

A LifeCare® Guide to



Grief  
and  
Bereavement

“*Treasure each other in the recognition that we do not know how long we should have each other.*”

— Joshua Loth Liebman

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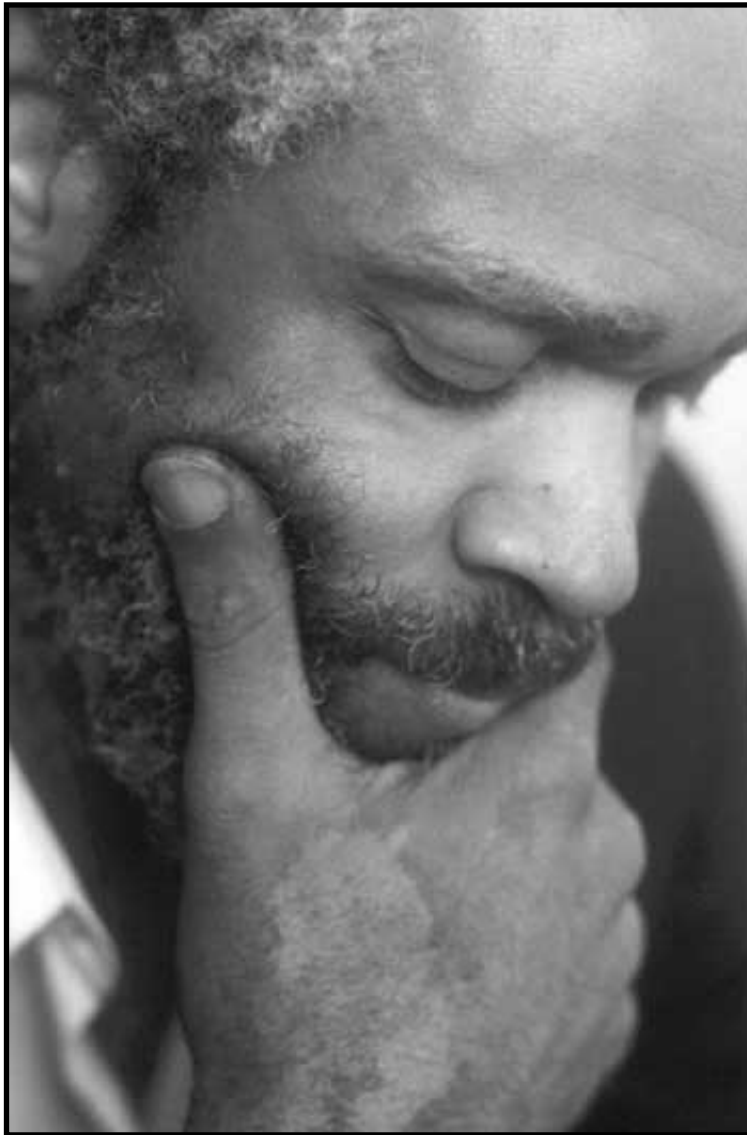
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# Introduction



"I will open my heart in  
trust that,  
In ways I do not now  
understand,  
My loved one will continue  
to be present in my life."

—Martha Whitmore  
Hickman

**I**f you are reading this guide, you have probably lost a loved one—an event that can be devastating to you and those close to you. Grieving is a personal and unique process. There are no right or wrong ways to grieve, but there are ways of getting support and taking care of yourself that can ease your feelings of loss. This guide includes practical information on feelings associated with grief; mourning specific

losses; changes in relationships; taking care of yourself; and remembering your loved one. The more you learn about grief and bereavement, the better you will be able to cope during this difficult time and in the years to come. If you would like information on how to help someone else cope with the loss of a loved one, please refer to *A LifeCare® Guide to Helping Others Cope With Grief*.

# When Does Grief Begin?



"The most essential thing in life is to develop an unafraid, heartfelt communication with others, and it is never more important than with a dying person."

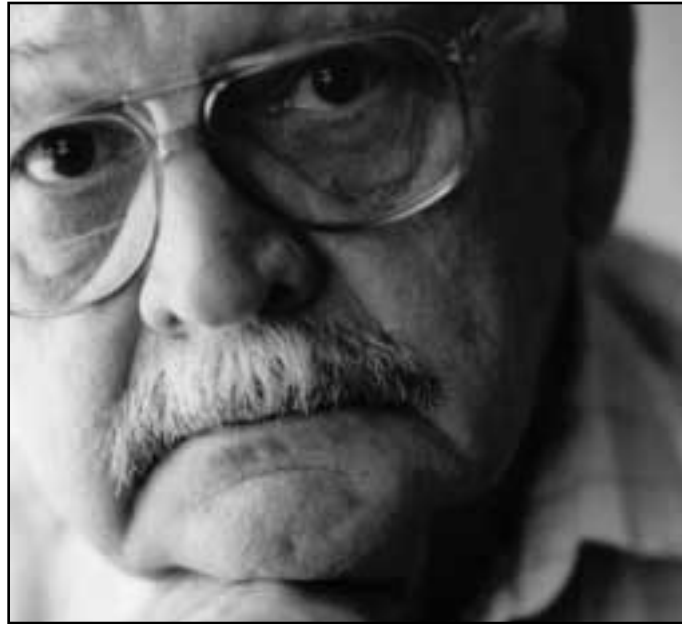
—Sogyal Rinpoche

**T**he process of grief is unique to each individual who experiences it. The moment you begin to grieve for a loved one may depend on many different circumstances, such as whether the death was sudden and unexpected or whether it occurred after a prolonged terminal illness.



## Terminal Illness

What many people don't realize is that grieving can begin simply with the realization that your loved one will die. The minute the doctor says there is an abnormality on the mammogram, or a suspicious spot on the lung X-ray, fear sets in. "What if this is serious?" "What if he has cancer?" "What if she dies?" This is the grief process—fearing the loss, and reacting emotionally to the reality of the threat—"It can't be, there must be some mistake," or "This isn't right!" A roller coaster of emotional experiences—from hope to despair—may begin when you first hear the news, and can continue over the course of the illness and long after the passing of your loved one.



Coping with a terminal illness may leave you feeling many things. Along with the difficulty and demands of the illness and the impending death, there is opportunity. You may find that the diagnosis forces you to stop and think about your relationship in new ways. You may make different choices than you might have otherwise, such as spending more time with your loved one, sharing things that you never have before, expressing your love directly, or resolving old conflicts. Caring for a terminally ill loved one can give you a sense of connection and the ability to share love. And, having had the opportunity to say goodbye can provide a great sense of comfort.

***Along with the difficulty and demands of the illness and the impending death, there is opportunity. You may find that the diagnosis forces you to stop and think about your relationship in new ways.***

At the same time, watching the physical effects of a disease take their toll on your loved one can be difficult. If you are also his or her caregiver, the round-the-clock physical demands can be exhausting as well. As a result, after your loved one's death, your only clear memories may be of your loved one's decline and suffering. In time, however, memories of the good times you shared, and of the person he or she was before the illness, will resurface.

Grieving involves mourning the losses that occur as your loved one becomes weaker and sicker, and mourning the anticipated death. Following are some suggestions for how to cope if your loved one is terminally ill.



TIPS

### Coping When Caring for a Terminally Ill Loved One

- ◆ **Share responsibilities.** When others offer to help, accept. If they ask what they can do, give them specific tasks—bringing over dinner, sitting with your loved one to give you a break, making phone calls—whatever it is you need. This is no time to be totally independent; you’ll wear yourself out.
- ◆ **Seek support.** Talk regularly with a friend or family member about how you are feeling and managing; seek professional help from a counselor, therapist or clergy member; or join a support group. Sharing your emotions with others may help relieve some of the stress you may be feeling. (For more information on professional help and support groups, please refer to the chapter *Taking Care of Yourself*.)
- ◆ **Resolve differences.** Try to work through any conflicts, old or new, in your relationship with your loved one. Recognize and respect your loved one’s opinions and put them in perspective. Some conflicts may no longer seem important.
- ◆ **Share what is important.** Tell your loved one what he or she means to you and say things that may have gone too long unsaid. This can be very fulfilling for both of you.

Sometimes the difficulty of communicating with a terminally ill loved one can add to your feelings of helplessness or anxiety. Consider the following suggestions for communicating with your loved one.



TIPS

### Communicating With a Terminally Ill Loved One

- ◆ **Ask your loved one what you can do.** Speak to your loved one about his or her personal wishes. Are there any projects he or she wants completed such as a garden or a family album? If you feel comfortable, this may be a good time to discuss your loved one’s preferences about funeral arrangements. For more information about planning funeral arrangements, please refer to *A LifeCare® Guide to Funeral Planning*.
- ◆ **Listen.** Allow your loved one to talk about his or her feelings, including his or her fears and sadness.
- ◆ **Spend time at the bedside.** Your loved one may not want to talk, but your presence, whether you are quietly reading, knitting or doing crossword puzzles, can be very comforting.
- ◆ **Be honest.** Don’t offer false hope or say things you don’t mean to “protect” your loved one from painful realities. Most people want the truth, even if it is difficult or painful. For example, don’t try to gloss over your loved one’s illness by pretending he or she will be fine. If you are dishonest, it may make your loved one feel even more isolated.



- ♦ **Reminisce.** Time spent reminiscing can be of great value, to both you and your loved one. Look at photo albums, share favorite stories and memories, and enjoy your time together, if possible.
- ♦ **Help your loved one organize his or her estate and legal affairs.** Help with drafting/updating a will, choosing an executor, setting up a trust or guardianship and executing advance directives. Make sure that at least one person knows where these important documents are located. For a comprehensive discussion on estate planning, please see *A LifeCare® Guide to Retirement and Estate Planning*.

## Unexpected Deaths

Accepting the reality of death—whether the death is expected or sudden is equally challenging. When a death is sudden, there is no process of mourning losses along the way, or preparing for the adjustments and, oftentimes, no opportunity for goodbyes. The emotions you may feel can vary dramatically depending on your relationship—and the cause of death. If, for example, an elderly loved one dies in his or her sleep, you may find comfort in the fact that he or she died peacefully. In other situations, you may experience anger at whatever caused your loved one’s untimely death; or feel guilty that you didn’t prevent it (even if it was impossible for you to have done anything); or you may feel vulnerable since you had no warning.

***Sudden deaths can also happen during the course of a terminal illness. For example, if your loved one was battling cancer for years, then died suddenly, you may experience this as an unexpected “sudden death.” This may be particularly hard if your support system assumes you were well prepared.***

***Accepting the reality of death—whether the death is expected or sudden is equally challenging.***

No matter how your loved one dies, you will most likely go through a process of grieving. We hope this guide helps you better understand the grieving process and the resources that are available to help you.

# Understanding the Grieving Process



"One often calms  
one's grief by  
recounting it."

