

Sutherland Hospital Bereavement Information



This booklet contains information helpful to people anticipating loss or who may have recently lost someone close to them. It has been put together to help you through what can be a distressing time.

Please know that everyone's grief experience is unique and very personal. There is no right or wrong way to grieve. Grief can be unpredictable and you may experience emotions you have not experienced before. Reactions to this experience can range from discomfort through to a sense of being overwhelmed. In living with grief you will find what help and what doesn't help.

Contact numbers for bereavement services are contained in the booklet but please feel free to contact the ward Social Worker if you would like any further assistance or information.

Your Social Worker _____

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What is Grief?

Grief describes all the emotions and reactions we may experience after significant loss. In particular, the death of someone we love or care about deeply can cause us to feel the full extent of grief. Every person's experience of grief is unique and personal. There is no right or wrong way to grieve and people will grieve in different ways. It is important to respect each other's way of grieving.

How long does grief take?

This is the question most often asked. There are no timetables for grief. Time of itself does not necessarily "heal all". Time is most helpful when the griever can acknowledge and allow the full experience of the loss and learn how to manage those times when grief needs to be "put on hold".

Course of grief

The intensity of grief or mourning will fluctuate over time. The process does not follow a predictable orderly pattern. Rarely will it be static. Grief is composed of many ups and downs, twists and turns, which can temporarily intensify the grief, for minutes, hours, days or longer.

Grief can often flare up for years after a particular death. Certain experiences later in life, e.g. other losses, memorial anniversary dates, birthdays, and times of crisis or joy can temporarily resurrect intense feelings of grief.

Duration of grief

In general, people assume that they should "be over" their grief in only a fraction of the time it actually takes to recover. Rather than being over in a matter of weeks, intense symptoms of acute grief may occur regularly for six to twelve months or longer before subsiding.

In many ways, the pain of grief can last a lifetime, but for most, it doesn't stay the same. The pain of "older" grief is less engulfing, gentler.

The duration of grief, as well as particular aspects which may be more easily resolved, will depend upon each individual mourner, their physical and emotional state, the meaning of the loss to them, the circumstances of the death and the social support available. This allows for a wide

variety of reactions, symptoms, experiences and difference durations all of which can be generally be considered “normal.”

Family and social relationships

Individual grief reactions can be very different, even within families. It can be difficult for family members trying to cope with their feelings and emotions. This can place strain on personal relationships. You may feel that you cannot give as much as is expected of you or you cannot get the support you need because your partner and family are also grieving.

What may help?

- Maintain a “healing” environment : openness of thought; allow expression of emotion
- Avoid excessive use of drugs and alcohol. These can delay the healing process.
- Give yourself time to grieve.
- Give yourself permission to grieve - to experience and reflect on whatever issues/ emotions/ thoughts arise.
- Accept the help and support of others.
- Be assertive, tell others what you need.
- Recognise that your grief is unique. Don't let anyone tell you what you should be doing.
- Don't let anyone minimise your loss. Your perception of what has been lost is what matters.
- Recognise over time your pain will diminish and you will experience more calm and peace.
- Remember to allow yourself time to talk and express your feelings to those around you. Crying can be a way for your body to manage the feelings.
- Be gentle with yourself and where you can indulge in whatever healthy way helps.
- Keeping a diary, writing letters, poems, drawings and keeping mementos may also be a helpful way of keeping your loved one in your thoughts and a part of your life.

Caring for a grieving person

Grieving people - generally speaking - need someone to listen to them, and all the care, encouragement and support they can get to help them re-establish their lives. Some of the most important needs seem to be:

- The need to feel **support**
- The need to explore this new **reality**
- The need to express **feelings**
- The need to move towards **re-establishment** of their life
- The need to **go on living** in a meaningful way

We can help in this process by

Being Aware - Grief is a normal and necessary part of life, and each individual will need to find their own pathway and their own timetable for this

Being There - We can't always solve this problem, but just being around to provide support may help

Being Sensitive - The grieving person has suffered a deep loss, which we may not recognise and which we will certainly perceive differently to them. We need to encourage them to express their thoughts and feelings at this time.

Being Humane - We need to allow the grieving person to openly express all their feelings without judging them. Nobody in grief should have to justify her or his feelings.

