



**ST VINCENT'S
HOSPITAL**
MELBOURNE

A FACILITY OF ST VINCENT'S HEALTH AUSTRALIA



What to do when someone dies

Information for carers, families and friends

The staff at St Vincent's Health Melbourne extend our deep sympathy to you and those impacted by the death of your family member or loved one.

We understand that this can be a time of great sadness and that you may need to make some hard decisions.



Rosemary for remembrance

Acknowledgements

This booklet was updated by Kathryn Dalton, Penny Lording, Melinda Collins and Lisa Braddy from the Social Work Department at St Vincent's Hospital Melbourne (SVHM). We also had support from the SVHM Social Work Student Unit. The booklet draws on information from Monash Health and Western Health. We would like to thank these health services for sharing their information with us.

Input has also been received from the members of the St Vincent's Hospital COVID-19 End of Life Care and Bereavement Care Response group. Members of this group come from Pastoral Care, SVHM Cultural Diversity Program, SVHM Aboriginal Health Unit and Megan Mclean (consumer representative).

Would you like to help us improve this booklet?

An evaluation survey can be found via this QR code.



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This booklet was created as a general guide with information on practical matters. It includes grief and support services that might be helpful after someone has died. There's no need to read this booklet page by page. You can just read the sections that you need at the time.

If you need further support or information, please call:

1. The St Vincent's Hospital Melbourne Social Work Department on:
Phone: 03 9231 3436
Monday to Friday: 9:00am-4:30pm
You can also ask a nurse to contact a social worker on your behalf.
2. The St Vincent's Hospital Melbourne Pastoral Care team for support with spiritual or religious needs on:
Phone: 03 9231 2211 and ask for Pastoral Care on pager 208.
7 days per week: 8:30am - 4:30pm
You can also ask your nurse to contact a pastoral care worker on your behalf.
3. If you need an interpreter, the hospital has access to a free, confidential interpreting service. Please ask your doctor or nurse to contact an interpreter for you.

There are people in the hospital who are here to support you during this difficult time.

- Nurses have an important role supporting families. Nurses also speak with other staff on the ward. Nurses can help you get in contact with a member from the team if needed.
- Pastoral care practitioners offer spiritual and emotional support to patients, families and carers. They offer support to people from all faiths and can arrange for someone from your faith community to visit during a hospital admission.
- Social workers provide emotional and practical support to patients, families and carers. Social workers can provide support navigating services following the death of a loved one.

If you would like support, a nurses can contact a pastoral care practitioner or a social worker for you.

Italian:

HA BISOGNO DI UN INTERPRETE?

L'ospedale offre un servizio interpreti gratuito e confidenziale. Chieda al Suo medico o alla Sua infermiera di organizzarLe un interprete

Spanish:

¿NECESITA UN INTÉRPRETE?

El hospital le ofrece un servicio de intérpretes gratuito y confidencial. Por favor, solicite a su médico o enfermera que lo organice.

Greek:

ΧΡΕΙΑΖΕΣΤΕ ΔΙΕΡΜΗΝΕΑ;

Το νοσοκομείο παρέχει δωρεάν, εμπιστευτική υπηρεσία διερμηνείας. Παρακαλείστε να ζητάτε από το γιατρό ή νοσοκόμο σας να κανονίζει διερμηνέα για σας.

Croatian:

TREBA LI VAM TUMAČ?

Bolnica pruža besplatnu i povjerljivu službu tumača. Molimo vas, upitajte vašeg liječnika ili medicinsku sestru da vam to organiziraju.

Serbian:

ДА ЛИ ВАМ ТРЕБА ПРЕВОДИЛАЦ?

Болница пружа бесплатне, поверљиве услуге преводиоца. Замолите свог лекара или медицинску сестру да вам обезбеде преводиоца.

Vietnamese:

QUÍ VỊ CÓ CẦN THÔNG NGÔN VIÊN KHÔNG?

Bệnh viện cung cấp dịch vụ thông ngôn miễn phí và kín đáo. Xin yêu cầu bác sĩ hay y tá sắp xếp thông ngôn viên cho quý vị.

Traditional Chinese:

您需要傳譯員嗎？

本醫院提供免費而保密的傳譯服務。請要求您的醫生或護士為您安排傳譯員。

Turkish:

TERCÜMANA İHTİYACINIZ VAR MI?

