

After Your Loss

PALOMAR | UC San Diego Health
Grief Support Services



Dear Friend,

We are sorry for your loss and want you to know that you are not alone in this difficult season.

Palomar UC San Diego Health is committed to supporting people of all ages, faiths and backgrounds in recognizing and understanding the journey of grief. The information in this booklet has been compiled from many different sources which we have found to be helpful over the years. There is not one answer or way to grieve or feel. The most important thing is to be honest about how you're feeling, as the journey of sorrow and loss is full of many twists and turns. We are willing to join you on this journey and to laugh and cry with you. We invite you to find some quiet time to sit and reflect on this information. You are not alone.

This booklet is designed to help you understand, acknowledge and navigate your grief. Carrying grief is a lifelong journey, but you don't have to do it alone. With the help of family, friends and faith, you can learn to live with sorrow and sadness. There is always room for hope. *Death is real and its sting is sharp, but death does not win. Love wins. Love always wins.* Those who experience loss will always hold this great tension between sorrow and grief and feelings of joy and love. We understand that and are here to help you learn to live with this loss.

Grace and peace,

Palomar UC San Diego Health Spiritual Care Team

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Chaplain Services

Palomar UC San Diego Health provides chaplain services 7 days a week at the Escondido and Poway campuses. Chaplains take care of all peoples' spiritual needs and can help by both listening and having an honest conversation. Chaplains can help you make difficult decisions related to the end of life, as well as next steps after a loved one has died. We are not here to fix or solve, rather we are here to stand with you during this difficult time. You may also request that your own spiritual leader be contacted. We are here to help.

Experiencing Grief & Loss

Normal and Natural Responses to Your Loss

The death of someone close can leave us with a variety of feelings, thoughts and emotions. These often seem powerful enough to threaten our very survival. If this feels overwhelming, it's because it is. If this feels like too much, it's because it is. These feelings may feel relentless and never-ending, then quiet down only to arise months or even years later when we least expect them. That's okay. That's because love still remains.

Grief is the natural human response to any loss, not only death. Illness, job changes, a divorce, a separation, unfulfilled dreams, a move to a new location or any other change can bring about a grief response. Grief is not a problem; it is a normal, healthy process of life. There is no right or wrong way to grieve. In the period of loss following death, you may feel many conflicting emotions such as sadness, anger, fear and guilt all at the same time. Because of this, grief can sometimes seem intolerable. It is important to recognize that these feelings are normal.

You may experience other people saying things or giving advice that you do not find helpful. Find the people who can listen to you and provide the support that works for you. Grieving is not done all at once. There is no tidy progression or stages of grief, and its course may resemble a long and winding road. Most of us move in and out of grief, alternately feeling the pain and reality of the loss, and then taking time to engage in life's ongoing tasks, such as work and family obligations. It's okay to experience pleasure and focus on other things.

There is no clear roadmap to grief because each person's experience is unique. This booklet explains common aspects of grief that many people experience and provides some tools that may help you navigate this journey and find your own path as you learn to incorporate loss into your daily life.

Grieving is a natural healing process that moves slowly from the pain of loss to hope for the future. It can feel so overwhelming that it can frighten and confuse you. Many people who suffer a loss worry about whether they are grieving in a normal and healthy way. Some normal and natural reactions to losing a loved one can include:

- Physical pain and discomfort.
- Loss (or gain) of appetite.
- Difficulty with concentration.
- Difficulty sleeping and/or dreams or visions of your loved one.
- Experiencing guilt or anger over events that did or did not occur in your relationship.
- The need to tell and retell the experience of your loved one's death.
- Sudden mood changes over the slightest things or without explanation.
 - This does not have to be directed at a person, you can just simply be angry.
- Sensitivity when talking about your feelings of loss.

As unpleasant and undesirable as these experiences can be, they can help move you through a process of healing. While you cannot reduce your pain by postponing your grief, you can learn to grow deeper and more capable of managing your grief through healing and recovery. Getting over grief is not the goal, learning to live with grief is.

Practical Help and Resources for Learning to Live with Loss

Healing does not mean your loved one is forgotten or left in the past. They will be with you in your memories of the past and future experiences in life. The following suggestions address some of our experiences in grief and may help in your healing process.