Being Ready - To listen when the story is told over and over again. Talking about the deceased is a vital step towards recovery. The enormity of the loss cannot be comprehended all at once but is realised gradually.

Being Patient - Mourning the loss of a loved one takes time

Being Prepared - Familiarise yourself with the wide range of ways in which grief can manifest. Reassurance that such manifestations are normal can prevent the grieving person from feeling totally overwhelmed.

Talking to children about death

Talking with children about death and dying can be difficult, especially if you're grieving yourself. But talking together openly and honestly, as much as you can, will help the child understand what's happening. It is common to want to protect children from death due to concern they will not understand or will become emotionally devastated. However, children can handle death well, and they may be more hurt or frightened if we exclude them from the news or hide our own grief.

When to talk with children about death

Once you know a loved one has died, take the time to explain this to your child as soon as you can. If your child finds out by accident they might be confused and angry.

If you have more than one child in your family, you might talk with the children together or tell each child what has happened individually. It can help to think about the age and temperaments of your children when deciding how to tell them about the death.

What to say when talking about death

Your child needs your help to understand death. So it's best to explain what has happened as simply and truthfully as you can. For example, 'I have some sad news. Your Aunty Sal died this morning'.

Using the word 'death' can avoid problems. If you say that someone has 'passed away' or 'gone to sleep', your child might be confused or frightened. For example, a child who is told that 'Grandpa has gone to sleep forever' might get scared of sleeping because she's afraid she'll never wake up.

Younger children might not know what death means, so you might need to describe it and make sure they understand that death doesn't go away. For example, 'Dying means that Aunty Sal's body has stopped working. She can't breathe or move, or cuddle you anymore'.

If you feel very uncomfortable talking about death, you might need to practice with another adult first. You could go through what you'll say and how you'll answer your child's questions.

It can also help to think about what you'll say if you don't know the answer to your child's questions. It's OK to say something like, 'I don't know but I'll try to find out'.

What children might feel when someone dies

When someone dies, your child might have strong feelings – sadness, despair, anger, confusion and anxiety. There's a big range of normal when it comes to children's feelings after a death. Some might be confused and struggle to understand what has happened. Some might not seem affected by the death at all. Or they might feel guilty that something they said or did caused the death. Some might show signs of separation anxiety and be scared that you or another caregiver might also die.

Your child will likely react more strongly to the death of someone he saw regularly and liked – for example, a friendly neighbour– than to the death of a family member he rarely visited. Young children can also react in the same ways to the death of a loved pet and the death of a person.

Talking about feelings when someone dies

You can let your child know that his feelings are normal, and you might say that you feel something similar. For example, 'Morris, you seem really angry that Nanna died. I'm feeling angry too because I really loved her, and I don't like it that she can't be here with us anymore'.

If your child knows that it's OK to talk about how she's feeling – and that you can cope with her feelings – she'll be more likely to talk more. And if she can talk more, she'll be better able to seek help when she feels overwhelmed. For some children, using toys, books, music or drawing might help them to express or show their feelings.

Tips to help children who are dealing with death

When someone dies, you can help children of all ages by:

- trying to keep to a routine
- letting them know that it's OK to play, be happy and have fun
- Telling teachers or caregivers what has happened so that they support the child.

Children's understanding of death depends on their age and development, so there are also particular things you can do for children of different ages.

Toddlers and pre-schoolers

Children in this age group understand death as a move to another place, but they don't understand that the person is gone forever. Your child might ask whether she can visit the person who died and when the person is coming back. She might ask the same questions over and over. This is her way of trying to understand what has happened. Some of your child's old habits might return – for example, he might wet the bed or start waking at night.

Young children (6-10 years)

At this age, children understand that death is the end of life, but they might believe that death can be prevented or that not everyone will die. They may deny the death has occurred, blame other people, or feel guilty for not “being good” to the dead person. You can help your school-age child by:

- letting him know that the death wasn't his fault
- letting him see you are grieving too
- Answering his questions openly and honestly – for example, if your child asks whether you'll die, you could say, 'Yes, I'll die one day. Everyone dies, but it mostly happens when people are old or very sick'
- suggesting he do a memorial activity – for example, planting a tree, writing a letter or drawing a picture

Children 11 years and over

Like adults they will have difficulty in understanding and handling their emotions, and may bottle their feelings up inside. Sharing our grief will help assist them to share their emotions also. Involve the child in decisions being made or ask for contributions if they chose to share. If they don't share their feelings with you, it may help to let others in their life to know, such as a sports coach, friend's parents, or teachers.

