined their wishes regarding their funeral in their Will or may have paid for the funeral in advance with their chosen funeral director.

If the funeral has not been prearranged, the first step is to make contact with a funeral director. You can find a funeral company by searching on the internet or by contacting the **Australian Funeral Directors Association** on **9859 9966** or **www.afda.org.au**

- Funeral costs may vary between companies. You may wish to contact several companies before making a final decision. Most funeral directors are available 24 hours a day.
- Once you have chosen a funeral director, they will make the necessary arrangements to have your loved one transferred into their care. The funeral director will organise the required paperwork for the funeral and for the Registry of Births, Deaths & Marriages.
- Sometimes private health, sickness, accident or life insurance policies may help to pay funeral and other expenses. If your loved one had insurance, you can call the company and ask if assistance is available.
- **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander** peoples requiring support and assistance with funeral arrangements can contact:

Aborigines Advancement League  
2 Watt Street  
Thornbury, Victoria, 3071  
Phone: 9480 7777

Families may wish to talk to staff members at their local **Aboriginal Community Co-Operative**. They will have connections to support services aimed at meeting the needs of families and individuals experiencing the loss of a loved one.

**Aboriginal Hospital Liaison Officers** (AHLO) are available at all Western Health Hospitals. You can advise staff at the hospital if you wish to meet with an AHLO and they will contact that person on your behalf or give you their contact details to call them directly.

# Who to notify checklist

The following checklist details some people or organisations you may need to contact about the death. Some may not need to be contacted immediately.

Person/Organisation to be contacted	Contact person, phone number and address (if needed)	Details of person who died (e.g. account or reference number)	Notified of death (Yes/No)
Accountant			
Australian Taxation Office	13 28 65		
Banks/Credit Unions			
Centrelink	13 23 00		
Child Support Services	13 12 72		
Community Groups or Clubs (e.g. RSL, sporting, social/cultural)			
Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA)	13 32 54		
Australian Electoral Commission	13 23 26		
Employers/Business Partners			
Equipment Hire (e.g. hospital, private hire)			
Executor of the Will			
Foreign Pension Authority (Centrelink's International Services)	13 16 73		
Funeral Director			
Funeral Insurance	(Yes/No)		
Health Professionals (e.g. doctors, case manager, dentist, podiatrist)			

Person/Organisation to be contacted	Contact person, phone number and address (if needed)	Details of person who died (e.g. account or reference number)	Notified of death (Yes/No)
Insurance Companies (e.g. car, health, home & contents, life)			
Landlord/Real Estate Agent			
Local Council & Community Services (e.g. Meals on Wheels, library, rates, home help, Bolton Clarke)			
Local Post Office			
Medicare	13 20 11		
“My Aged Care”	1800 200 422		
NDIS service providers			
Public Trustee			
School/University/ College			
Solicitor/Lawyer			
Superannuation Fund			
TV Subscriptions (e.g. Netflix, Foxtel, Stan, etc.)			
Utilities (e.g. gas, electricity, water, phone, internet, Citylink)			
VicRoads (licence vehicle registration)	13 11 71		
Other:			

Adapted from the Department of Human Services “Who to notify checklist”.

# Grief

Grief is our response to loss. It is the normal and natural response to loss, and it can affect every part of our life, including our thoughts, behaviours, beliefs, feelings, physical health and our relationships with others.

We experience and express grief in our own way. There is no 'right' or 'wrong' way to grieve and grief has no timeline. When we grieve, we are coming to terms with what has changed in our lives.

There are many things we may experience and all are normal responses.

Some examples are:

## **Feelings of:**

- Sadness
- Anxiety, panic
- Anger, irritability
- Disbelief
- Relief
- Numbness

## **Physical symptoms:**

- Difficulty in sleeping
- Fatigue/tiredness
- Lack of appetite
- Headaches
- Nausea
- Aches and pains

## **Social:**

- A loss of interest in the things you used to enjoy
- A lack of interest in outings, seeing friends, or doing your normal household chores, shopping, meals, etc
- A lack of interest in what's happening in the world
- Being over-protective of close family and friends



# Looking after yourself

Taking the time to look after yourself can help you cope on a daily basis. Below are some suggestions that you may find helpful.