—Pierre Corneille

**M**any people expect that grief has a beginning and an end; that it is something they can “work through” or “get over.” Similarly, many people often think of grief as a process that occurs in stages, however, most of these beliefs about how grief occurs are outdated. Over the past few decades, as researchers and those who care for the dying have listened to those grieving, the understanding of how grief works has changed significantly.

It is now generally accepted that the grief process is not linear—painful at the beginning and getting progressively better over time. It is a chaotic, cyclical process with good days and bad days, or good moments and bad moments. Feelings tend to come in waves—sometimes expected, and sometimes not. A smell, a song on the radio, or something else you associate with your loved one may evoke strong feelings. Other times, feelings seem to come from nowhere. You may find yourself suddenly in tears while sitting at your desk, or doing the dishes, even when you weren't aware you were thinking about your loved one. This is not evidence that you are losing your ability to cope, but rather, a common response to loss.

This chapter focuses on the different aspects of the grief process, including symptoms commonly experienced and tips for coping. For additional suggestions on coping with grief, please refer to the chapter *Taking Care of Yourself*.

## The Grief Process

To help explain the grief process, psychologist William Worden outlined four “tasks” of grieving. This framework offers a way to identify all that is involved in grieving, but keep in mind that the tasks are not separate aspects of grief. You may work through the different aspects of the grief process again and again in different ways, as you move through the tasks.



### The Tasks of Grief

- ♦ **Accept the reality of the loss.** From the moment you are told that a loved one has died, or may die, you know it mentally. However, it may take a much longer time to accept it emotionally. For weeks or months after the death, you may reach for the telephone, or even dial the number to call your loved one, only to realize he or she is gone. It is then that you have to remind yourself of your loss—and accept that your loved one is gone. However, even after adjusting to life without your loved one, you may have a new surge of disbelief. You may feel torn between wanting to accept reality, and feeling disloyal to your loved one for doing so. Remember, accepting the loss does not mean letting go.
- ♦ **Experience the pain of grief.** How long does normal grief last? The answer is different for everyone and every situation. It can take several years to establish a new sense of normalcy. But life does go on; the process of grieving can help you restore harmony and balance to your life.
- ♦ **Adjust to life without your loved one.** Each day you may be confronted in small or large ways with the absence of your loved one. He or she is not there to go to lunch with, to call in the evening, to celebrate the holidays, to go on vacation or to do the taxes. The process of adjusting may go on over the course of a lifetime. You may have to adjust to the loss of your child, for example, when his or her friends graduate from high school, get married or have children. Holidays and other traditions you would have shared may also be constant reminders—as are daily rituals—and each one requires adjustment. The empty chair at the dining room table, the personal belongings in the closet are all reminders of your loss. Some things you may choose to keep as a comforting reminder of your loved one, and some things you may change and adapt as your life moves on.



- ♦ **Find ways to remember.** At first, you may struggle to adjust to life without your loved one, but as time goes on, your life will continue to evolve, just as you do. It is not so much a matter of “letting go,” rather, it means shifting from being with that person to just having thoughts of that person. This simply means that, as time goes on, you will be choosing memories, rituals and other ways of remembering and relating to your loved one. As you grow and change, your memories of your loved one will grow and change as well.

## Symptoms Associated With Grief

As you grieve, you may experience a variety of symptoms—emotional, physical and cognitive—unique to your situation. By understanding what symptoms are common among grieving people, you may take some comfort in knowing that you are not alone. Following are common symptoms and tips for coping. For additional coping tips, please refer to the chapter *Taking Care of Yourself*.

### Physical Symptoms Associated With Grief

Following the death of a loved one, you may experience grief through physical reactions such as shortness of breath, headaches, nausea, loss of appetite, insomnia and fatigue. Intense grief also places the immune system under more stress, and therefore you may have an increased tendency to get sick. Your body is vulnerable now because much of your energy is being used for grieving.

***As you grieve, you may experience a variety of symptoms—emotional, physical and cognitive—unique to your situation.***

Even though it may be the last thing on your mind, taking care of your body is essential to keep you physically strong enough to deal with the emotional crisis you are experiencing. *Note*—If you are having physical symptoms that are new or extreme, such as chest pain, consult your physician.

### Cognitive/Emotional Symptoms Associated With Grief

The mental and emotional symptoms experienced during grief may include confusion, sadness, guilt or anger. Some of the most common symptoms include:

#### Denial

Immediately after the death of a loved one, you may experience shock, numbness and disbelief. At first, denial may help you process the news so you don't fall into shock. Some people report that the denial and resulting numbness help them get through those first days surrounding a loved one's death. If you are experiencing denial, realize this is a coping mechanism—but also realize that you need to accept your grief to heal. Share your feelings with others and give yourself time to let the loss make sense.

#### Sadness

You generally expect to feel sad when you are grieving, but what you often don't expect is to feel even sadder as time passes. The early days or weeks after the death of a loved one are usually occupied with the demands of funeral planning, attending

to financial and legal affairs or adjusting to a different schedule. You are often surrounded by friends and relatives, all of whom tend to be most attentive in the early weeks after the death. As the weeks pass, however, most return to their daily lives, and your support system may diminish to some extent.

It may be several months or more before you feel the full impact of your feelings. At this point, the death of your loved one may seem more real. You may be attempting to resume your daily routine as the absence of your loved one from your life becomes more intense. At this time, ask for help and support from others. If your support network is limited, seek professional help or join a support group. Additionally, allow yourself to cry; the best way to deal with the sadness is to accept your feelings as normal and express them in a way that helps you. Don't try to find a quick fix—allow time to grieve your loss.

### Anger

Anger is a common response to grief; it is our normal human reaction to being hurt. You may feel anger toward a higher power, friends, relatives—even your loved one for leaving you alone. There is nothing wrong with having these feelings. The important thing is to find constructive ways to release your anger. Letting your anger out anywhere, and at anyone, is not a healthy response to grief.

### Are You Suffering From Depression?

Extreme grief may cause a chemical change in your body that can lead to depression. If you recognize any of the following warning signs of depression in yourself—or others—consult a doctor or mental health professional. (Please see the chapter, *Taking Care of Yourself*, for information on professionals who can help):

- ◆ Feelings of sadness or intense depression, hopelessness or apathy over an extended period of time.
- ◆ Decreased interest and participation in activities, particularly those you previously enjoyed.
- ◆ Inability to keep up with crucial work and life tasks.
- ◆ Noticeable physical changes (stomach problems, extreme loss of appetite, confusion, severe headaches and/or sleep changes) for an extended period of time after the loss.
- ◆ Suicidal feelings. (Seek professional help immediately if you have suicidal feelings.)

Although not direct symptoms of depression, you may also want to seek professional help if you are experiencing violent outbursts directed at yourself or others or you are using drugs or alcohol to avoid or numb the pain of a loss.



TIPS

To manage your anger, try the following method of expressing it, converting it, then calming it:

- ◆ To express your anger, talk to others, write your feelings in a journal, or relieve the energy of anger by engaging in safe physical activity such as exercising.
- ◆ To convert your anger, stop focusing on what makes you angry and start focusing on something positive. The aim is to convert your anger into more constructive behavior. For example, if you are angry that your loved one died of cancer, you may want to participate in fund raisers that support cancer research.
- ◆ To calm your anger, control your physical behavior and your emotional responses (heart rate, breathing, etc.). Take deep breaths and think before you act to help calm your behavior and responses.

### Anxiety

After the death of a loved one, you may feel anxious, restless or unusually nervous. Generally, people manage everyday anxiety by finding ways to control situations; however, since death is something we cannot control, anxiety can increase. In turn, you may feel vulnerable and helpless—and anxious for a period of time—perhaps worrying that something bad will happen to you or someone else you love.

There are ways to deal with anxiety—both self help and medical methods. If you experience severe symptoms such as panic attacks, difficulty breathing, or distressing intrusive thoughts or images, speak to your doctor immediately. For coping with mild anxiety, consider these tips.



TIPS

#### Tips for Dealing With Mild Anxiety

- ◆ **Focus on your breathing.** Intense anxiety usually results in shallow, rapid breathing. Breathe deeply, from your diaphragm; breathing from your upper chest won't help you relax. Take a few deep breaths every time you start to feel tense or anxious.
- ◆ **Don't dwell on fearful feelings.** Feelings of anxiety are not harmful—just unpleasant. Do your best not to add frightening thoughts that can escalate your feelings of anxiousness. Wait for the fear to pass; do not try to run away from or fight the feelings. When anxiety fades, focus on what you will do next.
- ◆ **Try progressive relaxation techniques.** Progressive relaxation is a way of alternating tensing and releasing muscles to fully relax your entire body. To begin, eliminate distractions; wear comfortable clothing; and lie down on a rug or mat in a quiet area of your home with your feet about six to eight inches apart and your arms outstretched slightly away from your body. Take a few deep breaths from your lower abdomen, then begin. Starting at your toes, first tense your toes, then release. Next tense your feet then release. Move up to your calves, tensing your muscles, then releasing. Continue with each muscle group (your thighs, your lower abdomen, your middle abdomen, your upper



chest, your back, your fingers, hands, arms, neck, face and forehead). Continue to breathe deeply while you tense and release your muscles. Quietly rest for a few minutes before you get up.

- ♦ **Break the worry cycle.** Do your best to halt the “what ifs” running through your mind. Replace them with “then I wills.” Instead of thinking, “What if I cry tomorrow at work?” think, “Then I will go to the bathroom to splash water on my face.” Instead of, “What if I can’t pay the bills now that Bob is gone?” think “Then I will find a less expensive house to live in.” Turn your attention to what you can do to remedy a problem to help you feel more confident and in control and reduce your anxiety.

### Lack of Concentration

Since much of your energy goes into grieving and adjusting to the changes in your life, you may find that you are much more easily confused or distracted. Lack of concentration is one of the most common symptoms of grief. Attending to the demands of a job or a family, even reading a book or keeping your mind on a television program can become difficult. You may also find you are much more forgetful. While preoccupation will diminish with time, if you have difficulty concentrating, allow yourself some time to focus on your feelings and then return to the task at hand. Try not to get too heavily involved in new projects or commitments for a while. You may need to speak to your employer if you are having difficulty managing your daily work tasks. (Please see the section, “Relationships With Co-Workers,” for more on this topic).

### Altered Dreams

You may find that you have frequent dreams about your loved one, sometimes upsetting or very emotional dreams—even nightmares. Your dreams may recall the relationship that has been lost, or display your deepest wishes. Dreams are often a combination of events from the past, current experiences, fears, hopes and anxieties. Often dreams are a signal from your subconscious that time is needed for healing. When you have a dream or nightmare, the best thing you can do is talk about it with a friend or family member to help yourself heal.

