The information provided in this fact sheet reflects the questions commonly asked by family and friends of someone who died while in hospital.

Health workers understand that cultural practices surrounding death, grief and burial vary widely, and practices is very important. Let the staff know if you have any requirements or concerns.

WHAT TO DO FOLLOWING A DEATH IN HOSPITAL

WHO TO NOTIFY

When a death occurs in a hospital you will need to engage a Funeral Director, within a few hours, to arrange for the deceased to be moved to the funeral home. The Funeral Director will assist you with funeral and burial arrangements, and provide advice on other plans and notifications that you need to make.

If the death is reported to the Coroner for investigation, as is required by law in certain circumstances, the deceased will be taken to the Coroner’s Court. The funeral director will identify when the body will be released, and organise transportation to the funeral home. You can start making funeral arrangements during this process, but there may be delays.

The Coroner’s Court employs counsellors who provide information, support and counselling; visit www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au/coroners or phone 8584 7777 or

Hospital staff including Social Workers and Chaplains can direct you to culturally specific funeral directors or celebrants.

Others to be notified of a death include:

- Employers and educational institutions
- Insurance companies, financial institutions and credit card companies
- Department of Veteran’s Affairs and/or Centrelink
- Doctors, health funds and organisations providing social services
- Real Estate Agents / landlords
- A lawyer for legal matters such as probate and wills
- Australian Taxation Office
- Utility suppliers eg telephone, water, gas and electricity.

A lawyer will often offer to make these notifications when settling the estate.

ARRANGING A FUNERAL

The funeral director will personalise the ceremony to suit your needs, and help with:

- Prompting whether the deceased had a Will outlining their wishes
- Documentation such as the death certificate and notices
- Viewings
- Cultural practices.
**Involving Children**

Some families and traditions do not involve children in a funeral. For others including children in the planning of a funeral of a close relative is very important.

Selecting music, photos, stories and providing special memories for the eulogy, can help a child to cope with their feelings. It will encourage open discussion about death, the importance of the relationship, and their feelings.

It may be appropriate to invite older children to be involved in the service, by perhaps sharing memories by a reading.

**Cost**

The cost of a funeral can vary significantly. It is acceptable to: obtain quotes, and to ask for the minimum fee for a basic service and for a list of optional services and costs.

**Financial Assistance**

The deceased’s own funds can be released to pay for the funeral. If there are insufficient funds the following agencies may help to pay for the funeral:

- Centrelink and/or Department of Veterans Affairs
- Unions, friendly societies and clubs
- Private insurers and health funds
- WorkCover or the Motor Accidents Scheme if the death resulted from an accident

**DEATH CERTIFICATE**

You will need to ensure that a death certificate is produced by the NSW Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages: Ph: 1300 655 236.

A Funeral Director may offer to arrange this for you, for a fee.

A practical guide to coping with bereavement. Translated by All Language Typesetters, June 2011
COMMON RESPONSES TO DEATH

GRIEF

Grief is a common response to loss. Every person’s experience and reaction is unique and personal. Strain can be placed on relationships when people are trying to cope with feelings and emotions. There is no right or wrong way to grieve, and it is important to respect this.

EMOTIONAL REACTIONS

Shock/disbelief: it can be hard to accept your loss. You may have feelings of numbness or detachment from the world and an inability to concentrate.

Anxiety: ranges from feelings of nervousness to panic and distress. This is a common reaction, and in many cases these feelings improve with time.

Helplessness: you may feel sadness for deaths, injuries and losses of every kind. We can experience a longing for all that has gone, or regrets for things not said or done.

Anger: is a deep and difficult emotion to control. Underneath anger, there is often hurt or fear. You may feel angry for what has happened or at the senselessness of your loss. It is not uncommon to feel anger towards the person who died, for leaving you alone.

Preoccupation with thoughts about the death: you may feel the need to explain in detail the circumstances of the death. This can be an important part of the process of grieving and in coming to acknowledge and accept death.

Dreams: It is not unusual to dream of your loved one or to feel a sense of presence. This can be comforting, and help you to feel connected to the person who has died.

PHYSICAL REACTIONS

Sometimes your body will respond to the grief you are feeling. Common sensations include:

- Tiredness, inability to sleep, bad dreams
- Dizziness, palpitations, shakes or difficulty breathing
- Nausea, diarrhoea
- Changes to sexual interest
- Lack of appetite
- Increase in smoking and/or drinking
- Irritability, emotional outbursts and restlessness
- Loss of memory, concentration and unable to maintain organised activity
- Muscular tension which may lead to pain, eg headache, neck and backache.

COPING WITH GRIEF

You may experience a range of emotions such as sadness, anger, detachment and numbness. Crying can be a way for your body to cope with feelings. You may feel the need to stay with a friend or relative or you may want to be alone. Give yourself the ‘space’ you need; allow yourself time to talk and express your feelings to those around you.

While traditional practices and rituals around significant dates, such as birthdays and anniversaries, can bring comfort to those who are grieving, for others it may produce recurring periods of grief. Don’t put time limits on your grief.

