

A Supportive Palliative Care Guide

*Prepared by the
Mater Pastoral and
Spiritual Care Team*



MATER HOSPITAL
A FACILITY OF
ST VINCENT'S
HEALTH AUSTRALIA

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The Mater Hospital would like to acknowledge the Bereavement Team at HammondCare Greenwich Hospital for allowing us to adapt their information and resources to develop this booklet for our Mater patients and their loved ones.

If you are reading this, it may be that someone close to you is very ill or has died recently. This booklet has been designed to support you whilst you are caring for a loved one at the end of their life and to help you with any practical matters.

As an integrated part of the Palliative Care Team, the Pastoral and Spiritual Care staff are here to help prior to, and following the passing of your loved one. The Mater does not have a mortuary however, we can help you choose your preferred Funeral Provider/Celebrant and assist you with other related matters.

Palliative Care at the Mater Hospital involves a Multi-disciplinary Team to care for your loved one, and to assist you during a challenging period in life. Our staff includes:

- Specialist Doctors
- Clinical Nurse Consultant
- Pastoral & Spiritual Care
- Social Work
- Occupational Therapy
- Physiotherapy
- Dietetics

The Mater has walked with people over many generations seeking to holistically care for the dignity of each person in whatever stage of life they may be. It is our privilege to walk with you and your loved one during this time.

Pastoral & Spiritual Care Staff
P 02 9900 7688 or internal 8385
www.mns.org.au

Inspired to
Care



Nearing end of life of your loved one

Every death is unique. At the Mater we believe that when someone close to you dies, you have the right to say goodbye in your own way. For some, there is a need to spend time with a loved one, to bathe and dress them, to sit with them, to talk with them, simply to be close.

For others, saying goodbye at the time of death is enough.

The Medical Certificate of Death and the Cremation Certificate (*if this is the preference*) will be arranged by the attending doctor. These documents will be given to you, or your chosen funeral provider when your loved one is collected from the Mater.

Practical matters for your consideration

The Mater does not have a mortuary, therefore, the following information will need to be provided:

- If you feel you need more time to be with your loved one, please let us know.
- If after death care arrangements have not been made, please see page 7 to help you consider your choices.
- Please advise nursing staff of any jewellery you would like left on, or taken from your loved one's body, such as rings.

Watch, O Lord, with those who wake or weep tonight, and give your angels charge over those who sleep; tend to your sick ones, Lord; rest your weary ones, bless your dying ones, soothe your suffering ones, pity your afflicted ones, shield your joyous ones, and all for your love's sake.

— St Augustine

Plan ahead checklist

The following are some things to think about and discuss with your loved ones.

Legal

- Will/Executor/s/Estate planning
- Power of Attorney or Enduring Power of Attorney/Enduring Guardianship
- Advanced Health Care Directive Living Will – Is there one? Who holds it?
- Name and contact details of legal advisor, accountant, financial advisor, stock broker, insurance broker, and bank contact/s.
- Passport
- Marriage and divorce certificates
- Death certificate (Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages)

Financial

- Bank/Credit Union accounts – Where? / What are the login details, passwords, and account numbers?/ Who can gain access?
- Insurance policies
- Bonds or shares certificates – Where are they held? Who knows?
- Superannuation fund/s (check for death benefits)
- Loans, other financial records, credit, charge and store cards
- Investments, including any outside Australia.
- Mortgages, property deeds and leases
- Australian taxation office – What is the account number?

General

- Safe deposit boxes and keys
- Computer accounts – What are the names/logins/passwords?
- Family/contact details
- Centrelink/ Department of Veteran's Affairs/pension card/social security number
- Armed services record
- Funeral and burial plans – Any prepayments or arrangements?
- Council/rates
- Electricity/gas/water
- Telephone provider (*Which one? Mobile password, login, account name*)
- Australian Electoral Office
- Roads and traffic authority (vehicle/s registration)
- Medicare/Health funds (account numbers)
- GP/ other medical professionals (What are their names?)
- Community services/clubs

Making funeral or memorial arrangements

Choosing a Funeral Provider/Celebrant is usually based on practical matters such as cost and location. Reputation, previous experiences and recommendations from others are also useful guides. You may like to delegate this task to a family member or friend if that feels helpful.