*Often dreams are a signal from your subconscious that time is needed for healing. When you have a dream or nightmare, the best thing you can do is talk about it with a friend or family member to help yourself heal.*

### Guilt

Guilt is a common reaction to the death of a loved one. Generally, it is not a rational sense of guilt for something you did wrong, rather, it is a sense that somehow you could have made things better, or kept your loved one alive. You may feel guilt over unresolved conflicts in the relationship or have regrets about things said or unsaid to your loved one. Or you may feel guilt at not being with your loved one when he or she passed away. Try to remember that no relationship is without its moments of conflict and no situation is perfect. These feelings develop from the sense of helplessness that death tends to evoke. Death is ultimately out of your control; remind yourself that you did the best you could with the understanding you had at the time.

## Relief

If your loved one was sick for a long time, or if his or her suffering was significant, you may experience a sense of relief after he or she dies. This may leave you feeling guilty. Feeling relieved does not mean you love him or her any less, or that there is something wrong with you. It simply means that you are relieved your loved one is no longer suffering.

## Hopelessness

After the death of a loved one, you may feel a sense of hopelessness. You may be unable to see the possibilities that life still offers you and may sense that your current state (physical, mental, social or spiritual) is beyond repair. As time passes, you will gradually develop a sense of hope as you experience life again; your feelings may begin to shift and you may often find yourself having good portions of days, then eventually entire good days. These, as always, will be interspersed with rough times, but they will provide you with a glimpse of the future. *Note*—Intense feelings of hopelessness or despair can lead to depression and may signal a need to speak to your doctor.

## As Grief Evolves

Remember that there is no specific emotional place you “should” be at any time during your grieving process. Understand that your grief is unique, and accept that you may have strong feelings, whatever they are. There are, however, some elements of the grief process that are true for most all of us, and may help remind you that your painful feelings will lessen over time.



- ♦ **Grief is a life-long process.** Grief is an ongoing process that takes on different forms and meaning over time. To think of grief being with you forever may seem rather harsh, but its intensity, and exactly how you feel it, changes over time. Years after the death of a loved one you may still feel intense sadness when you remember the loss, but more often you will remember the happy times you shared with your loved one.
- ♦ **Grief does not mean “letting go.”** Loved ones will always be important, whether living or dead. Part of the grieving process involves keeping your loved one with you emotionally, even though he or she is no longer with you physically, while you continue to move forward with your life. This is a subtle process that happens over time.
- ♦ **Grief does not occur in “stages.”** The idea of stages implies that once you “work through” your feelings, they are over, and you move on to the next. While it is true that denial or disbelief, anger and intense sadness are common feelings associated with the grief process, the feelings you do experience won’t come in any prescribed order or over a set period of time.
- ♦ **Grief does involve growth.** Coping with the death of a loved one is an experience no one wants, but the difficult work of grieving—sorting through your intense emotions—may cause you to learn new things about yourself, or to find new strengths which can result in emotional growth or maturity. The loss you have suffered will create new thoughts, dreams, aspirations, blues and beliefs. Try to embrace these changes.



# Mourning Specific Losses



"Grief and pain are the price we humans have to pay for the love and total commitment we have for another person."

—C. S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed*

**T**his chapter focuses on the challenges you may face when grieving the death of certain loved ones. For specific tips on coping with the loss of your loved one, please see the chapter *Taking Care of Yourself*.

## Loss of a Spouse or Partner

The death of your spouse or partner may have a profound impact on you, whether you were together one year or fifty. When you lose your spouse or partner, you lose the person with whom you planned to live your life; the person with whom you shared the emotional, physical and financial aspects of your life. You lose your best friend, lover and in some cases, co-parent. Some of the challenges you may face now that your partner is gone include:

- ♦ **Loss of your confidante.** The person who you came home to each day, and talked with about the minor details of life is now absent. You may not be able to invite others into your life immediately, but as time goes on, you may want to strengthen your existing friendships and expand your circle of friends to aid you in your healing. Rely on family members and friends for support, and seek out new relationships. Confiding in other people is not disrespectful to your deceased spouse or partner.
- ♦ **Change in daily tasks.** Every couple has their own unique way of defining and dividing up the roles of their partnership (earning money, raising children, house and yard work, etc.). Suddenly you will be facing experiences independently. A good way to deal with these challenges may be to include others in your life: ask neighborhood children to cut your grass, hire a cleaning service, or swap baby-sitting services with a friend or neighbor. Perhaps your church or other community group offers volunteers who can help with chores. Don't try to carry the entire burden on your own.
- ♦ **Loss of routine.** Suddenly the person with whom you shared your daily routine is no longer with you. It may help you over time to slowly develop new routines while you adjust to the loss of your partner. Some surviving spouses sleep with a pillow next to them, find friends to shop with and make regular plans with friends and family.
- ♦ **Loss of the caretaker role.** If you had taken on the role of caregiver with your spouse (e.g., if your spouse was ill or injured), you may experience another loss after his or her death—the loss of your role as caretaker. Since you dedicated so much energy and time to your caregiving duties, you may feel a large void in your life when your role is over. Slowly getting involved in other activities may lessen this feeling. For example, volunteering your time—when you are ready—may help take the focus off your grief and allow you to concentrate on the needs of others less fortunate.
- ♦ **A change in your social life.** At first, it may seem that you have lost not only your spouse, but also much of your social world. You may find that you are no longer invited to or you no longer wish to attend social events, especially those that are geared toward couples. You may also lose social relationships in your life that existed through your spouse (i.e., his or her colleagues). Take your time easing back into the social world and, if necessary, seek out new groups of friends and interests. Attend a lecture, join a class or support group.

*"Widowhood is a process. It's like relearning to walk after an accident. Widowers must take it one step at a time."*

—Dr. Sandra L. Graves

- ♦ **Pressure to date.** Friends—in well-meaning efforts—may encourage you to date or pressure you to stay busy, oftentimes well before you are ready. These efforts can leave you feeling angry, isolated or wondering why you aren't adjusting as quickly as everyone else thinks you should be. Try to understand that your friends only want to help, but explain to them that you need time—as much as it takes—to learn who you are without your spouse before sharing your life with someone else.

On the other hand, you may meet someone fairly soon after the death of your spouse. He or she in no way replaces your loved one, but offers comfort and brings pleasure into your life. You may again feel pressure from well-intentioned friends who suggest that you are “running away” or “moving too quickly.” The truth is, there is no set timetable, and only you will know what is right for you in terms of beginning new relationships. Trust your instincts and do whatever makes you feel happy.

Being true to your own feelings and needs does not mean you are being unfaithful to your deceased spouse or partner.

- ♦ **Confusion.** If there were serious problems in your relationship (such as abuse or a pending divorce), you may expect that grieving will somehow be easier or less painful, especially if you previously wished that the relationship was over. But even if you had an extremely difficult relationship, there were probably strong connections that kept you in it. Following the death of your spouse, you may feel a loss of those connections. You may feel angry, guilty and sad that the relationship never flourished in the way you hoped. Or, you may be suddenly more aware of the positive qualities in your spouse or partner, now that you don't have to deal with the negative aspects of the relationship. You may also be surprised at the intensity of your feelings of loss, and even question the validity of those feelings. It is important to know that these confusing feelings may make grieving more, not less, complicated.

*If you had a difficult relationship with the person who died, you are likely to have confusing feelings about his or her death, including strong feelings of loss, anger and relief. These feelings may make grieving even more difficult than usual.*

## Loss of a Parent as an Adult

Some parent–child relationships are extremely close and supportive, and other parent–child relationships have significant conflict. Most fall somewhere in between, where they offer nurturing and love with an element of conflict mixed in.

Sometimes adult children expect that because a parent is elderly, or perhaps ill, they should, in some way, be prepared for his or her death, and losing a parent is not as significant as another death might be. But this is simply not true. Whether or not you are prepared, when a parent dies, you lose much more than your interactions with him or her.

### When you lose a parent, your losses may also include the following:

- ♦ **Regrets for what may have been.** Since you have shared a lifetime of memories with your parents, it is easy to grieve for those moments you will no longer share. Perhaps you will never be able to have your father walk you down the aisle at your wedding or you won't see your mother hold her first grandchild. These feelings may arise throughout your life as you experience milestones you wish you could share with your parent. As time goes on, the sadness of these milestones will probably lessen and you may be able to smile as you are reminded of your parent.
- ♦ **A sense of being an “orphan.”** It is common to hear adults in their forties, fifties or sixties describe feeling like an orphan after both parents die. When your parents die, depending on your relationship, you may lose a major support system in your life. The people who loved you unconditionally and supported you during emotional upsets and joys are now gone. Some adult children even find that they occasionally awaken ready to talk with a parent—only to realize a few moments later that the parent is no longer alive. These feelings are normal and may dissipate with time. While there will be no one who replaces your parents, you may begin to fill your life with other supporters.
- ♦ **Loss of your role as caretaker.** If you were the caregiver of your parents, you may feel lost for a period of time after their deaths as you redefine your role without caregiving duties. Caregiving can be a huge responsibility that demands a lot of time and energy. When this role is gone, it can leave a tremendous void in daily life. With time, however, you may find new ways and places to invest your energy, and your life again may feel full.
- ♦ **Loss of the family leader.** If the parent who is central in bringing the family together dies, the remaining family must redefine itself. Family relationships change, and the new communication may feel awkward at first. These kinds of situations are common when a parent dies, often leaving remaining family members feeling that they lost not only a parent, but also their entire family in a sense. It's important to find ways to stay connected.
- ♦ **Lost opportunity.** The death of your parent may also leave you grieving the reality that you no longer have the opportunity to improve the relationship or say things that you have always wanted to. This is as real a loss as any other. Try to remember that no relationship is perfect. You might be able to see the positive aspects of the person now that the relationship is no longer in the way. Try to hold onto and remember the positive qualities and joyful shared experiences.
- ♦ **A need to assist the other parent.** The death of one parent may leave you with the responsibility of caring for your surviving parent. Your new duties may include helping your parent grieve or becoming your parent's confidante or caregiver. Do your best to provide as much support as possible. If your parent needs more help than you can handle, consider hiring a professional caregiver to help out. For more on this topic, please see *A LifeCare® Guide to Caregiving* and *A LifeCare® Guide to Care Options*.

## Loss of a Sibling

Sibling relationships, like those with parents, can be very complex. Each child's role in the family is determined by many factors: gender, birth order, temperament, personality, etc. Sibling relationships can be very close or they can have a lot of conflict. Either way, your relationships with your siblings are some of the most significant in your life.

The quality of the relationship and the investment you had in it will shape your experience of grief. The closer you were to your brother or sister, the more likely you will struggle with daily reminders of his or her absence. If your sibling dies prematurely, you may feel like the natural order of life has been violated. You are likely to feel not only sadness, but anger at the course of events, and possibly guilt that you are still alive when your sibling is not.

When a brother or sister dies, a sibling's sense of loss is often overlooked since attention tends to be directed toward the parents, spouse or children of the deceased. Knowing this, be sure to ask others for the help and support you need.

The loss of a sibling may also affect other relationships in your family. Do your best to keep lines of communication open and seek professional help if necessary. And, be aware that there are sibling loss support groups; please see the *Helpful Resources* section for information on how to locate them.