- Ensure you maintain normal routines where possible e.g. regular meals, adequate sleep, exercise.
- Allow people to help you.
- Do things that are relaxing or soothing e.g. reading, listening to music, making a special place to reflect, gardening, walking, having a massage, meditating.
- Sharing your memories, stories, thoughts and feelings with friends and family can reduce the sense of isolation and loneliness that comes with grief.
- Try to delay making major decisions that cannot be reversed such as selling a home or giving away belongings. The early months can be filled with many emotions and may not be the best time to make these decisions.
- Allow yourself to express your thoughts and feelings privately, e.g. keeping a journal, collecting photos, drawing, writing a letter or a poem.
- Consider joining a support group to share with others who have had similar experiences.

Most people find that with the support of their family and friends and their own resources, they gradually find ways to learn to live with their loss and do not need to seek professional help.

Sometimes, however, the circumstances of a death may have been particularly distressing such as a traumatic or sudden death, or there may have been other situations in your life which make your grief complicated.

If you are finding it hard to manage on a daily basis, it may be helpful to speak to your local doctor who may talk to you about support from other health professionals e.g. counsellor, psychologist.



# Children, young people & grief

When children or young people experience a death, their parents, caregivers and teachers are often concerned about how best to support and meet their needs.

Children and young people also experience grief in a variety of ways depending on their age, stage of development, personality, and past experiences of loss.

Some common reactions that may affect them include:

## **Feelings of:**

- Shock, disbelief that the person has died
- Sadness
- Fear
- Guilt
- Anger
- Anxiety about the future
- Preoccupation with death and wanting details.

Younger children may ask the same questions repeatedly over a period of time. Continue to answer simply and honestly.

## **Physical:**

- Changes to sleeps patterns and appetite
- Headaches, tiredness, nausea, “sore tummies”
- Difficulty concentrating or remembering things

## **Social:**

- Clinging to remaining family members — especially in younger children
- Disruptive behaviours — fighting, arguing, ignoring requests
- Reluctant to go to school
- Withdrawal from social activities
- Mood swings
- Need for checking on other family members and wanting to be physically close to them.

# Caring for children & young people

Below are some suggestions that you may find helpful in caring for children and young people.

- A good place to start is asking them what they know. Talk openly and honestly with them about what has happened in an age appropriate way e.g. “Grandma has died because her body stopped working properly”.
- Listen. They may not want to talk straight away but continue to check in case they change their mind.
- Try to include children in the family’s grief experience e.g. attending the funeral if they wish. If they choose to attend, prepare them as much as possible beforehand so they know what to expect. Older children and young people may want to have a more active part in the service.
- Reassure them that they will continue to be cared for and loved.
- Children, especially younger ones, express many of their emotions through behaviour and play. They may find drawing, painting, storytelling, even making a memory box with photos and letters, helpful. In addition, older children may also like to create a journal or a poem.
- Discuss their support needs with their school teachers.
- Maintain routine as much as possible e.g. sports, hobbies, contact with friends.
- Reassure them that it is okay to grieve differently to other family members.

It is important to take care of yourself, both physically and emotionally, so you can support your children. Don’t be afraid to ask for help.

With good information, love and support, children and young people can learn to understand and cope with their grief. However, if you feel that they may need further assistance or support, don’t hesitate to see your local doctor who may talk to you about support from other health professionals e.g. school counsellor, psychologist.

# Support services

The following Support Services are a guide to some of the services available.

## **Grief & Bereavement Services**

### **General Practitioner (local doctor)**

A good starting point is to talk to your local doctor about how you are feeling. If needed, they can refer you to other health professionals for further support.

### **Community Health Services (CHS)**

CHS may offer free or low cost counselling for adults, children and young people. Please contact your local service under Community Health Centres and Services by searching on the internet. Local CHS include IPC Health, CoHealth, Djerriwarrh Health.

### **Mercy Grief Services (MGS)**

MGS offers professional counselling free of charge for anyone experiencing bereavement following the death of a family member, friend, or work colleague within the Western Metropolitan Region. MGS also have children, adolescent, and adult support programs.

3 Devonshire Road, Sunshine, Victoria, 3020

Phone: 9313 5700

### **The Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement (ACGB)**

The ACGB is a not-for-profit organisation providing a range of education, counselling, research and clinical services in the field of grief and bereavement. Counselling for adults, children and young people (fees may apply).