Your Funeral Provider/Celebrant will take responsibility for attending to the legal requirements after a death, including obtaining a 'Medical Certificate of Death'.

“ You matter because you are, and you matter to the end of your life. We will do all we can not only to help you die peacefully, but also to live until you die.”

*— Dame Cicily Saunders
Founder of the hospice movement*

Funeral or memorial service planning checklist:

- Choose your style of funeral or memorial service.
- Decide whether to have a burial or cremation
- Select a casket or cremation container
- Select a grave marker and inscriptions
- Identify a location for the service
- Decide on the type of service (religious service, memorial, wake, celebration of life etc.)
- Decide if you need to book a priest/ minister of religion etc.
- Decide when the service will be held (date and time)
- Personalise the ceremony (who will lead the service; what readings, if any, do you want; who will deliver the eulogy; what music or songs are to be played/sung; choose flower arrangements; prepare any displays, videos or memorabilia for use at the service; decide whether a post funeral gathering is appropriate and who will organise it)
- Make a list of those you would like to attend

Funeral or memorial service costs

Today there are a wide range of choices for funerals or memorial services. You can choose the service of one and link it together with another service provider that suits your unique needs. The cost of the funeral or memorial service will depend upon your choices and the type of ceremony you require. Meeting costs can be difficult for many families. There are many different ways which you can pay for funerals:

Community based funeral arrangements are available in some communities and family involvement is welcomed and is known to gently support with the grieving process.

Arrangements or payments may have already been made to assist with funeral costs. Details may be kept in your loved one's home, with their solicitor or detailed in their Will.

Deceased's estate

Money to pay for the funeral may come from the deceased's estate, which is managed by the Executor of the Will. Any financial entitlements payable on death, such as life insurance, will be paid into the deceased's estate and may assist with costs. You may also want to check for any other insurance policies, such as private health insurance or compulsory third party insurance, which may have included funeral or death benefits.

Tailored payment plans

Some funeral and memorial service providers allow payments over instalments. If you choose a funeral director be sure to ask about the payment options available to you. Keep a record of itemised quotes given to you about funeral costs and establish payment plans before signing.

Department of Veteran Affairs

Eligible veterans or their dependants may be entitled to funeral benefits or bereavement payments from the Department of Veteran Affairs. Visit Department of Veteran Affairs. Visit www.dva.gov.au for more details.

Centrelink

After the death of a loved one, you may be eligible for financial support from Centrelink. If you receive a Centrelink pension or carer payment then you may be eligible for a Bereavement Allowance. Visit www.humanservices.gov.au/individuals/centrelink for more details.

Funeral assistance

If you are having difficulties and cannot afford the cost of the funeral, you may be able to apply for funeral assistance from the Department of Justice. Visit www.justice.nsw.gov.au for more details.

You may also be eligible for early release of your superannuation on compassionate grounds. Contact the superannuation fund about the options available.

Legal matters

Will

A will is a legal document that instructs you about the deceased person's wishes. This will nominate one or more people as executor(s) and it is their responsibility to distribute the deceased person's assets and belongings to the beneficiaries named in the will. The executor is also responsible for payment of any debts from the estate assets. The executor may choose to request the services of a solicitor to execute the will.

If you are unable to locate a will, you should seek legal advice from the NSW Trustee and Guardian, Legal Aid or a private solicitor. The NSW Supreme Court, Probate Section can also assist with information. They can be contacted on 1300 679 272. For more information visit: www.tag.nsw.gov.au

If a will is being contested, it can be an extremely stressful and distressing experience for all involved. It is important to seek appropriate legal advice. You may also need additional emotional support from trusted friends, family or a health professional.

The change of circumstances that occurs when someone dies may mean it is necessary to review your own will and other documentation such as 'Enduring Power of Attorney'.

Probate

In NSW, probate is applied for if assets of the deceased were solely in their name and are deemed to be of significant value (e.g. real estate). If the deceased person owned joint assets, then probate is not usually required to transfer those assets as those assets pass to the surviving joint tenant.