## Loss of a Child

The death of a child can be one of the most difficult losses to make sense of, or to find meaning in, whether a child was five years old or fifty. Parents expect that their children will outlive them, and you will likely feel anger, even rage, that your child has died before you, especially during the early years after his or her death. Strong feelings of guilt are also common. If your child was terminally ill, these feelings will be no less intense.

At times when your child would have gone through rites of passage, or developmental milestones, you may experience the grief again. When your child's friends are graduating from high school, or your other children get married, you will be faced, in new ways, with the absence of your child. Facing the future without your child is challenging. It is not a matter of "moving on," but instead, developing new hopes, dreams and visions. Parents often feel their child is with them, and still teaching them about themselves and about life, many years after his or her death.

The death of a child also shifts other family relationships. Marriages can suffer enormous stress, as husband and





wife struggle with the loss both together and alone. A common misperception is that couples are more likely to fall apart after the death of a child. If there were serious pre-existing problems in the marriage, a couple may no longer have the desire or energy to keep the relationship together. But, if the marriage was reasonably strong before the death, many couples find that, despite different ways of grieving, they eventually have a better understanding and appreciation of each other than they did prior to the loss of their child.



TIPS

### Parental Styles of Grieving

Differences in grieving styles may cause some friction between a couple who has lost a child. This is a time, however, that a couple should do their best to support one another in their grieving. The following suggestions may help both of you as you grieve:

- ◆ Understand your different grief styles and respect each other's needs. If one partner seeks solace, allow him or her the opportunity to have some emotional "time off." If one partner needs to "talk about it," do your best to be there for him or her (without judging or giving advice).
- ◆ Being surrounded by constant reminders of the child can be difficult. Make lifestyle changes (store items that are too painful to look at or schedule time to be away from the house each day) to help each other move on.
- ◆ Reach out to others. Consider joining a support group together. This may help you both learn about each other's styles of grief and may provide a place to discuss your struggles while getting feedback from others.
- ◆ Create a ritual together to remember your child on special days (birthdays, anniversaries, holidays). Light a candle, take flowers to a cemetery, look through photo albums, take a walk or sit quietly together.

If you have great difficulty coping with the death of your child, you may want to seek professional help or join a support group. Please see the chapter, *Taking Care of Yourself*, for more information on these options.

### Loss of a Friend

Your friends are often your closest confidantes, and the people with whom you experience the most freedom and express yourself most fully. Grieving the death of a friend may be particularly difficult to deal with because others may not fully understand or acknowledge the importance of your relationship. When a loved one dies, most of the attention is directed toward family members. Additionally, after the funeral, or in the early weeks after the death, others tend to forget the significance of this loss in your life. Yet, the death of a close friend can be an extremely significant and painful loss. Rely on others for support and take as much time as you need to fully grieve.

## Loss of a Pregnancy

Expecting a child usually means you are looking forward to the future. If you suffer a miscarriage, your hopes and dreams may be dashed and you must grieve for the baby you will never know. Instead of hope, you may face uncertainty and perhaps too, a lack of support. People who were unaware you were pregnant, for example, will have no idea you are suffering. Friends and family members who were aware may not be comfortable discussing the miscarriage, and/or may not think of your loss as a death.

After a miscarriage, allow yourself time to grieve—and heal. During your healing process, it is not advisable to make quick major decisions. Another pregnancy won't replace the lost child. Deciding when to get pregnant again is a decision only you and your partner can make (with the advice of your doctor).

## Loss of a Co-Worker

When someone you work with dies, you may be unsure of how to feel or act. How you grieve will depend largely upon your relationship with your co-worker. He or she may have been a very significant person in your life, especially if you worked closely with him or her. You may also feel vulnerable, frightened and depressed, especially if you are in the same age group as your co-worker.

You may wonder whether you should attend your co-worker's funeral, especially if you have not met his or her family before. Since funerals can serve as an important focus for your grief, and aid in healing, you may feel comforted by attending the service and your co-worker's family may appreciate your presence. Explain to the family that you worked with their loved one and how sorry you are for their loss. If you wish to share pleasant memories of the deceased, do so in writing or in person. If you are not comfortable attending the service, you may want to send a heartfelt card or make a donation in your co-worker's name to provide some closure.



## Loss of a Pet

Grief over the loss of a pet is normal and natural. Pets are a source of comfort and companionship, of unconditional love and acceptance, of fun and joy. Don't be surprised if you feel devastated by the loss of such a relationship.

The most important step you can take is to be honest about your feelings. Don't deny your pain just because you are grieving for an animal. Don't try to avoid the grief by not thinking about your pet; instead, reminisce about the good times. This will help you understand what your pet's loss actually means to you.

If your family or friends love pets, they'll understand what you're going through. If you don't have family or friends who understand, or if you need more help, ask your veterinarian or local humane association to recommend a pet loss counselor or support group. Remember, your grief is genuine and deserving of support. Refer to the suggestions in the chapter, *Taking Care of Yourself*, as you would for any other significant loss. Additionally, the following suggestions may help you cope with the loss of a pet:



TIPS

### Tips for Coping With the Loss of a Pet:

- ♦ **Acknowledge how painful the loss of your pet is.** The loss of a pet is no more trivial than the loss of any other relationship. You may grieve the same way for a pet that you would for a human; your feelings of loss are perfectly normal.
- ♦ **Put away your pet's toys, leashes, collars, dishes, blankets, etc. if they are too painful to look at.** You may want to store these items in a box until you feel ready to deal with them.
- ♦ **Memorialize your pet.** For some, this may mean placing a framed picture on the wall, creating a monument or planting a tree in the yard.
- ♦ **Change your routine if necessary.** For example, if you would leave extra time in the morning to walk your dog, set your alarm clock later, or start a new exercise routine on your own.
- ♦ **Don't rush into replacing your pet.** Take time to heal so the new pet comes into an environment that is ready for him or her. Only you can decide if and when you are ready to get another pet.



# Changes in Relationships



"When the heart grieves over what it has lost, the spirit rejoices over what it has left."

—Sufi epigram

**T**he death of a loved one can affect your relationships with living loved ones. You may grow closer to some people who are particularly understanding or supportive. You may also feel more distant from people who are not able to respond to your current needs. This chapter focuses on the changes that may occur in relationships with surviving loved ones.

## Relationships With Family Members

When a family member dies, you may find that other family relationships change. Each family member has his or her own way of grieving, and his or her needs may be different than yours. Also, there are many different relationships that are lost, all being grieved in different ways. Your relationship with your mother, for example, is different than your sister's, father's or grandmother's relationship with her. Families typically adjust to the absence of a family member by "reassigning" the roles of the person who died to the remaining members. In a sense, the family must redefine itself. For example, a parent whose spouse dies may find him or herself trying to be both mother and father to their child. The remaining parent may take on some of the roles of the parent who died, and other things may be let go, or assigned to a non-parent. Or, if a mother dies, family members may expect the oldest sibling to step into a more mothering role with younger siblings. This role can be difficult if this person wants to receive, rather than offer, support.

The process of redefining the family takes time, and involves trial and error. When someone in the family dies, family roles may change or disappear altogether. As you are redefining yourself without your loved one, don't take on roles or responsibilities that you don't want. For example, if your youngest sister often turned to your mother for advice on day-to-day living and now turns to you, determine whether this is something you want—or are able—to take on.

Pay attention to your feelings, and as new demands arise, ask yourself what is best for you. Oftentimes, it is helpful to talk over your decisions with a friend, family members, a clergy member or, in particularly difficult situations, a professional therapist.

## Relationships With Friends

The death of someone close can change your life completely and adjusting to these changes may mean finding a new role in life or a new way of looking at yourself. This may change the relationships you have with your friends. You may find that your desire to be with others has changed. During the early months of grieving, you may feel a sense of social isolation because you may not have the energy for socializing. Also, it may seem like much of what people are doing or talking about seems uninteresting or trivial. Instead, you may be drawn to particular friends—perhaps those who are more sensitive—to support you now. At the same time, being alone could feel almost intolerable. Try to find a balance between time for yourself, and time spent with others you care about.

## Relationships With Co-Workers

When returning to work after a loss, you may find it difficult to be around co-workers who may not seem to understand your loss and grief. Workplace discussions may seem trivial and, for example, discussions about weekend activities of co-workers may no longer hold your interest. You may, on the other hand, have a strong need to talk about your loss—which may, in turn, be difficult or uncomfortable for co-workers especially since they may not have known your loved one. Additionally, well-meaning co-workers may avoid bringing up your loss because they fear upsetting you.

Don't be surprised if grieving affects and distorts your work habits. Staying focused on your work may not be easy. Remember that grief is a very powerful thing. If you are trying to recover after a loss, and must continue working, the following tips may help you cope.

### Did you know...?

Illness or death in the family is cited as the second most common problem affecting workplace performance.

(Source: Managed Health Network, Inc.)



TIPS

### Tips for Coping in the Workplace

- ◆ **Explain the situation to your manager and at least one sympathetic co-worker.** Tell them how much (or whether) you want others to know about the situation. If you do not feel comfortable speaking to anyone at work, be as professional as you can, and share your feelings and grief with a trusted friend or relative outside of work.
- ◆ **Don't wait for others to speak of your loss.** If co-workers are hesitant to talk to you, realize they may fear upsetting you or may not know how to handle the situation. If you feel comfortable, address them yourself to share information about your loss.
- ◆ **Expect to feel waves of emotion while at work.** Don't fight them off; if you suddenly must cry, take a short break from what you were doing or splash water on your face in the bathroom.
- ◆ **Use your lunch hour or break to address your needs.** Go for a walk, talk to sympathetic friends (at work or on the telephone) or write in a journal.
- ◆ **Consider using your Employee Assistance Program (EAP), if available.** Many companies have responded to employees' emotional needs by providing EAP services—an employee benefit that offers counseling on a variety of emotional issues. Check with your benefits coordinator to find out if your employer offers an EAP service.
- ◆ **If you have the opportunity, consider taking a leave of absence.** Finding the energy to heal and be productive at work may just be too hard, especially if your grief is extreme.

### Spiritual Relationships

You may have religious or spiritual beliefs that play a large role in how you feel about life and death. For many, these beliefs provide comfort during grief. For others, spiritual or religious beliefs may be challenged by the death of a loved one. You may question how a death could have happened if there is a loving higher power, or you may feel angry at a higher power who could leave you in such pain. Conversely, you may find yourself turning toward spiritual and religious beliefs as you look for comfort and meaning in your loved one's death, even if you were never particularly religious before.

The death of a loved one may also force you to confront, review and re-evaluate your life. You may start thinking about how you've spent your life so far, struggle with your values and priorities, and re-examine spiritual relationships. The following suggestions may help you deal with these struggles as you journey through the grief process.