Should children visit someone dying / attend funerals?

As soon as children are able to sit still or react appropriately at family events, they should be given a choice about funerals.

Funerals are important family rituals and can be highly therapeutic events. They reinforce the reality of the death—often critical for a child. Funerals provide opportunities for support. Such rituals validate grief and empower memories of the deceased.

If they have never attended a funeral, they need to know what to expect. Describe everything from how the room is laid out to how the deceased may appear should there be an open casket. Most funeral directors will be willing to assist – taking the child to an empty room and showing them what a casket may look like. Explain that some individuals will cry since they miss the persons while others may laugh or even smile as they reminisce about the deceased individuals. Others may simply catch up with friends or relatives they have not seen for a while.

Offer options. Children can attend part or all of the events. They may go up to the casket (if there is one) or not.

Offering support, including answering the child's questions, taking them for a walk if the child needs respite, or just offering a shoulder to cry may be offered by a parent or close family friend.

Professional Help

There are some conditions which you may need to consider seeking professional support. These may include if you are experiencing the following:

Substantial guilt about things you did or feel you should have done.	Suicidal thoughts which go beyond a passive wish that you would be “better off dead” or could reunite with the one who has died.
Extreme hopelessness, i.e. a sense that no matter how hard you try, you feel you will never be able to recover a life worth living	Prolonged agitation or depression which persists over a couple of months
New or ongoing physical symptoms that are a concern to you	Extreme anger/ rage that seems to be out of your control and that estranges others
Persistent functional impairment in your ability to work and /or accomplish routine tasks required for daily living.	Relying heavily on drugs or alcohol to diminish the pain of the loss.

While any of these conditions may be temporary feature of normal bereavement and grief their continued presence may be cause for concern and may deserve attention by someone beyond the regular support figures in your life.

If yourself or someone known to you is having an extreme grief reaction and could be at risk of harm please contact the following:

Sutherland Hospital Emergency Department (24hrs / 7 days)
Sutherland Hospital Acute Care team 02 9540 7831 (24hrs / 7 days)

Mental distress, call NSW Mental Health Line on 1800 011 511

If life is at risk please call Triple Zero (000) to receive immediate help

The Calvary Bereavement Counselling Service

This service provides counselling for any bereaved adult living in the St George & Sutherland Shire area or any bereaved person living outside the area but the deceased died within the area.

Many people who lose someone close to them often start to feel the impact of their loss at the very time it is expected they will be feeling better or “getting over it”, and, when social support is withdrawing. A professional counsellor can provide a listening ear and an opportunity to explore and process complex thoughts and feelings which may be experienced. Counselling can be helpful for people even some time after the event of death, particularly if there is a sense of being “stuck”, or not being able to “get on” or generally “not coping”.

The Bereavement Service is located at Calvary Hospital. It is a free service. Self-referrals are encouraged. Office hours are 8.00 am to 5.00pm Monday to Friday. You can contact The Bereavement Service on Phone. 9553 3025 for further information or to make a referral.

Practical assistance when someone has died

Who to Notify

When a death occurs in the hospital, the family, person responsible or next of kin will need to contact a funeral director who will organise for your loved one to be moved to the funeral home where funeral arrangements can proceed. There may be people and organisations that you will need to contact at a later stage. These may include:

Organisations to be contacted	Notified of death (Y / N)	Contact number
Australian Electoral Commission		132 326
Australian Taxation Office		132 865
Banks, credit union		
Centrelink payment (or International equivalent)		132 300
Child Support Services		131 272
Clubs		
Credit Card		
Department of Veterans' Affairs		133 254
Employers		
Executor of the will		
Health professionals (eg. Doctor, physiotherapist, dentist, podiatrist)		
Insurance companies		
Landlord, tenants		
Local council		
Medicare		132 011
My Aged Care		1800 200 422
Prepaid Funeral		
Private Health Insurance		

Professional bodies (eg. Accountant, Solicitor)		
Public Trustee		02 9240 0732
Residential Aged Care Facility (nursing home)		
Superannuation fund		
Telecommunication providers (eg. phones, internet)		
Utilities (eg. Gas, electricity, water)		
Vehicle registration and licensing authorities		

Financial Assistance

Centrelink provides a Financial Information Service for Bereavement Assistance Phone: 132 300, to help with education and information on financial and lifestyle issues for all Australians.