An application for probate is made to the Probate Registry of the Supreme Court. A Grant of probate recognises the authority of the executor(s) to deal with the estate and entitles the executor to collect and pay debts and distribute the estate as directed by the will. The documents for probate can be provided by your solicitor, they may be downloaded from the Internet or they can be purchased from a supplier of legal stationery.

Who to notify?

There are a number of people and institutions that need to be notified of a death. Most of these people will need notification in writing and a certified copy of the Death Certificate and will.

The process of notifying organisations can be daunting and often people comment that they feel like they are involved in erasing their family member's existence at a time when they most want

to hold on to them. It may be helpful to take your time to inform organisations, prioritising those that are most urgent, and to enlist the help of others to make these notifications. The following is a list of such people and organisations:

- Associations
- Australian Electoral Commission
- Australian Taxation Office
- Banks and/or credit unions
- Centrelink
- Charities
- Child Support Services
- Clubs (e.g. RSL)
- Department of Immigration
- Department of Veterans Affairs
- Department Store Accounts
- Educational institution (e.g. University, TAFE)
- Employers (paid, voluntary)
- Executor/s of the will
- Foreign pension authority
- Health Fund
- Health professionals (e.g. GP, dentist, optometrist)
- Insurance companies (e.g. home and contents, car, pet)
- Landlord
- Local council
- Loyalty cards (e.g. air miles)
- Mailing lists
- Medicare
- Professional services (e.g. solicitor, accountant)
- Public services (e.g. library)
- Social media (e.g. Facebook, LinkedIn)
- Subscriptions (e.g. magazines)
- Telecommunications providers (e.g. phones, internet)
- Utilities (e.g. gas, electricity, water)
- Vehicle registration and licensing authorities

“What we once enjoyed and deeply loved we can never lose, for all that we love deeply becomes part of us”

— Helen Keller

About grief

Impact of grief

Grief can affect us in a wide range of ways. Here are some examples of responses you may experience:

Physical responses you may experience

- Decreased appetite
- Shortness of breath
- Tiredness and lethargy
- Palpitations
- Sleeplessness or sleeping a lot
- Gastro-intestinal upsets
- Decreased/increased sexual drive
- Dry mouth

Your grief is a natural emotional response to loss. Go gently.

“Grief and love are sisters, woven together from the beginning.

Their kinship reminds us that there is no love that does not contain loss and no loss that is not a reminder of the love we carry for what we once held close.”

*— Francis Weller,
The Wild Edge of Sorrow*

Remember to see your GP if you have any concerns about your health. People often neglect their own wellbeing when caring for someone else – now may be the time to attend to health checks you’ve been putting off.

Emotional responses you may experience

- Frequent bouts of unexpected tears
- Helplessness
- Sadness
- Anger/feeling short-tempered
- Yearning, longing, pining
- Irritability
- Anxiety
- Feeling like you do not want to live
- Despair
- Numbness
- Relief
- Guilt
- Fear

Cognitive impacts

- Forgetfulness
- Vagueness
- Distraction
- Obsessive thinking
- Confusion
- Denial
- Difficulty making decisions
- Hallucinations
- Inability to concentrate/think clearly
- Vivid dreams

Often people comment that they feel like they are going crazy.

Behavioural responses you may experience

- Hyperactivity
- Lack of motivation
- Restlessness
- Low self-esteem
- Social withdrawal

Spiritual responses you may experience

- Questioning of previously held religious beliefs
- Questioning the meaning of life
- Loss of faith
- Sense of meaningless/pointlessness
- Strengthening of spiritual connections
- A sense of the presence of the person who has died

Not everyone will experience all of these reactions. You may only experience a few. The intensity of these responses is likely to fluctuate, gradually reducing over time. However we experience our grief, the impact of the death of a family member is far reaching.

“There are three needs of the griever: To find the words for the loss, to say the words aloud and to know the words have been heard.”