Accepting Assistance and Support

Including others in your grief is a helpful and positive step in working through grief. This is the time to surround yourself with people who care about you, even if you feel self-sufficient or strong. Family, friends or colleagues can be helpful when you inform them of practical, emotional and spiritual needs. If you are concerned with how you are coping with your grief and loss, consider professional help. We encourage you to seek support from trusted friends, family, peers or professionals to help you during this challenging time. Try not to isolate yourself from family and friends and allow them to offer comforting gestures of support during your grief. Attend a support group where people who have "been there" can give support. Pain shared is pain lessened.

Crying

Let the tears flow. Crying is a natural expression of grief and integral to a natural healing process. Your tears express your sense of loss and they help you release built-up tensions, whether physical, emotional, mental or spiritual. Tears remind us that love is still present.

Postpone Important Decisions

You may face important decisions after the death of your loved one, ranging from where your loved one's belongings go, to determining your personal life's future. Many people have learned it is helpful to move slowly through these tasks and decisions. Slow down. This is not the season for big decisions; it is the season to grieve and learn to live with this loss.

Expressing Feelings

Expressing your emotions and feelings without judgment is integral in healing through the grief process. Activities such as journaling for yourself or writing letters to your loved one are helpful means of expression. Expressing your feelings to trusted friends or family members is also welcomed. Seeking out support groups to share your sorrow with others may also be helpful. We encourage you to express your feelings. An essential part of grief work is to share your story of how you have experienced the loss of someone you love and what you feel over time. To some, telling your story to caring and supportive friends and family members, a caregiving professional or a support group may be easier, especially if you find it difficult to express your feelings at first. Talk about your memories of the one who has died. Any of these actions have the benefit of being therapeutic and appropriate when dealing with one's emotions.

Planning Holidays & Special Occasions

Seasonal holidays, anniversaries and birthdays can reengage feelings of sadness and loss. Be sure to give yourself the time and support you need to feel the feelings that these occasions bring. Find creative ways to honor your loved one. Make a special playlist, cook one of their favorite dishes or say a special toast in their memory. Holidays are hard, but they can also be beautiful times of celebrating and remembering those we have lost.

Rituals to Honor Your Loved One

Rituals are expressions of your personal relationship with your loved one and a healing way to continue keeping your loved one as part of your life. Rituals can include lighting a special candle, planting a tree in your loved one's memory, creating a photo album or scrapbook or saving a favorite piece of clothing.

Engaging Your Spirituality

Engaging your core values and beliefs can bring vital growth in your time of loss. Grief can deepen and enrich your spiritual life. Some of the most meaningful prayers are those written by people who are grieving. Engaging spiritual practice can be as unique as your loved one. Watching a sunset, meditation and prayer are just a few examples. Simply creating space to feel and remember in quiet presence is very meaningful. In addition, this might be a season to engage or reengage a local spiritual community. You are not alone.



Nutrition

Eat a balanced and well-rounded diet. Believe it or not, taking care of yourself during grief can start with something as simple as eating right. Food is often associated with emotional comfort. This can be a good thing, as long as eating is healthy and proportional. In *"Eating Rainbows,"* an article written by Joan Daniels, R.D., and Nancy Burke, R.D., in the Winter 2010 issue of *Thrive*, both authors recommend that combining a variety of colorful fruits, vegetables and legumes will help promote good health and lower disease risk. The body's immune system can be weakened during times of stress or grief.

A helpful guide to eating healthy is to follow the colors of the rainbow:

- tomatoes, watermelon, grapefruit, pomegranates, red chili peppers, cranberries, cherries
- carrots, mangos, cantaloupe, winter squash, sweet potatoes, pumpkins, apricots
- beans, chickpeas, lentils, kiwi, nuts, tamarind, dates, brown rice, almonds, mushrooms
- broccoli, cabbage, bok choy, brussels sprouts, spinach, okra, avocados, edamame, leeks
- blueberries, eggplant, blackberries, prunes, plums, beets, purple cabbage, figs, red onions

Drink 8 glasses of liquid (water, juice, milk, soup) per day. Avoid drinks that may cause dehydration and headaches such as alcohol or too much caffeine, as these can exaggerate feelings of depression.

Exercise

Stay active by regularly including exercise in your daily routine, such as walking, biking, stretching, jogging, swimming, yoga or aerobics. In fact, many of your favorite workout routines can be useful in grief work. As with any exercise program, please consult your healthcare provider about what kinds of exercises will be useful for you.