Hastanemiz ücretsiz ve gizlilik ilkesine bağlı tercümanlık hizmeti sunmaktadır. Doktorunuz veya hemşirenizden size bir tercüman temin etmelerini rica ediniz.

Somali:

MA U BAAHAN TAHAY TURJUMAAN?

Isbitaalku wuxuu bixiyaa adeeg turjumaan oo lacag la'aan ah, qarsoodina ah. Fadlan weydii dhaqtarkaaga ama kalkaaliyahaaga inay turjumaan kuu ballamiyaan.

Arabic:

هل أنت بحاجة إلى مترجم
تقدم المستشفى خدمة ترجمة مجانية وسرية. الرجاء الطلب من طبيبك أو الممرضة
الترتيب لمترجم لأجلك.

The first few days

The time straight after a death can be one of mixed feelings and reactions as people are often in shock. It can feel like you are in a dream and may find it hard to think clearly.

There are some things that need to be done – either by you, or other people close to the person who has died.

Take time to speak with hospital staff about any cultural or religious practices that you would like to be taken into account.

An Aboriginal Hospital Liaison Officer (AHLO) is available to provide support to families who are from an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander background.

You or someone close to you will need to make contact with family members and friends to inform them of the death.

After they have died, your loved one will be moved to a place within St Vincent's Hospital until you have chosen a funeral director. The funeral director will then contact St Vincent's Hospital and arrange for your loved one to be moved into their care.

The Death Certificate

Confirming someone has died must be done by a Medical Officer or a Registered Nurse. This is a legal requirement.

A Medical Officer will fill in the form saying someone has died. Copies will be given to the Funeral Director. The Funeral Director will get a standard death certificate for you. A formal death certificate will be posted to you in the next few weeks.

Can visiting or viewing the deceased person be arranged?

If you would like to see your loved one after they have died, please talk to a nurse on the ward or the funeral director. They will talk to you about whether this can be done.

You might decide to find other ways to say goodbye to your loved one. This could include spending time doing their favourite activity or holding an item that belonged to them. This does not replace saying goodbye to someone. It can give you time to reflect on your loved one's life and how important they were to you. This can help you grieve.

You can ask your funeral director about seeing them once they have been transferred to their care.

The Victorian Coroner

Sometimes a doctor may need to ask the Coroner to find out why a person has died. Staff will advise you if this is needed and what this might mean for you. For more information, you can access a helpful booklet from the Coroner's Court called "What do I do now?" This is available from their website at: www.coronerscourt.vic.gov.au



The first weeks

How do I go about making funeral arrangements?

Some things for you, your family and friends to consider are:

- Have funeral plans been made in advance?
- Had a funeral director been chosen by the person before they died?
- Are there any funeral insurance documents?
- Is there a will?

Choosing a funeral director

St Vincent's Hospital Melbourne can't tell you which funeral directors to choose. Deciding on a funeral director should be talked about by the family and friends of the person who has died. Someone will then need to make a decision about who to choose.

Making plans for a funeral can be very hard. This is because you are trying to make important decisions but are also probably in a state of high emotion.

It may be helpful to understand that some of the people in your family and friendship circle will have different thoughts to you. This may be about the cost or the funeral details which you may not have thought of until now. Try and make a plan ready to compromise and look after yourself and each other.

The Australian Funeral Directors Association is a public information service. You may find their website helpful for finding a funeral director or planning a funeral. Contact details: www.afda.org.au or 03 9859 9966

A funeral director can be very helpful. They will talk to you about which type of funeral you would like. This includes whether you would like a burial or cremation.

They will gather extra information about your loved one to complete the death certificate. They can also help prepare death notices, poems and tributes. The internet is another great resource.

Sometimes families would like a burial, cremation or interment in a different place. This could be another town, interstate or overseas. Talk to the funeral director about this as soon as possible.

Burial or cremation arrangements

A lot of families have a service after the death of a family member. This could be a

private or public service such as:

- A funeral.
- Memorial service.
- Private burial.
- Cremation.
- It may or may not be religious or cultural.

Legal obligations

You must have a burial, interment or cremation. This is a legal requirement. It must be done through a recognised cemetery or crematorium.

A funeral is not a legal requirement. It may be arranged or performed by a number of people. This could be a funeral director, religious leader or lay person.



Practical and financial matters

There are a number of practical matters which may arise in the days and weeks following a person's death. This may include contacting people or organisations who may have been working with or supporting the person who has died.