253 Wellington Road, Mulgrave, Victoria, 3170

Phone: 9265 2100 or 1800 642 066

[www.grief.org.au](http://www.grief.org.au)

### **Victorian Aboriginal Health Service (VAHS)**

VAHS offers free counselling for families within the Aboriginal community.

238-250 Plenty Road, Preston, Victoria, 3072

Phone: 9403 3300

[www.vahs.org.au](http://www.vahs.org.au)

## Telephone & Online Counselling Services

**GriefLine**     **9935 7400** (12noon to 3:00am)     **1300 845 745** (regional only)  
Counselling support services for individuals and families.  
[www.griefline.org.au](http://www.griefline.org.au)

**Kids Helpline**     **1800 551 800** (24 hours)  
Counselling support service for kids and young people aged 5 to 25.  
[www.kidshelpline.com.au](http://www.kidshelpline.com.au)

**CanTeen**     **1800 835 932**  
CanTeen provides free and confidential counselling services for young people (12 – 25 years) affected by cancer.  
[www.canteen.org.au](http://www.canteen.org.au)

Online chat / phone / email  
10:00am – 10:00pm weekdays  
11:00am – 6:00pm weekends

**Lifeline**     **13 11 14** (24 hours)  
Crisis support and suicide prevention services.  
[www.lifeline.org.au](http://www.lifeline.org.au)

**Beyond Blue**     **1300 224 636** (24 hours)  
Information and support for mental health and wellbeing.  
[www.beyondblue.org.au](http://www.beyondblue.org.au)

**Headspace**     **1800 650 890**  
Information and support for young people and their families.  
[www.eheadspace.org.au](http://www.eheadspace.org.au)

**SuicideLine**     **1300 651 251** (24 hours)  
Crisis support and counselling services.  
[www.suicideline.org.au](http://www.suicideline.org.au)

**SANDS**     **1300 072 637** (24 hours)  
Support and information when a baby dies before, during or soon after birth.  
[www.sands.org.au](http://www.sands.org.au)

# Financial assistance

## **Centrelink**

**13 23 00** or **13 12 02** (multi-lingual)

Depending on your situation, you may be eligible to receive Government financial assistance and services. Please visit:  
[www.humanservices.gov.au/individuals/subjects/what-do-following-death](http://www.humanservices.gov.au/individuals/subjects/what-do-following-death)

## **Financial Counselling Australia**

**1800 007 007**

Free phone information and support to people experiencing financial difficulty. If needed, they can refer onto other services.

# Legal assistance

## **Victoria Legal Aid**

**1300 792 387**

Free legal information.  
[www.legalaid.vic.gov.au](http://www.legalaid.vic.gov.au)

## **Federation of Community Legal Centres**

**9652 1500** (to find your local centre)

Free legal assistance for those experiencing financial or social disadvantage.

## **Victorian Aboriginal Legal Services**

**9418 5999** or **1800 064 865**

Free legal advice and representation for the Koorie community.  
[www.vals.org.au](http://www.vals.org.au)

# Other services

## **Bereavement Assistance Funeral Service**

**9564 7778**

Low cost funeral services for those who have limited or no funds.  
[www.bereavementassistance.org.au](http://www.bereavementassistance.org.au)

## **Translating and Interpreting Services**

**131 450** (24 hours)

Free telephone interpreting service for persons from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.  
[www.tisnational.gov.au](http://www.tisnational.gov.au)

## **Registry of Births, Deaths & Marriages**

**1300 369 367**

[www.bdm.vic.gov.au](http://www.bdm.vic.gov.au)

## **Coroner's Court of Victoria**

**1300 309 519**

[www.coronerscourt.vic.gov.au](http://www.coronerscourt.vic.gov.au)





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## References

- The Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement (ACGB)  
[www.grief.org.au](http://www.grief.org.au)
- *What to do when someone dies: bereavement support*, Alfred Health, 2014.
- *What to do following a death*, Centrelink:  
[www.humanservices.gov.au/customer/subjects/what-do-following-death](http://www.humanservices.gov.au/customer/subjects/what-do-following-death)

**Please note:**

This booklet has been developed as a resource for patient carers, advocates and family members. Attention has been given to ensure that the information is current at the time of publication. However, the material is not definitive or exhaustive. The information provided through this publication is not intended to provide or substitute for professional services or advice, including grief counselling or therapy.



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