Rest and Work

Take care of yourself and get some rest! Rest can look like a nap on the couch or time spent tilling the garden. Rest might mean sitting still or watching a movie. Rest is important during early grief because death and loss are physically, emotionally and spiritually taxing. Some people will need a break from work while others will welcome the distraction of work, but there is no right or wrong. The important piece is balance. Get some good rest that's meaningful to you.

Reading and Writing

Read books, articles and poems that provide comfort or help in understanding what you are experiencing in grief, so you do not feel alone. Keep a diary or journal of your thoughts, memories and mementos. Write letters, notes and/or poems to or about your loved one. You may create a voice recording of your thoughts and memories, especially for younger members of your family who might not be old enough now to remember the one you lost. Below is a list of just a few books we have found to be helpful for others in our own personal grief and loss.

- *How to Go On Living When Someone You Love Dies* by Therese A. Rando
- *Midlife Orphan* by Jane Brooks
- *The Bereaved Parent* by Harriet Sanoff Schiff
- *Widowed* by Joyce Brothers
- *A Grace Disguised* by Jerry Sittser
- *The Grieving Child* by Helen Fitzgerald
- *The Grieving Teen* by Helen Fitzgerald
- *The Wild Edge of Sorrow: Rituals of Renewal and the Sacred Work of Grief* by Francis Weller



Case Management Services

Case Management is made up of Registered Nurses and Social Workers. The services are available 7 days a week at Palomar UC San Diego Health. Ask your nurse for more information.

Organ and Tissue Donation

If your loved one signed up to be a donor on the California Organ and Tissue Registry or at the Department of Motor Vehicles, all efforts will be made to honor their wish if medically possible. If they have not registered yet and you are interested in learning more about organ and tissue donation, representatives from Lifesharing are available to speak with you. To learn more, please visit: DonateLIFECalifornia.org.

The Medical Examiner's Office

Depending upon the cause of death, the nurse may need to call the Medical Examiner's Office. The Medical Examiner will review the cause of death and tell the nurse if an autopsy is to be done. Your nurse will then tell you what the Medical Examiner has stated. The Medical Examiner will bring your loved one from the hospital to the Medical Examiner's Office in San Diego. The Medical Examiner will determine when your loved one is ready for burial or cremation.

What is a Non-Medical Examiner's Autopsy?

A Non-Medical Examiner autopsy can occur one of two ways:

- If you wish to, you may request an autopsy. The service will have a fee and the hospital does not pay for this service. Please talk with the doctor in the hospital if this is your request.
- A doctor may also request an autopsy to learn more about:
 - The illness or disease
 - The effectiveness of therapy
 - Any complications or other diseases that may be present
- This process requires your consent and there may be no charge to you

Death Certificate

The mortuary or crematory you choose will give your loved one's death certificate to you. It is a good idea to order a few death certificates as you may need to send them to multiple places.

How to Get Your Loved One's Belongings

A family member, guardian or conservator will need to show (ID) proof of who they are and sign a form. If you have questions or concerns, please call the hospital operator.

Palomar UC San Diego Health Escondido: 442.281.5000

Palomar UC San Diego Health Poway: 858.613.4000



Memorial Gifts

Please contact the charity of your choice. Most charities will thank the donor and notify the family of the gift.

Help With Burial Costs

The Indigent Burial Program pays for the burial or cremation of a deceased San Diego County resident who cannot afford it.

The person who died must **not** have:

- Assets from which to pay the cost of a funeral
- Family who can afford to pay
- Social Security Administration or Veterans Administration burial assistance

For more information, call 858.694.3500.

After Your Loss:

- ☐ Collect valuables and personal items before leaving the patient's room. Contact the hospital if you need assistance.
 - Palomar UC San Diego Health Escondido: 442.281.5000
 - Palomar UC San Diego Health Poway: 858.613.4000
- ☐ The family is responsible for choosing a mortuary and making all funeral arrangements for their loved one.
- ☐ Make a list of immediate family, close friends, employers or business colleagues to be notified by phone.
- ☐ If flowers are to be omitted, pick an appropriate memorial to which gifts may be made.
- ☐ Arrange for family members or close friends to take turns answering the door or phone, keeping a careful record of calls and visits.
- ☐ Arrange appropriate childcare if applicable.
- ☐ Seek help in coordinating the supply of food for the next days.
- ☐ Consider special needs of the household such as cleaning and the care of pets.
- ☐ Arrange hospitality for visiting family and friends.
- ☐ Notify lawyer and executor of the will.
- ☐ Plan for disposal of flowers after funeral (hospitals or rest homes).
- ☐ Prepare a list of people to receive acknowledgements of flowers, calls, etc.