You may wish to ask someone to help you, or to carry out tasks on your behalf.

The Department of Health and Human Services have a very useful 'Who to notify checklist' which can guide you. This is located on the next page.



Useful list of who to notify

Person or organisation	Contact Details	Notified (Yes/No)
Accountant		
Australian Taxation Office	13 28 65	
Bank/Credit union		
Centrelink	13 23 00	
Child Support Services	13 12 72	
Community groups/clubs		
Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA)	13 32 54	
Australian Electoral Commission		
Employers/Business partners		
Equipment hire (i.e. hospital/private service)		
Executor of the will		
Foreign Pension Authority		
Funeral Director		
Funeral insurance		
Health insurance fund		
Health professionals (GP, case manager, dentist etc.)		
Insurance companies (i.e. car, home and contents)		
Landlord/real estate agent		
Local council (rates, council services)		
Medicare	13 20 11	
Public Trustee		
School/university		
Solicitor/lawyer		
Superannuation Fund		
Utility Companies (gas, electricity, water)		
Vic Roads (license, registration)	13 11 71	

Adapted from: The Department of Health and Human Services have a very useful 'Who to notify checklist'

Space for notes:

Space for notes:

Financial assistance

Paying for a funeral or other costs is often a worry when planning a funeral or burial.

You can look into the following financial supports if needed:

- Centrelink (telephone: 13 23 00 or www.centrelink.gov.au).
- State Trustees (telephone: 1300 138 672) may be able to provide financial assistance depending on your circumstances.
- Bereavement Assistance Service – low cost funeral service. Payment is based on pension status or exceptional financial circumstances. Phone: 03 9564 7778.

Other financial supports are listed on page 22.

Legal assistance

It is often helpful to get legal advice about areas such as wills or probate.

A will is a legal document written by the person who has died. A will says how they would like their belonging to be distributed after their death.

The Probate Office is part of the Supreme Court. Its role is to officially recognise an Executor. An Executor is the person named in the will as being authorised to carry out the wishes in the will.

If there is no will, the Court will appoint an Administrator. This is usually the next of kin. More information about what happens where there is no will can be found on the Victoria Legal Aid website: <https://www.legalaid.vic.gov.au/find-legal-answers/wills-and-estates/if-someone-dies-without-will>

You can get legal advice from the following:

- Victorian Legal Aid – free legal information.
Phone: 1300 792 387.
Website: www.legalaid.vic.gov.au
- Federation of Community Legal Centres – find a local community legal centre.
Phone: 9652 1500.
- Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service – free legal advice for members of the Aboriginal community.
Phone: 9418 5999 or 1800 064 865.
Website: www.vals.org.au
- Law institute of Victoria – the “Find a Lawyer Service” helps to find a specialist lawyer in your area. Bookings via www.liv.asn.au/find-a-lawyer can allow for discounted fees.

The Longer Journey

Understanding grief

Grief is the response we have when we have experienced a significant loss. It is a natural response and every person's experience is different.

There is no normal time period for grieving. It can take many months and years to adjust into a new life without your family member or friend. Feelings often come and go in no particular order or consistent manner.

Feelings

The feelings experienced when someone close to you dies may include:

- Guilt
- Loneliness
- Sadness
- Anger
- Relief
- Acceptance
- Shock
- Fatigue



You may also feel a sense of relief and acceptance. Especially if the deceased person had been ill for a long time, or the relationship with that person had been difficult. You may also experience positive feelings including laughter when reflecting on the person's life. This is also a normal part of grief.

Thoughts

Your thoughts may become focused on the person who has died or you may feel confused about what has happened. This can include asking questions about life and any previous spiritual or religious beliefs.

Helpful ways to cope with grief

It is important to remember what is helpful to you may not be the same for other people. It is also important to remember that others may not be able to respond as you would want.

For some people grief never goes away, but becomes more bearable over time. As the strength of grief reduces, it will become easier to focus on special positive memories.

There is often endless advice on what you should and should not do when you are grieving. Try to be kind to yourself and take one day at a time. Don't be too hard on yourself if you don't handle things as well as you normally would. You might find having a list of things that you know would lift your mood or comfort you helpful.

