

General Information

What do I do next?

Suggestions from others who have experienced loss

We extend our sincere sympathies to you for your loss. Many people tell us it would help to have a checklist to help them organize things. It helps to know what may happen during the first few weeks after the loss of a loved one.

We hope these suggestions will help you.

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General information

You may be contacted by the New England Donor Services (NEDS) to discuss organ and/or tissue donation. The immediacy of the issue makes it necessary to do this as soon as possible.

Arrangements for funeral or religious services can be made after you leave the hospital. You may want to discuss any plans with family members. Your funeral home will probably contact you to make an appointment and will help to plan the arrangements. Clergy may also assist you during this time.

When you return home

- Contact family members and close friends.
- Contact your clergy if you have a religious preference.
- Discuss the choice of a funeral home with immediate family.
- Arrange for a friend or neighbor to help you answer phone calls and questions about funeral arrangements.
- Ask for help in phoning others to tell them of the death.
- Notify the employer of the loved one's death.
- Notify the employers of household members.
- If children are involved, tell their schools.
- Contact your attorney for help with legal issues.
- Have someone keep a list of all phone calls, flowers, and food gifts.

Before going to the funeral home

Gather this information to take to the funeral home. It is also helpful to bring a family member or close friend with you.

- Name of your loved one (full name and nicknames)
- Date of birth of your loved one
- Place of birth of your loved one
- Social Security number
- Occupation
- Father's name
- Mother's maiden name
- If veteran, proof of military service
- List of relatives and relationships
- List of church, professional organization, club, and other organization memberships of your loved one
- The name and address of an organization or charity to which donations may be made in memory of your loved one
- List of people who might be available as pallbearers

- List of people who may speak about your loved one at the service
- The clothing in which your loved one will be buried
- Arrangements for food or a reception after the burial service

After the funeral arrangements are made

- Arrange for quiet time for you and your loved ones to rest. Ask someone to help you over the next few days.
- Plan to get copies of the death certificate from the funeral home.
- If the funeral home is not handling the obituary, make arrangements to have one placed in local newspapers.
- On the day of the funeral service, ask someone to house sit.

After the funeral

- Contact life insurance companies.
- Contact the local Social Security office. You may be eligible for benefits.
- If you do not have an attorney, contact your bank concerning any accounts.
- Notify creditors and credit card companies.
- Grieving and bereavement can mean a need for extra help or resources. Your funeral director or your town may be able to help.

Other suggestions you may find helpful

- **Accept the grief.** Roll with the tides of it. Don't try to be brave. Take time to cry.
- **Talk about it.** Share your grief within your family. Don't try to protect them with silence. Find a friend to talk to. A good listener doesn't pass judgment. If possible, find someone who has experienced a similar sorrow.

- **Keep busy if that feels helpful to you.** Do purposeful work that occupies your mind, but avoid frantic activity. You have just experienced a major life change, and allowing yourself time to rest is very important.
- **Take care of yourself.** Bereavement can hurt your health. Right now, you may feel that you don't care. That will change. You are important. Your life is valuable. Take care of it.
- **Eat well.** At this time of emotional and physical depletion, your body needs to be nourished more than ever. Try to eat what you can, when you can. Be good to yourself.
- **Exercise regularly.** Return to your old program or start one as soon as you can. Depression can be lessened a little by the biochemical changes exercise brings. You will sleep better. An hour-long walk every day is ideal for many people.

Remember

Accept your understanding of the death for now.

Maybe you have asked “why?” over and over. Maybe you now realize you will get no good answer. But you probably have some small degree of understanding. Use that as your viewpoint until you are able to work up to another level of understanding.

Join a group of others who are grieving. Your old circle of friends may change. Finding friends who have been through your experience may be helpful. Bereaved people sometimes form groups for friendship and sharing. Call 662-2951 for support group information.

See old friends, too. This may be difficult. Be yourself and don’t avoid the subject of your loss.

Put off major decisions. Wait before deciding to sell your house or change jobs. Give yourself time before making important decisions or big changes.

Record your thoughts in a journal if you like to write. It helps to get your feelings out and records your progress.

Turn grief into creative energy. Find a way to help others. Helping to carry someone else's load is guaranteed to lighten your own. If you have a creative talent, use it. Great art has been made as a tribute to someone loved and lost.

Contact members of your religious group. If you have been inactive in matters of faith, this might be the time to get involved again.

Do not allow crippling grief to continue. A time will come for you to pick up familiar activities and try new ones. If your grief prevents this, try meeting with a trained counselor. They may help you to resolve feelings of anger, despair, and guilt.

No matter how deep your sorrow, you are not alone. Others have been there and will help share your load if you let them.

Do not deny them — or yourself — the opportunity.

Adapted with permission from the Yale Bereavement Support Team, Healing Grief, by A. Jenson and from Rutland Regional Medical Center Trauma Support Program.

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