TIPS

### Coping With Spiritual Relationships

- ◆ **If it is a comfort to you, seek religious support.** Talk with people who understand what you are going through—your priest, pastor, rabbi or other clergy member will be able to discuss questions and feelings, even if they involve anger or a loss of faith.
- ◆ **Think about your own definition of spirituality.** Surround yourself with what gives you comfort and peace in life (friends, time spent in nature, attending church or synagogue, praying, etc.).
- ◆ **Examine your values and beliefs.** Ask yourself questions and get to know yourself. Do you know where you stand on issues of importance in your life? Are you living consciously and following your beliefs?
- ◆ **Prioritize your values and beliefs.** What is most important in your life (relationships, work, possessions, etc.)? What do you spend the most time doing, acquiring or being in your life? Are your daily behaviors reflecting your stated important beliefs?
- ◆ **Live as though each day may be your last.** While this is typically easier said than done, try to take steps toward what you want to do/be each day—live life to the fullest so you will not have regrets later on.
- ◆ **Fight through feelings of fear.** Everyone experiences fear, especially after a great loss, but those who can go on in spite of it are typically the most content with their lives. When you feel most afraid to do something, push through the fear by asserting your own strength or seeking help from family and friends.



## Taking Care of Yourself



"Death can be very hard to face, and we might be tempted to avoid it and flee from having to confront it. But if you have the courage to deal with it when it comes into your life—to accept it as an important and valuable part of life—then, whether you are facing your own death, that of someone in your care, or that of a loved one, you will grow."

—Elisabeth Kübler-Ross

**W**hen a loved one dies, you may encounter all kinds of advice. Some suggestions may be helpful—especially in the earliest stages of grief, and some may leave you feeling angry, hurt or alone. Be aware that while friends feel for your loss, they may feel helpless and vulnerable while witnessing your pain—and be unable to offer constructive support. Ultimately you must figure out—and tell others—what you need. This section provides tips and suggestions to help you grieve in your own way.



## Identify Your Needs

People may suggest that you should get over your feelings quickly, and this may reinforce the idea that you should put aside or bury your grief. Remember that it is hard for others to know the depth of your grief as time goes on.

Learn how to help yourself heal. Get to know yourself, and tune into your needs to help you make choices more confidently. For example, you may recognize that after a day at work you need to be alone and cry. Well-meaning friends may suggest that you should instead accompany them to dinner and a movie to get your mind away from your pain. Trust yourself and if you find it helpful to spend time alone with your feelings, no matter how painful, do it.



TIPS

### The following tips may help you identify what you need:

- ♦ **Pay attention to your feelings.** Allow yourself to feel anger, sadness, guilt, anxiety or even fear on occasion, but try not to let any of these overwhelm you. If you are feeling constantly down, nervous or fearful, seek help from a professional.
- ♦ **Find outlets that feel right to you.** It may take some experimentation, but try to find ways to express the feelings of loss. You may want to try writing in a journal, exercising, taking walks or pursuing artistic outlets such as pottery or painting.
- ♦ **Work quiet time into your daily routine.** Lie down, take a nap or meditate whenever you have some free time. It's important to have moments that are peaceful and problem-free. Reflect on any thoughts that come to you at these times.
- ♦ **Don't overbook your schedule.** Don't try to manage your feelings by staying busy and engaging in endless activity. If you need time to be alone to cry, allow yourself this time. Feelings that are pushed aside generally wait, unchanged, until they are given attention in some way.

## Have Realistic Expectations and Be Patient With Yourself

The myth that grieving is over quickly is common in our society. Usually after only a few months have gone by, friends stop talking about the death or may be less willing to listen to you talk about your feelings. This is often because they are uncomfortable seeing you in pain or because they are uncertain how best to respond to your loss. These messages, combined with your own wish to ease your pain, are likely to leave you feeling pressured to get past difficult feelings quickly.

If you have a tough time living up to your own or others' expectations, understand that grief is usually confusing and long lasting. Instead of feeling that you aren't as "strong" as you should be, set more realistic expectations based on the reality of the grief process. When painful memories of issues arise, remind yourself that your feelings are normal. If they persist, seek out the necessary resources to deal with them.



TIPS

### Here are some tips to help you cope:

- ♦ **Expect that it will take a long time to adjust to your loss.** It is challenging to accept the reality of death even when you have had time to prepare, and this task may be more challenging when the death is unexpected.
- ♦ **Rethink your priorities.** Decide whether a task must be accomplished in full now, or whether it can be modified or even put off. Approach those that must be completed now by breaking your to-do list down into small tasks. Usually, small tasks taken one at a time are easier to manage than a large task.
- ♦ **Set realistic goals.** Much of what you do may not be up to your usual standards. Though it may persist for several months, you will regain your former ability to focus and concentrate as you adjust to your loss.

### Talk About Your Grief

You may find that you have a need to share your loss with others. By talking about your loss to friends, relatives, clergy or a professional, it becomes more “real” to you. It may be difficult to express feelings openly, but people usually feel better when they do. If you are uncomfortable talking to others, consider expressing your feelings through poetry, art or writing.

### Rely on Others

If you are used to being independent, or you have just lost the person you relied on most, now is a time to lean on others. We often hesitate to ask for things or even accept what people offer for fear of being too dependent, or of being a burden.

Remember, like you, the people who care about you are feeling helpless in the face of your loss. If they offer help, whether it is practical help like doing the grocery shopping or offering a listening ear, you may be helping them—and yourself—by accepting what they offer. If they can do something useful for you, they may feel less helpless, and you may feel less alone. Remember, too, that your turn to reciprocate may someday come.

### Take Care of Your Body

When grieving, you may notice your body seems to need more attention—you feel more tired and out-of-sorts. Try to respect what your body needs and do your best to keep yourself healthy so you’ll have the strength to cope with your grief. The following suggestions may help:



TIPS

- ♦ **Get a physical.** Grief affects you emotionally and physically. Soon after the death of a loved one, see your doctor for a complete check-up. If you had an existing medical condition before the death, it may be worsened by the stress of your grief. Keep in close touch with your doctor so medical conditions and medications can be closely monitored.



TIPS

- ◆ **Eat well.** In the early months after the death of a loved one, or at times when your feelings are very intense, it is common to lose your appetite. Physically, as well as emotionally, you still need good nutrition. Try eating small amounts of nutritious foods throughout the day, rather than three large meals. If you experience significant change in your weight (10 pounds or more), or are still losing or gaining weight after a couple of months, talk with your doctor.

Although appetite loss is one of the most common reactions to a loss, some people experience an increase in the amount they eat, which is often a form of self-soothing. While this might temporarily take your mind off of your loss, this coping strategy ultimately doesn't work.

- ◆ **Exercise regularly.** When you exercise, your body releases endorphins, which are natural mood elevators. Exercising can help reduce stress, and help you stay physically strong during this period when the alterations in your immune system caused by grief make you more susceptible to illness. If you were not exercising regularly before the death of your loved one, start (with the approval of your doctor) with an activity you enjoy that is not overly strenuous. The time you devote to exercise will boost your energy overall, and may help you regain focus. *Note*—Conversely, too much exercise can wear you down. Consult with your doctor before starting any exercise program.
- ◆ **Focus on your breathing.** Heightened anxiety brought on by feelings of grief usually results in shallow, rapid breathing. If you consciously slow down your breathing, take a few deep breaths, pause briefly between exhaling and inhaling, and relax your shoulders, you can lower your anxiety level.
- ◆ **Avoid drugs and alcohol.** Drugs and alcohol may, at first, seem to provide easy relief for your pain and grief, but in reality, they do more harm than good. Alcohol is a depressant that can further add to your saddened mood, and many drugs numb you, removing your ability to deal with your true feelings. Remember that there are no quick fixes for grief. *Note*—If you are relying on drugs and/or alcohol to cope with your loss, you may need professional help to overcome a dependency on these substances. Talk to your doctor or ask your benefits coordinator if your company offers an EAP (Employee Assistance Plan), which offers counseling and substance abuse assistance.
- ◆ **Get plenty of sleep.** When grieving, you may experience disruptions in your sleep patterns. Both insomnia and fatigue are common after suffering a loss. You may find that you now need much more sleep to feel refreshed. Or, you may not be able to sleep more than two hours at a time. Too much or too little sleep can make you irritable and tired, so try to find a balance that works for you. If you're having trouble sleeping for an extended period of time, speak to your doctor.



## Put Off Major Decisions

Though you may be required to make major changes after the death of your loved one, don't make hasty decisions until you are able to think clearly and rationally. For example, you may want to sell your house or get rid of your loved one's belongings to remove daily reminders of him or her. But try not to respond to these impulses in the early months after the death. Your pain is most likely caused by the absence of your loved one, not the presence of his or her belongings. And very likely, the things that cause pain initially, may be the very things that bring comfort as time passes.

However, some decisions may need to be made rather quickly. You may, for example, need to settle your loved one's legal and financial affairs. A parent's house may need to be sold quickly due to financial pressures.



TIPS

### If you are forced to act quickly, keep the following suggestions in mind:

- ◆ **Use your support system.** Talk to your friends, family, etc. about your concerns when making a big decision at such a difficult time.
- ◆ **Seek professional help.** If you need to sell a home or sort out other financial issues, seek the help of a professional (attorney, real estate agent, tax expert, etc.) who can provide objective advice. Be sure to ask friends for referrals—and check credentials before hiring anyone. Bring someone with you if you think you might have difficulty concentrating and remembering all that is said. If you go alone, consider tape recording the conversation so you can refer back to it at a later time.
- ◆ **Ask people to help.** If you need to sell a home, there may be a lot of labor involved in packing belongings. If possible, have friends or family members help with specific tasks and errands.
- ◆ **Make choices according to your needs.** Think about when you want to be alone with your memories and losses, and when you want others with you. For example, you may want to pack your loved one's belongings on your own, or you may want a friend there for support.
- ◆ **Keep the things that have meaning for you.** While you may need to sell the house, you do not need to give away all of the contents. Some of the things you strongly associate with your loved one are important to keep; they may offer great comfort later. If you are having trouble deciding whether to keep certain items, consider storing them temporarily and make a decision later.

## Join a Support Group

Bereavement support groups are one of the best places to learn about the normal grief process. These groups, many of which are free to join, allow you to talk with others who are grieving. They give you the opportunity to tell your story to people who are willing to listen, and who are experiencing similar emotions. Support groups are wonderful places to validate your feelings. You may find strength in knowing you are not alone.

Support groups tend to be most helpful when some time (usually several months) has elapsed between the death and when you join the group. At this point, your loss may seem more real, and you have more daily experience living without your loved one. In fact, some support groups require a minimum amount of time to have passed before you can join.

***Support groups tend to be most helpful when some time (usually several months) has elapsed between the death and when you join the group.***

There are many types of bereavement support groups. Some are facilitated by a mental health or religious professional; others are strictly mutual help groups—that is, they are entirely run by people who have experienced a death themselves. Support groups can be time limited, meeting for six or eight sessions, or they can be open-ended, where the group is ongoing and members begin when they are ready, and continue until they feel that they have gotten the support they need.