If you need some ideas, the following list may be useful to keep in mind to get through hard times:

- Try not to make big decisions too soon.
- Try to keep your usual routine (having regular meals, exercise and sleep where possible).
- Create a memorial by doing or making something to remember the person who has died.
- Continue the relationship with the person who has died by talking to them, looking at photos and visiting special places.
- Develop your own rituals such lighting a candle, listening to special music, making a special place to think about the person.
- Share your thoughts and feelings with other people as this can help can reduce the feelings of loneliness and isolation that come with grief.
- Catch up with friends and families.
- Speak on the telephone or by using a program like FaceTime, Zoom, Whatsapp etc.
- Write letters or cards.
- Allow people to help you. For example, ask them to mow the lawn and cook dinners.
- Talk to a trusted person about your feelings.
- Try soothing or relaxing activities like listening to music, gardening or reading.

Interacting with family and friends

You may be given lots of well-meaning advice from family, friends, and those around you. Some of it will be painful and there are possibly no words that will help. Sometimes what was helpful one day could feel painful the next. This roller coaster of feelings can be hard for everyone to deal with at times.

If you are feeling this way, consider reaching out to health professionals (a list of useful supports are on page 21 and 212).

Support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

Aboriginal Hospital Liaison Officers (AHLO) are available to provide culturally appropriate support. You can ask hospital staff if you would like support from an AHLO.

An Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander patient or family who requires support with funeral arrangements can contact:

Aboriginal Advancement League
2 Watt Street, Thornbury VIC 3071
Phone: 03 9480 7777

The Department of Health and Human Services also have a factsheet about Sorry Business during COVID-19 which is located here:

<https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/aboriginal-community-sorry-business-covid-19>

Support for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse people

There are often specific cultural or religious practices that some people follow after a death.

We live in a community with many nationalities and cultural practices. It may be useful to contact your local church to help you at this time. You could also contact a specific cultural community organisation or group to help you. This could involve help during the funeral process or during times of grief.

If needed, Pastoral Care Services can also assist. They can make contact with community religious leaders to provide support at this time.

If you need an interpreter, please ask the hospital staff who will arrange one for you.

Supporting children and helping them to understand death

Often parents and families are concerned about the impact of a death on children and adolescents.

Children are affected by the death of a significant person in their family. This can affect different children in many different ways. Even very young children who cannot speak or seem too young to understand can be affected. What is known is that even very young children react to the person not being around. Children may express their grief in the following ways.

Feelings

- Shock and disbelief.
- Sadness.
- Fear and guilt.
- Anger.
- Anxiety about the future.
- Being focused on the death and how it occurred.



Behaviours

- A small baby whose parent has died may cry when passed to an adult they don't know well.
- Clinging to or wanting to be held by parents.
- Changes in sleep or toileting habits.
- Headache, sore tummy or nausea.
- Seeking physical affection like cuddles.
- Mood swings or withdrawal from social activities.
- Troublesome behaviours such as fighting, arguing and ignoring requests.
- Refusing to go to school or complete school tasks at home.

Parents and caregivers of children may notice that having small children around may be a mixed blessing. They can be a welcome distraction but the energy needed to care for them can feel overwhelming.

Some children can quickly switch between seeming caring and understanding of your grief to focusing things back on themselves. This is a normal part of how children cope with grief.

General Support services

Grief and bereavement support

- **Your local doctor/General Practitioner (GP)** can start the conversation about how you are feeling and refer to relevant health professionals.
- **Community Nursing Services** or local **Community Health Centre** may offer counselling support.
- **The Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement.**
Phone: 9265 2100 or 1800 642 066
Website: www.grief.org.au
- **Bereavement Information Referral Service.**
Phone: 1300 664 786
Website: www.grief.org.au
- **Victorian Aboriginal Health Service (VAHS)** can provide counselling for members of the Aboriginal community.
Phone: 9419 3000
Website: www.vahs.org.au

Translated resources on bereavement and grief

- Bereavement, grief and loss video available in Arabic, Greek, Italian and Chinese (Simplified and Traditional)
[https://www.healthtranslations.vic.gov.au/bhcv2/bhcht.nsf/PresentDetail?Open&s=Bereavement, grief and loss \(video\)](https://www.healthtranslations.vic.gov.au/bhcv2/bhcht.nsf/PresentDetail?Open&s=Bereavement,grief%20and%20loss%20(video))
- Further translated information is at:
<https://www.healthtranslations.vic.gov.au>