— Victoria Alexander

Theories of grief

There are many theories of grief. The one that most people have heard of is the idea that there are stages of grief we must work through before reaching a place of ‘acceptance’. This theory has been criticised as it doesn’t accurately describe many peoples’ experiences of loss. Newer theories of grief are based on the idea of ‘continuing bonds’ – the idea that we might keep a connection with someone who has died and have a changed relationship with them. For example, when we have known someone well we can imagine what they might have said in a particular set of circumstances, so we can draw upon their wisdom even though they are not physically present. We may continue to talk to them when we look at their photograph or visit a grave, thereby continuing a relationship with them in a different form.

No single theory of grief can capture the experience of all people who are bereaved and no one theory can explain all aspects of one person’s experience. How we experience grief will vary depending on a wide range of factors including gender, culture, beliefs and personality. One model of grief you may find useful is the Dual Process Model (see diagram). It suggests that there are two domains that need to be attended to.

The first domain relates to the experience of loss, including:

- The range of emotions you might feel (e.g. numbness, sadness, guilt, loneliness)
- Remembering events related to an illness or the event of death itself
- Experiencing triggers of grief: the waves of emotion that sweep over you when you are reminded of your loss by visiting a particular place, hearing a certain song or looking at a photograph
- Avoiding changes that are made necessary because of your loss

The second domain relates to more practical changes, including:

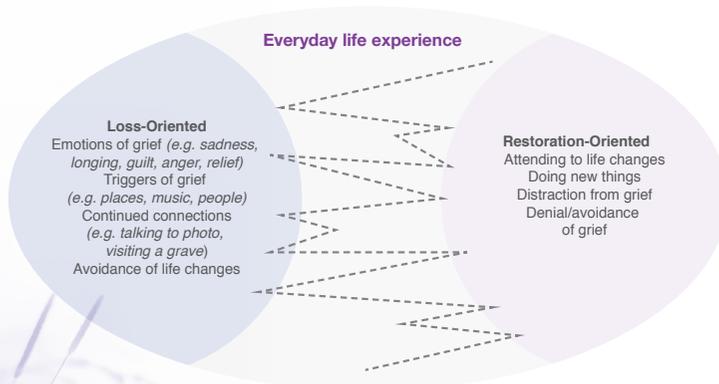
- Learning new skills (e.g. managing finances may be a skill you now need to learn)
- Going back to work or re-connecting with friends
- Taking time away from grief (e.g. distracting yourself by keeping busy with other tasks)
- Trying new things

Both areas need to be attended to and people find themselves moving between each domain (the zig-zagging line between each area in the diagram below suggests how people may bounce back and forth between these different impacts of grief). The balance between each area may shift and change over time. You may feel more able to attend to tasks in one area versus another.

“Our Grief is as individual as our lives.”

— Dr Elisabeth Kubler-Ross

Dual Process Model
(Adapted from Stroebe and Schut, 1999)



How long does it take?

There is no set time frame for grief. The following is a guide, remembering that each of us is unique in our grieving. Everyone copes differently. It is not useful to compare your way of grieving with that of other people. Some people need to talk about their feelings. Some people are more private. Some people cope better by keeping busy. Some people do not feel able to do much at all. Often, people are able to navigate the ups and downs of grief with the support of family or friends. For some, it can be helpful to speak with a counsellor.

The first couple of months

At first, most people will feel some form of shock, numbness or unreality. After the funeral there are often feelings of unreality and emptiness. You may feel quite disoriented, referring to the deceased in the present tense, at times forgetting that they have died. This can be quickly followed by periods of sadness as the reality returns. For example, people often talk about picking up their phone to contact someone or calling out to them when at home and then remembering that they're no longer there. There are lots of formalities to attend to even though you may feel it is hard to focus on anything. Notifying organisations means you have to tell others that the

person has died and this can be very painful. Although these tasks are difficult, they can provide a sense of purpose when you may be feeling lost and help prevent practical and/or financial challenges in the future.

If your partner has died, this can also be a time when you may start to realise the many unnoticed things they have given you or done for you. You may have to learn new skills and take on unfamiliar tasks.

Sometimes people experience pressure to dispose of the deceased's belongings and clothes. Some people like to do this immediately whilst others leave it much longer. You will know when you are ready to do this. Having familiar sights and smells in your home can be comforting and provide powerful ways of remembering.