Some groups have a general bereavement focus, and are open to anyone who has experienced the death of someone important to them. Others are specific to the relationship that was lost, such as the death of a child or spouse. Still others are geared toward the cause of death, such as cancer, suicide, homicide or Alzheimer's disease survivor groups. Often, it is the match between you and the other members in the group that makes for a successful support group experience.

Support groups are typically easy to find. Check with local hospitals, community centers, hospices and religious organizations for information on support groups offered through their organization or for referrals. Calendar or community sections in local newspapers usually also list support groups. And many associations now have local support groups online. In fact, if you have Internet access, you can probably join an online support group moderated by a professional.

If you cannot find a support group in your area, consider starting one yourself. You do not have to be specially qualified to start a support group, just someone who has experienced a loss or someone who wants to help. Many organizations listed in the *Helpful Resources* section offer assistance in starting chapters or support groups in new regions.

## **Seek Professional Help**

Depending on your existing support system, your personal style and how well you are adjusting to the loss of your loved one, you may want to seek the help of a mental health professional. Having a time and a place where you can talk freely may provide an important release or give you new ideas on how to move beyond your intense feelings of loss. Also, the death of a loved one can stir up past emotional difficulties and losses you have not before addressed (a painful divorce, alienated siblings, etc.) that you may need help addressing now.

There are many different mental health professionals that offer treatment for depression or grief counseling. They may include psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, professional counselors or grief therapists. If you do choose to see a professional, seek someone who has experience with grief work and understands the normal grief process. Check with your primary physician for recommendations. Also be sure to check with your insurance plan regarding your mental health

benefits, as professional counseling can be expensive—anywhere from \$30 an hour to over \$100 an hour. However, many people now have counseling as a part of their health benefits through work (see the box on Employee Assistance Plans), and there are community health centers that offer counseling on a sliding-fee basis.

### How Do You Know if You Need Help?

Listed below are some signs that may indicate you need to talk with a professional counselor who is familiar with the grief process. Be aware that most people will experience most of these symptoms off and on during the grief process; however, when the symptoms become intense, and show no signs of lessening, you may benefit from professional help.

### Employee Assistance Plans (EAPs)

EAPs are counseling services offered by many employers to help you and your eligible family members resolve emotional problems (such as alcohol and drug abuse, emotional and personal issues, legal matters, stress reduction, grief and bereavement and more). EAP counselors are fully qualified and licensed in their areas of service. They typically include licensed psychologists, social workers, counselors and other staff. Usually with this service, you and your dependents are entitled to receive a set number of counseling sessions free of charge. Check with your employer to find out if your organization offers this benefit.

QUESTIONS



TO ASK

- ◆ **Do you feel like something is wrong?** The most important indication of needing additional assistance comes from your own sense of need.
- ◆ **Do you feel you are not grieving because you cannot talk about it?** During the grief process, it is important to be able to express your thoughts and feelings through words and actions.
- ◆ **Do you put your grief on hold so you can take care of others?** For example, are you taking on the role of caregiver for the rest of the family? Is this additional responsibility making you feel resentful and angry?
- ◆ **Are you engaging in risky behaviors as a means of coping with painful thoughts and feelings?** For example, are you drinking more, using drugs (including taking prescriptions or over-the-counter drugs), having thoughts of harming yourself or others?
- ◆ **Are you experiencing a pervasive fear that prevents you from having close relationships?** After losing someone you loved and felt close to, you may not want to get close to anyone again for fear of losing them, too.
- ◆ **Do you feel the need to keep busy so you don't think about or feel your grief?** It can help to find things to keep you busy when you are grieving, however, this can also become a way of pushing grief aside and not dealing with it.
- ◆ **Are you constantly preoccupied or experiencing constant thoughts of the death over a long period of time?** Soon after the death, it is normal for your thoughts to be focused almost entirely on your loved one and his or her death; however, if this continues for an extended period, you may need some additional help.



# Remembering Your Loved One



"The comfort of having  
a friend may be taken  
away—  
But not that of  
having had one."

—Seneca

**E**ventually, you will develop ways to remember your loved one, or keep him or her with you mentally and spiritually. These may vary greatly according to your religious and cultural beliefs. For example, you may talk to your loved one mentally on a regular basis—sharing tid-bits of your day, or going to the cemetery to bring him or her up to date on your life's events. As time passes, you may keep whatever personal rituals you have created in place, or you may shift to a new kind of sharing, or a way of acknowledging that your loved one is still with you.



For example, you may always remember your loved one when you use a particular bowl—one of his or her favorites—when cooking, or you may mention your loved one in conversations to keep him or her alive in your everyday life. In this way, you keep your relationship with your loved one alive in a way that feels right for you.

## Develop and Use Rituals

Rituals carry symbolic meaning and can help keep you stay connected to your loved ones who have died. These rituals can be personal or shared, private or public, and may vary depending on your religious and cultural beliefs.

You probably already have many rituals in your life. Think of the actions you do in a specific order each day—drinking your morning coffee while you read the paper, walking the dog, showering and dressing for work. Many families have a ritual of saying a blessing before dinner.

Think about starting new rituals that commemorate your loved one; rituals your family can do together, and things you can do by yourself. Lighting a candle daily or weekly, saying a prayer, planting a garden, donating money to a charity or visiting the cemetery are all examples of rituals that may help remind you of your loved one. In order for them to be truly meaningful, they can't be prescribed, but rather must be developed or chosen based on the personal meaning they hold for you.

## Holidays and Anniversaries

It can be very difficult to enjoy holidays and anniversaries that you would have previously celebrated with your loved one. Equally difficult are your loved one's birthday and the anniversary of his or her death. Many people choose to create rituals for these days as well. You may choose to spend these days alone, quietly thinking about your loved one. Or, you may wish to honor the day by reminiscing or going out to dinner with friends or family. Only you know what will be best for you on these days. Even though no one can take away your grief at these times, there are things you can do to make these days less painful.



TIPS

### The following tips may help you handle holidays and anniversaries without your loved one:

- ♦ **Be honest about your feelings and how you want to spend the day.** Decide how much celebrating you can handle and what feels most comfortable for you. For example, will you really be able to handle the responsibility of the annual family dinner? Do your best to surround yourself with people who wish to support you in what you need.
- ♦ **Make changes if necessary.** If you wish to continue the family traditions, do so; if you wish to make changes, that is okay, too. Visit friends or relatives for a holiday or anniversary instead of hosting others; open presents on Christmas morning as opposed to Christmas Eve; vary the timing of Chanukah gift giving; or celebrate a loved one's birthday in a whole new way.



- ♦ **Consider helping others.** Many soup kitchens need volunteers to serve holiday meals; and many organizations send volunteers to visit the elderly or home-bound individuals. Invite someone who is alone or a family without local relatives to share the holidays or a special day with you and/or your family. Or donate money or gifts to charity in your loved one's name.
- ♦ **Remember your loved one in a special way.** Perhaps include his or her name in a prayer before you eat; light a candle to symbolize your loved one's place at the table; or read aloud a poem. If it offers you comfort, reminisce with friends and family about your loved one or look through photo albums and scrapbooks.
- ♦ **Do your best to be positive.** Feel gratitude for the things that are going well in your life (health, job, friends, family, etc.). Remind yourself that you are allowed to experience joy and happiness. These feelings are not disrespectful to your loved one.

### As Time Goes On

Remember that over time, the intensity of your painful feelings will lessen. This doesn't mean you stop feeling grief, but what once seemed unbearable, may be easier to manage, and the sadness, anger and despair you once felt may no longer demand all of your energy. Feelings of security, calmness or simply everyday happiness that may have receded during the months and, sometimes, years after the death of your loved one may slowly become accessible again. You may even feel guilty for reinvesting in the pleasures of life again. Try to remember that the memory of your loss does not disappear with your decreased feelings of grief. By going on with your life you are not taking away or denying the experience of your loss. Finally, know that you cannot grieve without finding your life unchanged. Realize that you have grown from your loss experience and gained an invaluable awareness of how precious life really is.







# Suggested Reading on Grief and Bereavement

## Books for Adults

*After the Darkest Hour the Sun Will Shine Again: A Parent's Guide to Coping With the Loss of a Child*, by Elizabeth Mehren. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997.

This guide to coping with the loss of a child provides insight and wisdom while combining the author's own story with the experiences of others who have gone through this tragedy.

*The Bereaved Parent*, by Harriet Sarnoff Schiff. New York: Penguin Books, 1978.

This book is for parents whose child has died—and for all who want to help them. Schiff offers guidelines and practical step-by-step suggestions to help you cope with every stage of grief, from facing the funeral to rebuilding a marriage.

*A Child Dies: A Portrait of Family Grief*, by Joan Arnold and Penelope Gemma. Philadelphia: The Charles Press, 1994.

This book attempts to help parents and health professionals understand the grieving process that follows the death of a child. It describes typical grief symptoms, such as profound emptiness, guilt and anger; discusses family methods of coping after a loss; and explores possible therapeutic interventions by caregivers.

*Dying: A Book of Comfort*, by Pat McNees. New York: Warner Books, 1996.

More than 40 celebrated writers and religious figures from various faiths include eloquent words on the nature of dying and comfort for those left behind.

*How to Go on Living When Someone You Love Dies*, by Therese A. Rando. New York: Lexington, 1998.

Dr. Rando leads readers through the process of grieving, addressing such topics as understanding and resolving grief, accepting help and support, and personal bereavement rituals.

*How to Survive the Loss of a Love*, by Melba Colgrove, Harold H. Bloomfield and Peter McWilliams. Los Angeles: Prelude Press, 1991.

An inspiring and comforting book, filled with poems and coping tips, that encompasses medical and psychological advances in the treatment of loss.

*How to Survive the Loss of a Parent: A Guide for Adults*, by Lois F. Akner. New York: Quill, 1993.

Therapist Lois Akner explains why the loss of a parent is different from other losses and, using examples from her experience, shows how it is possible to work through the grief.

*How We Grieve: Relearning the World*, by Thomas Attig. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996.

The author uses real-life stories to illustrate how survivors can meet challenges, make critical choices and reshape their lives through grieving.

*I'm Grieving as Fast as I Can*, by Linda Feinberg. Far Hills, N.J.: New Horizons Press, 1994.

This book provides comfort and understanding for dealing with the difficult feelings that arise after an untimely death.

*Living When a Loved One Has Died*, by Earl Grollman. Boston: Beacon Press, 1995.

This is a book about death and life, written for those who have sustained a loss of a loved one.

*No Time for Goodbyes: Coping With Sorrow, Anger and Injustice After Tragic Death*, by Jannis Harris Lord. Ventura, Calif.: Pathfinder Publishing of California, 1991.

This book addresses the impact a tragic death has on surviving loved ones, and discusses grief, mourning, the criminal justice system, suicide, financial issues and coping with tragic loss.