It can be helpful to seek support from social workers, counsellors, pastoral care workers etc. Ask for help, from friends, even if it for simple tasks like shopping or making phone calls.

Important decisions may be best made with assistance. You may wish to seek professional advice from a lawyer, counsellor, etc.
CARING FOR SOMEONE WHO IS GRIEVING

People may need support many months after the death. Be sensitive to the depth and intensity of other’s loss and pain, and allow the person to feel their pain. Allow them to have memories and to talk about the deceased.

Offer to share in their rituals and traditional practices to show respect for their culture and that of the deceased. Acknowledge your own discomfort in dealing with grief, and recognise that this is fine. It may be helpful to offer practical assistance such as shopping and household tasks.

HELPING CHILDREN TO COPE WITH DEATH

A child’s grief response can depend on their age at the time of death. It is important to allow children to share in the mourning process. In times of bereavement, it is often difficult to know how to talk to children about what has happened: adults naturally want to protect them from the pain and sadness of loss. Adults can be so engulfed by their own pain that they forget that a child is also feeling things that are hard for them to understand, or verbalise.

EMOTIONAL REACTIONS

Confusion – children may ask many questions, or the same questions repeatedly to try and understand the loss.

Fear – children may fear: being left alone, leaving loved ones, a similar event happening again, or an event being beyond their control.

Sadness – tears, tantrums or withdrawal from usual daily activities, may be common.

Guilt – about their contribution to cause what happened: however unreal this may be.

Anxiety – behaviour may be unsettled and restless. The child may become: irritable, increasingly insecure, or regress to ‘babyish’ behaviour such as clinging, bed wetting, thumb sucking, nail biting, stuttering and sleeplessness.

Anger - at the unfairness of the situation and at being let down or disappointed.

Denial – children may withdraw into their fantasy world, or appear emotionally indifferent and unaffected. Their behaviour may remain unchanged.

PHYSICAL SYMPTOMS

Common symptoms of grief in children include:

- tiredness
- difficulty breathing, nausea, dizziness, palpitations, shakes
- muscular aches, particularly headache and abdominal pain
- rashes
- change in appetite, toileting habits and sleep patterns.

DELAYED REACTIONS

Children make sense of grief and loss issues in their own time and way. Birthdays, holidays and anniversaries can serve as reminders of painful memories.

It’s helpful to be sensitive to the individual needs of the child, to acknowledge their experiences and provide support.
WHERE TO GO TO FOR SUPPORT OR COUNSELLING

- Doctors
- School counsellors
- Hospital social workers
- Child, Youth and Family Team in your area
- Community or spiritual leaders

You may wish to consider seeking professional advice in time if you:

- Feel that you can't manage the recurrent intense feelings or physical reactions to your loss
- Have nightmares and poor sleep, which doesn't improve
- Feel isolated or have no one to share your emotions with
- Develop sexual problems, or your relationships are affected
- Smoke, drink or take drugs more than usual
- Are experiencing exhaustion if you have been providing support to a grieving person
- Are experiencing a crisis, or your work performance suffers
- Notice those around you are particularly vulnerable.

MORE INFORMATION

For more information, talk to the social worker on the number listed below. If you are in the hospital, your doctor or nurse can contact them for you.

DO YOU NEED AN INTERPRETER?

Face-to-face or telephone interpreting is available for patients and their families. This can be arranged by hospital staff.

You can call all government services using the Telephone Interpreter Service (13 14 50).

Contact:

Available in Arabic, Chinese, Greek, Italian, Macedonian, Russian & Spanish

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BEREAVEMENT COUNSELLING AND SUPPORT ORGANISATIONS

Bereavement Care Centre  
www.bereavementcare.com.au  
A fee may be charged.  
Ph: 1300 654 556

Beyond Blue  
www.beyondblue.org.au  
Ph: 13 00 224 636

Calvary Bereavement Service  
Bereavement support, counselling and education for the St George and Sutherland Area  
Ph: 9553 3025

Centacare  
www.centacare.org  
Ph: 9390 5366 – Counselling support

Compassionate Friends  
www.thecompassionatefriends.org.au  
Ph: 9290 2355

Dial-A-Mum  
Ph: 9477 6777

Enough is Enough  
Anti Violence Movement  
Ph: 9542 4029

Homicide Victims Support Group  
www hvsgnsw org au  
Ph: 8833 8400  
Ph: 1800 191 777 (24 hour telephone service)

Lifeline  
24-hour telephone support service  
Ph: 131 114

National Association for Grief and Loss  
www nalag org au  
Ph: 6882 9222

Relationships Australia  
www relationships com au  
Ph: 1800 044 062

Salvation Army Care Line  
24 hour telephone counselling service  
Ph: 1300 363 622

Seasons for Growth  
For children, young adults and their families  
www goodgrief aust com  
Ph: 8912 2700

SIDS and Kids  
24 hour support line  
www sidsandkids org  
Ph: 1800 651 186

Support After Suicide  
Department of Forensic Medicine  
Ph: 8584 7800

Transcultural Mental Health Service  
Enables those in distress to talk with someone, in their first language  
www dhi gov au tmhc tmhc default aspx  
Phone: 9840 3800