Often people choose not to decide what to do with belongings all at once. There can be some items that feel easier to remove from the home (e.g. medical equipment), and others which you know you will keep forever. For everything in between, it is ok to take your time and make decisions bit by bit. It can sometimes feel easier to give items away if you know they will be used and appreciated.

Sometimes during these early weeks people have a strong feeling that the deceased person is around them. Often this can be a comforting experience. Others may not have this feeling and this can be a relief for some and disappointing for others.

Around three months

Not uncommonly, people will say that they feel worse at this time. This is when the body's protective hormonal mechanisms are wearing off. The funeral and other practical matters have been attended to, and those around you have returned to their routines. You are also trying to return to your routine or trying to establish new ones.

Just when family and friends are expecting you will feel a little better, the pain of your bereavement often increases. You may feel you are getting worse or going backwards. The permanence of your loss becomes more of a reality. In addition to grieving their absence in the present, you may also be grieving the plans and hopes you had for the future.

Some people lack their usual motivation or zest for life and have to push themselves to do things that they would normally enjoy. Some people are able to return to their usual activities while having sad or thoughtful times as they remember the deceased.

For some, life without the person who has died feels unbearable and you

may wish that you too had died. At times people feel they do not want to live without the deceased. This is not uncommon and different from contemplating suicide. Thoughts of suicide are an expression of extreme distress and it is important to talk about them with your GP or counsellor.

After the first three months

For many, this is a time of feeling very alone. Even when you have the support of other family and friends you can feel lonely. You can find yourself going over and over memories, feeling preoccupied and forgetful about everyday matters. You may have unexpected outbursts of emotion that you find difficult and at times embarrassing.

As you come to terms with the reality of your loss, your senses may seem to play tricks, catching sight of your family member or friend, only to be disappointed when you realise they are not there. You may find yourself wanting to visit significant places. Acknowledging the reality that this change is permanent can be a slow process. Your mood and behaviour may continue to be erratic.

Friends and family may be resuming their lives and expect you should be too. You may feel misunderstood. If your partner has died you may also feel you no longer fit in within your social group.

Grief can feel like a roller-coaster ride and

it can be very unpredictable. However, gradually over the months following a death, for most people the times in between the moments of grief become longer and the feelings lessen in intensity.

The process of becoming accustomed to a world which will be forever different takes time. For most, at least the first year may be full of ups and downs as you adjust to a new reality. You may find yourself reassessing life, searching for new meaning, and questioning old ideas and values. It is, in fact, a very busy time and can be exhausting. Grieving takes far more energy than we imagine.

After the first year

During the first year of grief many people experience intense emotions. For some people the second year can continue to be very difficult. As during the first year, the support of family and friends can be enough to assist people to cope with the ups and down they are experiencing. If you are concerned about how you are coping or if your grief is getting in the way of things you need to be doing, you may find it helpful to contact a bereavement counsellor.

Sexuality and intimacy

After the death of a partner you may feel anxious and miss the closeness, intimacy, touch and sexuality that were part of your relationship. You may feel that you will never, or do not wish to, meet anyone as special again. On the

other end of the spectrum, you may feel you need companionship and a close relationship. Both responses are common for people who are grieving. These are responses to grief that may not be easily talked about or understood by family and friends. Counselling is a space where issues around sexuality or intimacy can be discussed if that feels helpful.

Difficult/complicated relationships

Often literature on grief can talk about the death of a 'loved one' however, sometimes that is not how the bereaved person thinks of the person who has died. If a relationship has been strained, conflictual or abusive, people often experience feelings in their grief which do not fit with stereotypes of what grief 'should' look like. There might be a confusing mix of feelings about a range of issues including no longer being able to 'fix' the relationship or have important conversations, or, not having been able to end the relationship sooner. People can feel relief that a challenging relationship has come to an end.