*What to Do When a Loved One Dies: A Practical and Compassionate Guide to Dealing With Death on Life's Terms*, by Eva Shaw. Irvine, Calif.: Dickens Press, 1994.

A guidebook that leads you through a range of concerns surrounding both the practical and emotional aspects of death. Beginning with what to do in the first 24 hours, you'll find advice for dealing with the initial shock and a plan for managing your grief and the grief of those you love.

## Pet Loss

*Coping With Sorrow on the Loss of Your Pet*, by Moira K. Anderson. Los Angeles: Peregrine Press, 1987.

A comprehensive, compassionate guide to every aspect of pet loss bereavement. In this book, you'll find out why it's normal and important to grieve the loss of a pet, and coping strategies suggested by pet owners.

*The Loss of a Pet*, by Wallace Sife. New York: Howell Book House, 1998.

A self-help guide to understanding and better enduring the pet bereavement process. It explains all the stages of bereavement, and how they affect us at this time. A special chapter on children and the death of their pets is particularly expansive and useful.

*Pet Loss: A Thoughtful Guide for Adults & Children*, by Herbert A. Nieburg, Arlene Fischer and Martin Scot Kosins. New York: HarperPerennial, 1996.

This book encourages those who have suffered the loss of a pet to acknowledge such grief and tells them how to cope with the situation.

*Note*—This reading list is not intended to be entirely comprehensive since new books are published constantly. Visit your library or local bookstore for new and noteworthy titles.



# Helpful Resources for Grief and Bereavement

## Death and Dying

### **Americans for Better Care of the Dying (ABCD)**

2175 K Street, N.W., Suite 820  
Washington, DC 20037  
202-530-9864

<http://www.abcd-caring.com>

This nonprofit charity is dedicated to improving services for patients with serious illness and their families. ABCD aims to advocate between providers and patients; involve society in end-of-life care; control pain and other symptoms; demand continuity in service systems for the seriously ill; and limit the emotional and financial toll on families.

### **Children of Aging Parents**

1609 Woodbourne Road, Suite 302A  
Levittown, PA 19057  
800-227-7294  
215-945-6900

This national, nonprofit organization provides information about caregiving, support groups and other resources. Membership offers enhanced services.

### **Choice in Dying**

1035 30<sup>th</sup> Street, N.W.  
Washington, DC 20007  
800-989-9455  
202-338-9790

<http://www.choices.org>

Dedicated to fostering communication about complex end-of-life decisions, this nonprofit organization counsels patients and families, trains professionals, advocates for improved laws—and offers a range of publications and services, including advance directives.

### **Growth House, Inc.**

<http://www.growthhouse.org>

This Web site is a link to resources for life-threatening illness and end-of-life care. Growth House's primary mission is to improve the quality of compassionate care for people who are dying.

### **The Hemlock Society**

PO Box 10810  
Denver, CO 80250-1810  
800-247-7421

<http://www.hemlock.org>

Provides information and support for voluntary euthanasia for terminally ill adults and also for the seriously, incurably physically ill. Member of the World Federation of Right-to-Die Societies.

### **The Living Bank**

4545 Post Oak Place, Suite 315  
Houston, TX 77027  
800-528-2971

<http://www.livingbank.org>

This is the oldest and largest donor education organization in the country, and the only national organization that keeps computerized records of donor data for future retrieval in an emergency. This organization provides donor forms for individuals wishing to donate organs.

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**National Alliance of Senior Citizens Foundation (NASCF)**

1744 Riggs Place, N.W., Third Floor  
Washington, DC 20009  
202-986-0118

In collaboration with the National Alliance of Senior Citizens, the NASCF is committed to fulfilling the wishes of individuals diagnosed with terminal illnesses. The foundation provides education and counseling on advance directives and the right to determine the limits of medical treatment.

**Funeral Planning Services**

**Continental Association of Funeral and Memorial Societies**

2001 S Street, N.W., Suite 530  
Washington, DC 20009  
202-745-0634

This organization can provide information on arranging simple, inexpensive funerals.

**Cremation Association of North America (CANA)**

401 N. Michigan Avenue  
Chicago, IL 60611  
312-644-6610

CANA is an association of crematories, cemeteries and funeral homes that offer cremation. More than 750 members own and operate crematories and encourage the concept of memorialization.

**Funeral and Memorial Societies of America (FAMSA)**

One Upper Access Road  
PO Box 10  
Hinesburg, VT 05461  
800-458-5563

<http://www.funerals.org>

This is the umbrella organization for more than 100 local, nonprofit FAMSA societies. FAMSA is dedicated to a consumer's right to choose a meaningful, dignified and affordable funeral and can provide information on funeral options and services, as well as referrals to local services. It also investigates complaints about funeral homes and/or services.

**Funeral Service Consumer Assistance Program (FSCAP)**

National Research and Information Center  
PO Box 27641  
Milwaukee, WI 53227  
800-662-7666

Call this nonprofit organization to request literature on funeral planning and grief, or for a referral to an intermediary who can help you investigate a complaint and/or problem with a funeral home.

**National Funeral Directors Association (NFDA)**

11121 W. Oklahoma Avenue  
Milwaukee, WI 53227  
800-228-6332  
414-541-2500

<http://www.nfda.org>

NFDA's mission is to enhance the funeral service profession and promote quality services to consumers. They offer brochures on subjects pertaining to grief, death and funeral services.

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## Grief and Bereavement

### **Bereavement and Hospice Support Netline**

<http://www.ubalt.edu/www/bereavement>

This online directory of bereavement support groups and services and hospice bereavement programs from across the United States provides information to help individuals and/or their loved ones find appropriate help and support in coping with issues of loss and grief.

### **GriefNet**

<http://rivendell.org>

GriefNet is an online system that can connect you with a variety of resources related to death, dying, bereavement and major emotional and physical losses. It offers information and online discussion and support groups for bereaved persons and those working with the bereaved, both professional and lay persons.

### **Twinless Twins Support Group International**

11220 St. Joe Road  
Fort Wayne, IN 46835-9737  
219-627-5414

This international organization provides support for twins (and all multiple births) and their family members who are suffering from such a loss.

## Hospice

### **Foundation for Hospice and Home Care**

513 C Street, N.E.  
Washington, DC 20002  
202-547-5263

This organization promotes hospice and home care and can provide free consumer guides.

### **Hospice Association of America (HAA)**

519 C Street, N.E.  
Washington, DC 20002  
202-546-4759

<http://www.nahc.org>

An affiliate of the National Association for Home Care, this is a nationwide organization representing more than 2,000 hospices and thousands of caregivers and volunteers who serve terminally ill patients and their families. Anyone can call for information and brochures; members receive additional services.

### **Hospice Education Institute**

190 Westbrook Road, Suite 2  
Essex, CT 06426  
800-331-1620

This organization provides referrals to a regularly updated directory of hospice and palliative care programs nationwide, plus general information on hospice care and information on bereavement issues and services.

### **National Association for Home Care**

228 Seventh Street, S.E.  
Washington, DC 20003  
202-547-7424

<http://www.nahc.org>

This organization promotes hospice and home care and can provide free consumer guides.

### **National Hospice Organization**

1901 N. Moore Street, Suite 901  
Arlington, VA 22209  
800-658-8898 (helpline)  
703-243-5900

<http://www.nho.org>

This organization represents hospices nationwide and can provide you with information about programs in your area.



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## Infant/Pregnancy Loss

### **A.M.E.N.D. (Aiding a Mother and Father Experiencing Neonatal Death)**

1559 Ville Rosa  
Hazelwood, MO 63042  
314-291-0892

This national organization offers support and encouragement to parents grieving the loss of their baby.

### **CLIMB (Center for Loss in Multiple Birth)**

PO Box 1064  
Palmer, AK 99645  
907-746-6123

CLIMB offers support by and for parents of twins, triplets or other multiple-birth children who have experienced the death of one or more children during pregnancy, at birth, in infancy or childhood. It provides contact listings, articles and telephone and mail support to parents and friends suffering this kind of loss.

### **National SHARE Office (Pregnancy and Infant Loss Support, Inc.)**

St. Joseph Health Center  
300 Capitol Drive  
St. Charles, MO 63301-2893  
800-821-6819

<http://www.nationalshareoffice.com>  
This national organization serves those who are grieving the death of a baby through miscarriage, stillbirth or newborn death by providing grief support information, education and resources on the needs and rights of bereaved parents and siblings. It sponsors over 100 local chapters nationally and internationally.

### **National Sudden Infant Death Syndrome Resource Center (NSRC)**

2070 Chain Bridge Road, Suite 450  
Vienna, VA 22182  
703-821-8955 ext. 249

<http://www.circsol.com/sids/>

NSRC is an affiliate of the National Center for Education in Maternal and Child Health, which in turn is a service of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. NSRC provides information, referrals and assistance to parents and friends of SIDS victims, and distributes the *Information Exchange* newsletter. The center also provides free information sheets on SIDS.

### **Sudden Infant Death Syndrome Alliance**

1314 Bedford Avenue, Suite 210  
Baltimore, MD 21208  
800-221-SIDS (24-hour hotline)  
410-653-8226

<http://www.sidsalliance.org/>

This national, nonprofit, voluntary health organization is dedicated to the support of SIDS families, education and research. With help from over 50 local affiliates, the alliance provides support groups, one-on-one contact, and strives to unite parents and friends of SIDS victims with medical, business and civic groups concerned about the health of infants.

### **Unite, Inc.**

7600 Central Avenue  
Philadelphia, PA 19111-2499  
215-728-3777

This national organization provides grief support following the death of a baby, including miscarriage, ectopic pregnancy, stillbirth and infant death. It maintains local chapters and offers educational programs and information to those surviving these losses.

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## **Insurance and Government Programs**

### **Department of Veterans Affairs**

800-827-1000

<http://www.va.gov>

To find the Department of Veterans Affairs in your area, call toll-free or visit the Web site. A counselor in your local office can answer questions about veterans' benefits and eligibility requirements.

### **Health Care Financing Administration (HCFA)**

7500 Security Boulevard

Baltimore, MD 21244

414-786-3000

<http://www.hcfa.gov>

This is a federal agency within the Department of Health and Human Services that administers the Medicare and Medicaid programs.

### **Insurance Information Institute**

110 William Street, 24<sup>th</sup> Floor

New York, NY 10038

800-942-4242

212-669-9241

<http://www.iii.org>

Trained personnel can answer questions about insurance issues (agents, claims, liability, disasters, etc.) through their National Insurance Consumer Helpline (NICH).

### **Medicare Rights Center**

Medicare Beneficiaries Defense Fund

1460 Broadway, 11<sup>th</sup> Floor

New York, NY 10036

212-869-3850

<http://medicarerights.org>

This nonprofit organization assists Medicare beneficiaries with general questions and concerns about coverage. It is sponsored by the New York City Office for the Aging, but it is not exclusive to New York residents.

### **Medicare.gov**

800-633-4227

<http://www.medicare.gov>

The Web site provides information on Medicare, Medigap policies and Medicare Health Plan. The site's Nursing Home Compare section lists Medicare-certified facilities and up-to-date inspection and deficiency information.