Send Appropriate Acknowledgements:

- ☐ Check all life and casualty insurance and death benefits, including Social Security, credit union, trade union, fraternal and military. Also check on income for survivors from these sources.
- ☐ Promptly check on all debts and installment payments. Some may carry insurance clauses that will cancel them. If there is to be a delay in meeting payments, consult with creditors and ask for more time before payment is due.
- ☐ If your loved one lived alone, notify utilities and landlord.
- ☐ Tell the post office where to send mail.
- ☐ Check with the Health Department or mortuary regarding the death certificate number.

Checklist: Who to Notify **Government Agencies:**

- ☐ Social Security Administration, 800.772.1213
- ☐ Veteran's Administration, 800.827.1000 (if decedent was formerly in the military)
- ☐ Defense Finance and Accounting Service, 800.269.5170 (military retiree receiving benefits)
- ☐ Office of Personnel Management, 888.767.6738 (if decedent was not a U.S. citizen)

Financial Companies:

- ☐ Credit card and merchant card companies
- ☐ Banks, savings and loan associations and credit unions
- ☐ Mortgage companies and lenders
- ☐ Financial planners, stockbrokers and pension providers



Credit Reporting Agencies:

Immediately contact all three national credit agencies by telephone to report the death. Instruct them to list all accounts as "Closed. Account Holder is Deceased." Follow up with a letter to each agency sent via certified mail. Be sure to retain a copy for your records. You may also request a credit report to obtain a list of all creditors and to review recent credit activities. A sample notification letter is available at <https://palomarucsdhealth.org/bereavement-resources/>.

Experian

Phone: 800.397.3742

Address: P.O. Box 9701, Allen, TX 75013

Equifax

Phone: 800.525.6285

Address: P.O. Box 105069, Atlanta, GA 30348

TransUnion

Phone: 800.680.7289

Address: P.O. Box 6790, Fullerton, CA 92834

Memberships (examples):

- ☐ Professional associations and unions
- ☐ Health clubs and athletic clubs
- ☐ Automobile clubs
- ☐ Public library
- ☐ Alumni clubs, Rotary, Kiwanis, Lions, Veterans' organizations and clubs
- ☐ Social media (Facebook, X, LinkedIn, etc.)

Do Not Contact Lists:

For a small fee, you can list the decedent's name on the Deceased Do Not Contact List that is maintained by the Direct Marketing Association.

- ☐ Direct Marketing Association (register at www.IMS-DM.com/CGI/DDNC.php)

List of Local San Diego Mortuaries and Crematories:

AAA Cremations (Miramar)
619.573.4777

Affordable Funeral Solutions (Rancho Bernardo)
858.217.6776

Alhiser-Comer Mortuary (Escondido)
760.745.2162

Allen Brothers Mortuary (San Marcos)
760.744.4522

American Cremation Services
760.729.9182 (Carlsbad)

California Funeral Alternatives
760.737.2890 (Escondido)
858.842.3000 (Poway)

Care Center Cremation and Burial (San Marcos)
760.489.9900

Cremation Services, Inc. (Vista)
760.727.8906

Dearborn Memorial Park (Poway)
858.748.5760

Dignity Memorial-Funeral Homes, Cremations
and Cemeteries El Camino Memorial Park
858.453.2121 (Sorrento Valley)
760.753.1143 (Encinitas)

Eternal Hills (Oceanside)
760.754.6600

Funeraria La Paz (Escondido)
760.294.2262

George Family Cremation and Burial (Escondido)
442.257.2854

Lakepointe Cremation and Burial
760.737.6884 (Escondido)
951.245.1771 (Lake Elsinore)

McLeod Mortuary (Escondido)
760.745.2100

Miramar Memorial Services (Miramar)
858.566.9100

Neptune Society Cremation (Encinitas)
760.942.1821

North County Cremation Services (San Marcos)
760.471.6301

Opal Cremation of Greater San Diego (Carlsbad)
760.388.5879

Poway-Bernardo Mortuary (Poway)
858.748.4101

Silver Lining Cremations (Escondido)
760.607.9393

Trident Society Cremation (Miramar)
858.527.7678

Tulip Cremations (Escondido)
844.942.4909

White Rose Aqua Cremation (Escondido)
442.777.6077

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