*"Grief keeps the heart flexible,
fluid, and open to others"*

— Francis Weller,
The Wild Edge of Sorrow

Visiting the grave or other significant places

For some people, there may be a special place to visit that creates a sense of closeness to the deceased. This may be a grave, memorial garden, bench, park or any other place that has a connection to your family member. Like all aspects of your grief, visiting this place is a very personal decision. For some, visiting this place is very special; it allows closeness to the deceased. Other people however may only visit on birthdays and anniversaries, whilst some choose not to visit at all. You will know when and if you need to visit a grave or other significant place and who you may need with you for support.

Ashes

Bringing home your loved one's ashes can be challenging, however some bereaved people share that they have been surprised by their reaction, including feeling comfort in bringing ashes home. It may be helpful to have a supportive friend or relative with you when you collect your loved ones ashes. Once you have collected your loved ones ashes, it is okay to take your time to decide what to do.

Many people find it takes many months to feel ready to decide where their loved ones ashes will be scattered or buried.

Members of the family may have different opinions about what to do and this can take time to figure out. Some people feel okay about separating the ashes, scattering them in multiple places, whilst others feel strongly about keeping them together.

The scattering or interring of ashes can be another opportunity to remember and honour your family member with others. As time passes people often think of things they wish they had included in the funeral or memorial service – this can be an opportunity to do these things or share those memories.

If you are scattering ashes in a public place (e.g. park, beach or at sea) you are expected to seek permission from the relevant authorities.

For more information visit:
www.health.nsw.gov.au/environment/factsheets/Pages/cremation-ashes.aspx

How to prepare for anniversaries, religious celebrations and special occasions

You may experience an unexpected increase in your feelings of grief and sorrow in the build up to special days during the year, such as birthdays, anniversaries, and other events. There is no need to feel alarmed if you experience this. It is a normal part of grief. You may also find yourself experiencing an increase in your feelings of grief and may not understand the cause, only to realise later that a significant date is approaching or has passed. This is also very common. Planning ahead for such special days may be helpful.

Remember difficult feelings come and go, and they might be mixed with happy feelings and memories as well. Your grief for the person that has died never ends but it usually does change and become less intense as time goes on. If your grief tends to surface more strongly around significant dates, you or others may feel that you are not coping as well as you should. However it is normal to experience these feelings. This does not mean that you are not coping but rather that you are grieving. In fact, coping and grieving usually happen at the same time.

Anniversary of a death

When approaching the first anniversary of a death people can often find themselves remembering and reliving what was happening a year ago. This can lead to an increase in the emotions of grief and distress around specific events. It may be helpful to ask of yourself ‘what went well?’, ‘what did I do well?’ during that time. It is also important to balance painful memories with attention to memories of happier times. To help recall those happier moments, we suggest you look at photographs and listen to music you enjoyed together.

The anniversary of a death can be an opportunity to create new traditions of remembering. You may want to include family and friends in any plans you have for the day. Some people choose to visit a place where they feel connected to their family members, play music, write a letter to that person, light a candle or take time to share memories. Going through the first anniversary (and the first of other special occasions) is an opportunity to try different things to see what feels right for you.

Helpful considerations as you prepare for anniversaries and special occasions

- Plan what you want to do and do not want to do during this time. Be open to changing your mind depending on how you feel on the day.
- Consider the venue – for example, it is easier for you to leave someone else's home than it is to ask guests to leave your home.
- Commit yourself to attending an event only for a limited amount of time (e.g. "I'll come for an hour"). This gives you the option to leave if you're feeling uncomfortable. No one will mind if you choose to stay longer.

*You are behind me
I do not have to turn around*

*You are in front of me
I am walking toward you*

*You are beside me
more than any abyss and any
mountain*

*You are in me
I do not have to look elsewhere*

*If the seeds in the black earth
can turn into beautiful roses
What might not the heart of man
become
in its long journey to the stars?*

— GK Chesterton

- Remind yourself that your distress is normal. Others have felt, and currently feel, as you do right now.
- Choose to be around the people you find most supportive.
- Do something to honour your loved one. Hang a special Christmas ornament on the tree, light a candle, plant some flowers.
- Recognise that the absence of your family member will cause pain no matter what you do. This is often a time filled with bittersweet memories. You may find yourself reminiscing. Sharing memories with your family and friends can be helpful.
- Give yourself permission to have fun and experience joy when you can, just as you give yourself permission to mourn when you need to. Remember that feeling happy is not a betrayal; it does not mean you do not miss your loved one.
- Tell people what you might find helpful. Sometimes concerned family or friends may be unsure about how to help. Encourage them to let you grieve in your own way and in your own time.
- Rest if you feel tired. Don't overwhelm or over commit yourself. Spread out events if possible.
- Beware of 'shoulds'. Try to do what fits best for you and your family, not what you or others think you 'should' do. Give yourself permission not to do things.