### **National Association of Insurance Commissioners (NAIC)**

120 W. 12<sup>th</sup> Street, Suite 1100

Kansas City, MO 64105

816-842-3600

<http://www.naic.org>

This organization of insurance regulators that protects the interests of insurance consumers and publishes guides that educate consumers about insurance and their rights.

### **National Organization of Social Security Claimants Representatives (NOSSCR)**

6 Prospect Street

Midland Park, NJ 07432

800-431-2804

201-444-1415

An association of over 3,000 attorneys who represent Social Security and Social Security Income claimants. It can provide information about Social Security laws as well as referrals to attorneys who specialize in this type of law.

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### **Social Security Administration (SSA)**

Office of Public Inquiry  
6401 Security Boulevard  
Room 4-C-5 Annex  
Baltimore, MD 21235  
800-772-1213

<http://www.ssa.gov>

This is the national office of the Social Security Administration. Call or visit its Web site to locate the Social Security office in your area or to obtain information regarding Social Security, Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI), Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Medicare and Medicaid.

### **U.S. Department of Health and Human Services**

800-638-6833 (Finance Medicare Hotline)

Sponsored by the Health Care Financing Administration, Medicare representatives can provide information about Medicare, Medicare HMOs, Medigap policies, insurance fraud and Medicare beneficiary programs. They can also provide the telephone number of your State Insurance Counseling and Assistance Program (ICA).

## **Legal**

### **American Bar Association**

750 N. Lake Shore Drive  
Chicago, IL 60611  
312-988-5000

<http://www.abanet.org>

Though primarily an association for attorneys, this organization will provide referrals to local bar associations that can in turn provide additional referrals to local attorneys.

### **Legal Counsel for the Elderly**

AARP  
601 E Street, N.W.  
Washington, DC 20049  
800-424-3410

This organization can provide general legal information and referrals to elder law attorneys, local bar associations and legal hotlines.

### **National Academy of Elder Law Attorneys, Inc.**

1604 N. Country Club Road  
Tucson, AZ 85716  
520-881-4005

<http://www.naela.com>

This nonprofit organization provides educational resources, support and assistance to attorneys specializing in elder law, their clients and their clients' families.

### **National Clearinghouse for Legal Services, Inc.**

205 Monroe Street, Second Floor  
Chicago, IL 60606-5013  
312-263-3830

This nonprofit organization offers legal information concerning health, housing and the elderly.

### **Senior Law Home Page**

<http://www.seniorlaw.com>

This Web site offers articles, news, legislative updates and resources regarding elder law, Medicare, Medicaid, estate planning, trusts and the rights of the elderly and disabled.

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## Loss of a Child

### **The Candlelighters Childhood Cancer Foundation (CCCF)**

7910 Woodmont Avenue, Suite 460

Bethesda, MD 20814

800-366-2223

301-657-8401

<http://www.candlelighters.org>

This is an international, nonprofit organization whose mission is to educate, support, serve and advocate for families of children of cancer, survivors of childhood cancer, and the professionals who care for them. This organization provides education, peer support, an information clearinghouse, referrals to local contacts, publications and advocacy.

### **Children's Hospice International (CHI)**

2202 Mount Vernon Avenue

Alexandria, VA 22314

703-684-0330

800-242-4453

A nonprofit organization that provides a network of support and care for children with life-threatening conditions and their families. Information on children's hospice care for the general public, referrals to local hospice programs or other health professionals, and printed materials are available.

### **The Compassionate Friends**

PO Box 3696

Oak Brook, IL 60522

708-990-0010

<http://www.compassionatefriends.org>

A national nonprofit, self-help support organization that offers friendship and understanding to families who are grieving the death of a child of any age, from any cause.

### **MADD (Mothers Against Drunk Driving)**

669 Airport Freeway, Suite 310

Hurst, TX 76053

800-GET-MADD

<http://www.madd.org/>

Mothers Against Drunk Driving is a nonprofit, grassroots organization with more than 600 chapters nationwide. MADD is focused on finding effective solutions to drunk driving and underage drinking, while supporting those who have already experienced the pain of these senseless crimes.

### **Make-a-Wish Foundation of America**

100 W. Clarendon, Suite 2200

Phoenix, AZ 85013

800-722-9474

<http://www.wish.org>

This is the oldest and largest wish-granting organization in the world. It exists to fulfill the special wishes of children under the age of 18 who have life-threatening illnesses. The foundation is a nonprofit, privately funded organization composed of more than 13,000 volunteers in 82 chapters in the United States.

### **The National Organization of Parents of Murdered Children (POMC)**

100 East Street, B-41

Cincinnati, OH 45202

513-721-5683

<http://pomc.com/>

This national, nonprofit organization provides ongoing emotional support to parents and other survivors of murdered children. It will also help and assist victims dealing with the criminal justice system. Call or visit its Web page for support, information or to subscribe to its newsletter.

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### **The Sunshine Foundation**

2001 Bridge Street  
Philadelphia, PA 19124  
215-535-1413

<http://www.sunshinefoundation.org>

This foundation works throughout the country and the world to fulfill the wishes of children suffering from terminal as well as chronic illnesses such as: spina bifida, muscular dystrophy, sickle cell anemia, cystic fibrosis, AIDS, cancer and more. It is supported in large part by donations from private individuals. Call for information on its programs.

### **Mental Health Services**

#### **American Psychiatric Association**

1400 K Street, N.W.  
Washington, DC 20005  
202-682-6220

<http://www.psych.org/main.html>

This professional organization supports research to improve diagnosis, treatment and rehabilitation of people with mental or emotional illness. Individuals may contact the association for referrals to psychiatrists in their area.

#### **American Psychological Association**

750 First Street, N.E.  
Washington, DC 20002  
202-336-5500

<http://www.apa.org>

A nonprofit organization that provides information and referrals to state associations that can help you find local clinical psychologists.

#### **National Alliance for the Mentally Ill (NAMI)**

200 N. Glebe Road, Suite 1015  
Arlington, VA 22203-3754

800-950-6264

703-524-7600

<http://www.nami.org>

This organization provides education and resources on mental illness and brain disorders.

#### **National Foundation for Depressive Illness, Inc.**

PO Box 2257

New York, NY 10116

800-239-1265

<http://www.depression.org>

This organization can provide information and publications about depressive illness—and refer you to doctors who specialize in treating depression.

#### **National Institutes of Mental Health**

Public Inquiries Office

6001 Executive Boulevard, Room 8184  
MSC 9663

Bethesda, MD 20892-9663

301-443-4513

<http://www.nimh.nih.gov>

Part of the National Institutes of Health (NIH), this is a research institute that offers general publications on mental health disorders, including depression.

#### **National Mental Health Association (NMHA)**

1021 Prince Street

Alexandria, VA 22314-2971

703-684-7722

<http://www.nmha.org>

A nationwide not-for-profit agency that provides mental health information and referrals to other mental health organizations (but not physicians).

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### **National Register of Health Care Providers in Psychology**

1120 G Street, N.W., Suite 330  
Washington, DC 20005  
202-783-7663

<http://www.nationalregister.org>

This organization provides listings of psychologists according to geographic area and specialty.

### **Pain Management**

#### **National Chronic Pain Outreach Association**

7979 Old Georgetown Road, Suite 100  
Bethesda, MD 20814  
301-652-4948

Information clearinghouse about chronic pain and its management; publications; and referrals to pain management specialists, pain clinics and pain support groups.

#### **American Chronic Pain Association**

PO Box 850  
Rocklin, CA 95677  
916-632-0922

<http://www.theapca.org>

The American Chronic Pain Association (ACPA) is a nonprofit organization with more than 800 chapters throughout the United States and the world. The purpose of this organization is to provide a support system for those suffering with chronic pain through education and self-help group activities.

### **Pet Loss**

#### **Pet Loss.com**

<http://www.petloss.com/>

This is a Web site for those grieving over the death of a pet or an ill pet. It offers personal support, advice, tribute pages, poetry and more.

#### **Pet Loss Partnership (PLP)**

College of Veterinary Medicine  
Washington State University  
Pullman, WA 99164-7010  
509-335-4569

<http://www.vetmed.wsu.edu/plp.html>

The goal of PLP is to provide support for people grieving the loss of a pet. Call or visit its Web site to request a newsletter and/or other resource information.

### **Self-Help**

#### **American Self-Help Clearinghouse**

Northwest Covenant Medical Center  
Denville, NJ 07834-2995  
201-625-9565

This national organization provides information on local self-help group clearinghouses worldwide, which can help you find and form bereavement self-help groups. The American Self-Help Clearinghouse also provides free consultation on starting new self-help groups.

#### **National Self-Help Clearinghouse**

25 W. 43<sup>rd</sup> Street, Room 620  
New York, NY 10036  
212-642-2944

<http://www.selfhelpweb.org>

This nonprofit, national service refers individuals to self-help support groups all over the United States. It will help you locate a support group in your area or refer you to a clearinghouse that will help you locate one.

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## Suicide

### **American Association of Suicidology**

4201 Connecticut Avenue, N.W.

Suite 408

Washington, DC 20008

202-237-2280

<http://www.suicidology.org/>

A nonprofit organization dedicated to the understanding and prevention of suicide. It provides resources for anyone concerned about suicide, including AAS members, suicide researchers, therapists, prevention specialists, survivors of suicide and people who are themselves in crisis.

### **Light for Life Foundation**

PO Box 644

Westminster, CO 80030-0644

303-429-3530

<http://www.yellowribbon.org/>

This national, nonprofit organization provides suicide prevention information and youth suicide facts and statistics. From its Web site, you can link to suicide statistics, coping tips, crisis/help groups and survivors' support networks.

## Widows/Widowers

### **American Association of Retired Persons Widowed Persons Service**

601 E Street, N.W.

Washington, DC 20049

202-434-2260

<http://www.aarp.org>

One-to-one peer support for widows and widowers, run in cooperation with AARP and local community groups. There is an outreach service, which provides visits by widowed volunteers to the newly bereaved and group meetings for discussion and mutual assistance. It also provides free booklets, referral services, manuals on starting support groups, and public education.

### **The International THEOS Foundation (THEOS)**

322 Boulevard of the Allies, Suite 105

Pittsburgh, PA 15222-1919

412-471-7779

This is an international nonprofit support network that maintains over 120 local chapters and over 70 chapters outside of the United States for support for recently widowed men and women. It sponsors programs and provides services to help participants work through their immediate grief and cope with day-to-day concerns of widowhood.

### **Widowed Persons Service (WPS)**

4270 Chicago Drive S.W.

Grandville, MI 49418

616-538-0101

This is a self-help support group for men and women who have experienced the loss of a spouse through death. They offer daytime and evening support group meetings, seminars, social activities and public education of the widowed experience. They have a directory of the 270 programs across the country and can refer you to one in your area.

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