Phone: 136 357 to book a financial information service seminar.

Centrelink also provides Bereavement payments which you may be eligible to receive:

- Bereavement Allowance – Short term income support payment paid to recently widowed people to help them to adjust after the death of their partner. Claim needs to be lodged within 4 weeks from the date of your partner’s death. Phone: 132 300.
- Bereavement Payment – Payment to help ease the adjustment to changed financial circumstances after the death of your partner, child or person you were caring for. Also applies for a child who was stillborn or has recently died. Phone: 132 300
- Pension Bonus Bereavement Payment – Help for the partners of Pension Bonus Scheme members who died and didn’t successfully claim the bonus. Phone: 132 300.
- Double Orphan Pension – Payment to help with the costs of caring for children who are orphans or who are unable to be cared for by their parents in certain circumstances. Phone: 136 150.
- Widow Allowance – A payment to ensure women have an adequate income if they have become widowed, divorced, or separated later in

life, were born on or before 1st July, 1955, and have no recent workforce experience. Phone: 132 850.

- Department of Veterans Affairs – You may be eligible for a funeral payment or further payment of an existing allowance. Phone. 1300 550 457.

The following agencies may also help in paying for a funeral:

- Unions, friendly societies and clubs
- Private health funds or Private Insurers
- WorkCover / Motor Accidents Scheme if the death resulted from an accident
- Banks – your loved one's own funds may be released to pay for the funeral.

Death Certificate

Obtaining a death certificate may be a service provided by your chosen funeral director. Alternatively for information on how to obtain a Death Certificate, contact Service NSW Phone: 13 77 88. The Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages is located at 35 Regent Street, Chippendale, SYDNEY NSW 2008, telephone 13 77 88, website: www.bdm.nsw.gov.au

When a Death is reported to the Coroner

In some situations the circumstances surrounding a death are reported to the Coroner for inquiries. You can start making funeral arrangements even if the death is reported to the Coroner, but there may be delays. The funeral director will find out from the Coroner when the body will be released and will organise transportation to the funeral home. Counsellors are available at the Coroner's Court to assist relatives and friends by providing information, support and counselling. More information about the Coroner's Court is available from the hospital Social Worker.

*Forensic Medicine & Coroners Court Complex (FMCCC) Lidcombe
(Western Sydney)
Phone: 8584 7777*

*Coronial Information and Support Program (CISP) Forensic Counselling
Services
Phone: 8584 7777*

Arranging the Funeral

The funeral director can help with organising necessary documents, tailoring a service to your needs, burial or cremation, viewings and organising a person to conduct a funeral.

Funerals are very personal matters. If you wish to incorporate any special requests by your loved one or other family members, including culturally specific arrangements you can discuss this with the funeral director. If you have a minister or priest or someone you would like to conduct the funeral service you can contact the person and advise the funeral director.

Involving children

It can be very important for children to be involved in the planning of a funeral of a close relative. Choosing music, photos or stories and including their special memories of their loved one in the eulogy is a helpful way to encourage open discussion about death and the importance of the lost relationship. It may be appropriate for older children to be given the opportunity to be involved in the service either by doing a reading or sharing personal memories.

Prearranged funerals

Check with the Executor of your loved one's Will to find out if there are any specific directions for the funeral. If the funeral has been pre-arranged you should contact the funeral director involved.

Repatriation funerals

A repatriation funeral involves the transfer of your loved one's remains to or from another part of the world, so they can be laid to rest in accordance with their wishes. The funeral directors may require hospital certification including a letter of non-infection status, to facilitate the repatriation. Costs can vary widely. It is recommended to obtain several quotes from funeral directors. The funeral directors may need to make interstate, and/or international arrangements with relevant state and federal government departments, and the Consul-General of the other country.

Funeral Costs

Costs will vary significantly depending on the nature of the funeral service and the cost of the burial plot. Before finalising the details of the funeral it is often a good idea to call two or three funeral directors to obtain quotes. It is appropriate to ask what the minimum fee is for a basic service and to ask for an itemised list of costs of the optional services.