How to help yourself readjust

Looking after your emotional wellbeing

- Give yourself permission to grieve. Allow yourself to grieve in your own time and your own way. Do not let anyone else tell you what you should be doing or how you should be feeling.
- Talk about the person who has died. It can be helpful to express your thoughts and feelings.
- Look at photos, share stories, listen to music or start a journal when it feels helpful to do so.
- Be kind to yourself.
- Allow yourself to have times when you are distracted from your grief. Similar to working hard, you may need to take some time off from grief to keep you resilient.
- Learn more about what to expect in your bereavement. Information can help your understanding and prevent unrealistic expectations.
- Your loss will mean life will never be the same, you will never forget the person, there will always be reminders, but the pain will lessen. It can be helpful to decide that something meaningful will result from your loss.
- However, you do not have to make sense of your loss or fit it into your spiritual beliefs or meaning of life immediately. This takes time.

- It can be helpful to tell yourself that you will get through this. Even though this may not seem possible now, there are many other grieving people who manage to navigate this experience and you will too.
- Feeling happy, laughing or enjoying moments does not mean you do not miss your family member. It is okay to have these moments during your grief.

Looking after your physical wellbeing

- Look after yourself. Diet is important when you are grieving. A healthy diet will help fight infection. During the early days, you may not feel like eating but try to have small, healthy, regular meals.
- Physical exercise like walking and swimming can improve your mood and energy levels. Fresh air and being outdoors can also relieve stress and lethargy.
- Rest and sleep are important. People who are grieving often have difficulty sleeping. Seek professional help if this continues for a prolonged period.
- Take care not to rely on drugs and alcohol for support. Although your pain may be eased temporarily, it will return once the drug has worn off. It is healthier to experience your feelings, even if it seems more painful in the short term.

- Take time to pamper and indulge yourself – do something special. At first, things might seem pointless and without pleasure, but do them anyway, as they may refresh you and ease tension.
- Massage, relaxation and meditation can also ease tension.

Balancing practical matters

- Grief involves managing many practical changes and challenges. Try your best not to feel overwhelmed by these problems. Deal with each problem one at a time, accepting help and support where needed.
- Set yourself small, achievable goals and plans at first, as they can keep you going, give your life a little meaning and provide purpose and direction. Initially, however, you may not enjoy activities in the way you may have before.
- Take one day at a time and do not look too far ahead.
- Where possible avoid making big, irreversible changes or decisions within the first 6 to 12 months. It is a difficult time to know what you want and need.
- Give yourself quiet time alone. Be mindful of being very busy and being with other people all the time.

Accessing your support network

- Try not to isolate yourself. Stay connected with people who care for you and, as much as possible, allow them to care for you and nurture you.
- Understand your friends' strengths. Know which of your friends are able to listen and those friends who are better at giving practical help or offering distraction from your grief with offers of activities. You may need to tell your friends what you need at any particular time.
- Be wary of advice-givers. Well-meaning people offer many suggestions. Pick and choose what works for you.
- Whilst not giving up hope of feeling better, do not let others minimise your loss and grief. Many people are uncomfortable with grief and will try to "fix it" to make you feel better.
- Ask for help if you feel you need it. You do not have to cope with this on your own.
- Seeking out people who have also experienced the death of a loved one can be helpful. Support groups are available.
- Your family will also be affected by grief. Sometimes differences in grieving can result in tension and disagreement in the family. Try to accept and understand individual differences.

How to help people who are bereaved

Each person will grieve in a unique and personal way. It is important to allow people the time and space to grieve as they choose. However, support is important, and can be very beneficial. The following are some points to keep in mind as you help someone who is grieving.