When you need someone to talk to

- **Griefline**
Phone: 1300 845 745 (Midday to 3am, 7 days a week)
- **MyGrief App (Australian Centre for Grief and Palliative Care)**
Download from the App Store for iPhone or Google Play for Android
- **Parents Line**
Phone: 13 22 89 (8am to Midnight)
- **Men's Line**
Phone: 1300 789 978 (24 hour support)
- **Kids Help Line**
Phone: 1800 55 1800 (ages 5-25, 24 hour support)
- **Life Line**
Phone: 13 11 14 (24 hour support)
- **Beyond Blue**
Phone: 1300 224 636 (24 hour support)
Online Chat (11am-12am) - Beyond Blue Webchat Support Service
- **Victorian Suicide Helpline**
Phone: 1300 651 251 (24 hour support)

When You Need Information and Resources

- **Palliative Care Victoria**
Phone: 9662 9644
Website: www.pallcarevic.asn.au
- **National Association for Loss and Grief**
Phone: 9329 4003
Website: www.nalag.org.au
- **Services Australia:** 'What to do when someone dies'.
www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/individuals/subjects/death-and-bereavement/what-do-when-someone-dies
- **Carer Help**
Diverse support for family carers before and after death www.carerhelp.com.au

When You Need a Space to Share How You're Feeling

- **Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement**

Online Bereavement Support Groups

Phone: 1800 642 066 to discuss the following groups

Talking Grief Support Group - For women and men 65+ who have experienced a bereavement

Bereaved Partners Support Group - For those aged up to 65 who are seeking support and connection after the death of a partner

Kids Grieve Too (KG2) - To assist children aged 6-12 express grief in creative ways

Death of a Parent (DOP) - For adults of all ages who are grieving the death of a parent

COVID-19 Support Group - Phone 1800 22 22 00

Financial services

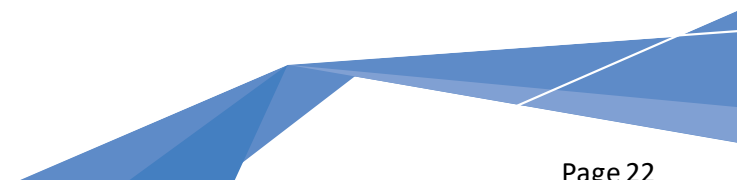
- **Centrelink** – you might be eligible for government financial assistance.

Phone: 13 23 00

Website: www.centrelink.gov.au

- **Financial Counselling Australia** - free phone information and support to people in financial difficulty.

Phone: 1800 007 007



Helpful reading material

Books for children and teenagers

There are many different children's books, which can be helpful. They cover support children and teenagers following the death of someone they know or love. The following could be read with a child or by a teenager.

- Healing your grieving heart for teens: 100 Practical Ideas; Alan D Wolfert (2001)
- Angel Catcher for Kids: A Journal to help you remember the person you love who died; Amy Eldon (2002)
- The grief book: Strategies for young people; Elizabeth Vercoe and Kerry Abramowski (2004)
- Beginnings and endings with lifetimes in between; Bryan Mellonie and Robert Ingpen (2005)
- Tear Soup; Pat Schwiebert (2005)
- You are not alone: Teens talk about life after the loss of a parent; Lynne Hughes (2005)
- How much do I love you; Sam McBratney (2008)
- Weird is Normal: When teenagers grieve; Jenny Lee Wheeler (2010)
- Teenagers and grief; Doris Zagdanski (2012)
- What's dead mean? How to help children cope with death; Doris Zagdanski (2008)
- The Rabbit Listened; Cori Doerrfield (2018)



General reading list

- Surviving Traumatic Grief: When Loved Ones Die in a Disaster; Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement
- Lessons of loss: A guide to coping; Robert A Neimeyer, USA (2001)
- Grief and remembering: 25 Australians tell it like it is; Allan Kelleher, Australia (2001)
- A to Z, Reflections on loss and grief; Linda Espie, Australia (2003)
- The Year of Magical Thinking; Joan Didion (2005)
- After Life, After You: True Stories of Love, Grief and Hope; S.K Reid (2010)
- Now that the funeral is over: The commonsense guide for grieving people; Doris Zagdanski, Australia (2017)
- Stuck for words: What to say to someone who is grieving; Doris Zagdanski, Australia (2017)
- Teen Grief: Caring for the grieving teenage heart; Gary Roe (2019)
- 35 ways to help a grieving child; The Dougay Centre (2020)



Once again – we send you our deepest sympathy and hope that the memories you have of your loved one can bring a smile to your face amongst these painful times.

Do take care.