

When a loved one dies

The death of a loved one is a tragic event. It is often unexpected. You may feel a wide range of emotions. These may include one or more of the following:

- shock
- sadness
- numbness
- anger
- guilt
- fear
- anxiety
- relief and a profound sense of aloneness.

You may have a delayed reaction until the 'shock' of the death 'sinks in'.

You are not alone. Emergency department staff are here to help answer your questions, or explain anything you do not understand.

What happens now?

Feel free to stay at the hospital for as long as you wish and talk to staff.

The doctor will tell you if the death of your loved one requires the attention of the Coroner.

Before you leave the hospital

Other close family members may choose to view the deceased person. We prefer only immediate family members to come to the hospital. Family members may choose not to see the body. This is fine. Please tell hospital staff when you are ready to leave. The deceased person will be cared for by the hospital until plans have been made with your chosen funeral director.

What is the role of the Coroner?

The State Coroner investigates a death if it is traumatic, unexpected (sudden) or the cause is not known (an unexplained death). The Coroner will advise you if an inquest (hearing) is required. This is rare and only applies in certain circumstances.

An autopsy may be needed to find out why the person died. It is usually performed within three days of the person's death.

The Coroner requires that the deceased person be left exactly as they were when they died. The Coroner's Office will arrange for the deceased person to be taken to the Coronial Services Centre.

You are able to object to an autopsy. This request should be directed straight to the Coroner's Office (call the State Coroner's Office without delay - **Phone (03) 9684 4444**).

You may also be contacted by the Donor Tissue Bank of Victoria to discuss the option of tissue donation - this usually occurs immediately as living tissue needs to be donated within 12-24 hours.

When you get home

When you get home you may want to contact family, friends and your local clergy (church). It is good to seek company and support at this time. The hospital staff are able to help you contact people if you wish.

You will need to contact a funeral director, even if the deceased's body is at the Coroner's Office. A list of funeral directors can be found under 'F' in the Yellow Pages. The funeral director will make suitable arrangements to collect the body from the hospital or Coroner.

You may need to check if a prepaid funeral has been organised or if there were special requests in regards to the funeral.

Organising a funeral is an important part of grieving, so it is worth spending time to plan the funeral that you and the deceased would want. If you need help, the funeral director can take care of all aspects of the funeral, such as ordering flowers, putting notices in the newspaper and handling the legal paperwork for either burial or cremation.

Grieving

Grief is personal and private. No one can tell you how to grieve. It is a journey you take and no two people will grieve the same way. It is important to give yourself, your family and your friends enough time to grieve. There is no 'normal' length of time or the 'right' way to grieve.

The feeling of loss does not go away but the intensity will ease. It may help to ask for support from family and friends. Ensure that you take care of your diet and get enough rest and 'time out'.



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Support services

The hospital has social workers and pastoral care staff who can help you. If they are unavailable (usually out of hours) you will be contacted the next day. Alternatively, please ask the hospital staff how to contact them.

You can also ask your doctor or local health care professional for support in your local area.

The services listed below offer support for you, your family and your friends.

- **Australian Funeral Directors Association**

Phone (03) 9859 9966
www.afda.org.au

- **Bereavement Counselling and Support Service**

Phone 1300 66 47 86
www.grief.org.au

- **Compassionate Friends**

(self-help group for bereaved parents)
Phone 1800 641 091
www.compassionatefriendsvictoria.org.au

- **Grief Line** (12 noon to 3 am)

Phone (03) 9596 7799

- **Kids Helpline**

(a help line for people aged between five and 25)
Phone 1800 55 1800
www.kidshelp.com.au

- **Life Line** (24 hours)

Phone 13 11 14

- **Mensline Australia**

Phone 1300 78 99 78
www.menslineaus.org.au

- **Road Trauma Support Team Victoria**

Phone 1300 367 797
www.rtstv.org.au

- **State Coroner's Office**

Phone (03) 9684 4444
www.coronerscourt.vic.gov.au

- **SIDS and KIDS (24 hours)**

(sudden and unexpected death of any child under six)
Phone 1300 30 83 07
www.sidsandkids.org

- **Suicide Helpline Victoria** (24 hours)

Phone 1300 651 251
www.suicidehelpline.org.au

Notes:

If you would like to receive this publication in an **accessible format**, please phone 9096 8064 or email edfactsheets@dhs.vic.gov.au

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