What to say?

- Avoid platitudes such as 'I know just how you feel' or 'he's in a better place now'. Such answers rarely console, and it is often better to say nothing at all – simply be there.
 - Be available to listen if the person wants to talk. Bereaved people often want to talk a lot about the person who died. Do not change the conversation or avoid using the name of the person.
 - Be comfortable with silence. Sometimes it is simply your company that is needed.
 - Weekends, evenings, anniversaries and holidays can be especially painful for the person. Extra contact and support at these times may be appreciated.
- ## What to do?
- Try to maintain your usual way of interacting with the person who is grieving. If it would be a usual part of your relationship, continue with physical signs of comfort, such as touch and hugs.
 - Try not to avoid the person. This will add to their sense of loss.
 - Do not be afraid to cry or express feelings. This may help the person know that they are not alone, and that someone understands. However, do be conscious of not forcing them into a position where they have to look after your emotional wellbeing.
 - Encourage the person to rest, eat well and care for themselves in a way that feels right for them.
 - Inform yourself about all the reactions we can have when we are grieving.
 - Offer help with practical matters. Often very simple tasks are difficult when one is exhausted by grief. It is more helpful to offer specific assistance rather than asking the person what they want help with, as decision making can be difficult.

- Remember that grief can last for a long time. Continue to visit, make calls, and share your own life and thoughts – anything which reminds the person that they are valued and that you care for them.
- Sometimes a bereaved person may not want to talk. This does not mean they want you to stop contacting them. Reassure them it is okay to tell you this and that you will continue to be there for them when they need and/or are ready.
- Give special attention to any children in the family. They are also grieving.

Looking after yourself

- Be aware that you may feel uncomfortable and may feel you do not know what to say.
- Be aware that the self-esteem of the person may be low, and that they may initially appear very self-centred. This will diminish with time.
- Be aware of your own feelings and needs. You may also be grieving. It is important to care for yourself at this time too.
- Remember grieving takes much longer than you think.

Other supports

- Support groups and/or professional counselling can help some people. Providing information about this can be useful. The person who is grieving can then make their own decision about following these suggestions.
- Sometimes the pain of bereavement is so intense that thoughts of suicide may occur. Contact the person's GP or the Mental Health Line (1800 011 511) if you are concerned.

A helpful video – 'Refuge in Grief' – how to help a grieving friend, can be found at refugeingrief.com

Resources for support

Useful contacts and websites

National Association for Loss and Grief

P 02 6882 9222
www.nalag.org.au

Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement

P 1800 642 066 (Toll free)
www.grief.org.au

National Centre for Childhood Grief

P 1300 654 556
www.childhoodgrief.org.au

GriefLine

P 1300 845 745 (National landline only)
www.griefline.org.au

Lifeline

P 13 11 14
www.lifeline.org.au

Compassionate Friends NSW

P 1800 671 621
www.thecompassionatefriends.org.au

MensLine Australia

P 1300 789 978
www.mensline.org.au

Chaplains/Pastoral and Spiritual Care Workers

Contact your local Minister of Religion or the Pastoral and Spiritual Care staff at the Mater Hospital.
P 02 9900 7688

Community Support

Bereavement Counselling

To make an enquiry or to arrange an appointment to receive bereavement support, feel welcome to contact the below services between Monday and Friday, 8.30am to 5pm, at the location most convenient to you:

Greenwich Hospital, Greenwich
P 02 9903 8333
Neringah Hospital, Wahroonga
P 02 9488 2200
Northern Beaches Palliative Care Service,
Mona Vale P 02 9998 3600

If your friend or family member was known to one of HammondCare's Community Palliative Care Services then you are eligible to access free bereavement counselling from HammondCare. To make an enquiry or to arrange an appointment please contact 1800 427 255.

For bereavement counselling services across the wider Sydney area, the Central Coast and the Southern Highlands, please see the NSW Bereavement Counselling Services Directory, at: www.palliativecarebridge.com.au/resources/25-nsw-bereavement-counselling-services-directory-2018

Solace

Support groups for widows and widowers.
P 02 9519 2820 www.solace.org.au



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