DISCLAIMER

The Social Work Department of The Sutherland Hospital has prepared the following lists of funeral directors and counselling services as information only and it is not exhaustive. The funeral directors and counselling services listed are not endorsed or supported by the Social Work Department or the South Eastern Sydney Local Health District. Whilst we endeavour to keep the information up-to-date, there may be errors or omissions in the information provided.

Some funeral services in the Sutherland Shire area

Affordable Cremations NSW 1300 95 95 33 www.acnsw.com.au
Adriano Coluccio Funeral Services 02 9604 9604 www.acolucciofs.com
Olsens Funerals 02 9526 1032 / 02 9545 3477 www.olsensfunerals.com.au
Personal Farewells 1300 95 95 33 www.personalfarewells.com.au
Sincerity Funerals 02 9540 9559 www.sincerityfunerals.com.au
Simplicity Funerals 1300 556 222 www.simplicityfunerals.com.au
Southern Cross Funerals 02 9521 4422 www.southerncrossfunerals.com
White Lady Funerals 1300 656 550 www.whiteladyfunerals.com.au

Bereavement and Support Organisations

<p>Suicide Call Back Service 24 hours free telephone counselling for those bereaved by suicide 1300 659 467</p>	<p>National Centre for Childhood Grief 1300 654 556 A fee may be charged. www.childhoodgrief.org.au</p>
<p>Calvary Bereavement Counselling Service 02 9553 3025</p>	<p>Catholic Care Counselling support 13 18 19 8am – 8pm</p>
<p>Compassionate Friends 1800 671 621 www.thecompassionatefriends.org.au</p>	<p>Dial-A-Mum 02 9477 6777 8.00am – 11pm</p>
<p>Red Nose Grief and Loss 1300 308 307 (24 hour support line) www.Rednosegriefandloss.com.au</p>	<p>Homicide Victims Support Group 1800 191 777 www.hvsgnsw.org.au</p>
<p>Enough is Enough Anti Violence Movement 02 9542 4029 Individual counselling, stress and anger management</p>	<p>National Association for Grief and Loss 02 9489 6644 Telephone grief support line www.nalag.org.au</p>
<p>Lifeline 24-hour telephone support service 131 114 www.lifeline.org.au</p>	<p>Relationships Australia (NSW Branch) 1800 044 062 or 1300 364 277 www.relationships.com.au</p>
<p>Southern Community Welfare Free counselling session for those bereaved by suicide 02 9545 0299</p>	<p>Seasons for Growth For Youth, Children and their families 02 8912 2700 www.goodgrief.aust.com</p>
<p>Service NSW bereavement team 13 77 88 Mon – Fri 7am to 7pm <i>Checklist of NSW Government agencies to notify, information on how to organise a funeral and advise on what to do when someone you know has suffered a loss</i></p>	

Resources

<p><i>Coping with Grief</i> 4th Edition Mal & Dianne McKissock</p>	<p><i>No Time for Goodbyes: Coping with Sorrow, Anger and Injustice after a tragic death</i> 6th Edition Janice Harris Lord</p>
<p><i>Healing your Grieving Heart: 100 Practical Ideas</i> Compassionate advice and simple activities to help you through your loss Alan D. Wolfelt PhD</p>	<p><i>Healing your Grieving Heart: 100 Practical Ideas For Teens</i> Alan D. Wolfelt PhD</p>
<p><i>Healing your Grieving Heart: 100 Practical Ideas For Kids</i> Alan D. Wolfelt PhD</p>	<p><i>After Suicide: Help for the Bereaved</i> Dr Sheila Clark</p>
<p><i>Red Chocolate Elephants: For Children Bereaved by Suicide</i> Book & DVD Diana Sands PhD</p>	

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Neimeyer, R. (2000) *Lessons of loss: A guide to coping*. Clayton, Australia: Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement.

http://raisingchildren.net.au/articles/trauma_when_someone_dies.html

[https://www.humanservices.gov.au/individuals/subjects/what-do-following-death- Table Who to Notify](https://www.humanservices.gov.au/individuals/subjects/what-do-following-death-Table_Who_to_Notify)

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