

***When You Have To
Say Goodbye....***



Western Lane Fire & EMS Authority staff would like to express our deepest sympathies for the loss of your loved one. We have put together this booklet of information to help you walk through the difficult days ahead.

Feel free to contact a member of our Community Support Team if you have any further questions or needs.



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The First Few Days

So many overwhelming and confusing emotions are likely to be flooding you in the immediate days after your loss. All of these feelings (devastation, confusion, shock, denial, numbness, anger and more) are normal reactions to the loss of a loved one. They are proof that we have loved.

Don't expect to function well at this time. Just allow yourself to grieve. Eat at regular intervals and try to get enough sleep. Drink lots of water. Allow yourself to cry. Grieving and self care. These are all you can manage right now. And they are what you need to do most of all.

And yet, there is so much to do! Funeral arrangements, the multitude of phone calls and visitors, day to day care of your children and household, notifying others.....the tasks ahead of you are overwhelming. Assign these tasks to trusted family or friends. Loved ones will be offering their support and assistance in this time. ***Let them help you.***

"Making Arrangements"

There is a lot to be done, and this is not the time for you to have to do it. So again, ***delegate these responsibilities*** to family and friends who offer to help you during this difficult time. Here is a list of things to consider:

~**Make a list of important people to notify:** family, close friends, employers, etc.

~**Allow others to temporarily be responsible for household tasks** such as: preparing meals, grocery shopping, getting children to school, etc. This is an easy, yet concrete, way for family and friends to show their support.

~**Establish one person to answer phone calls and make necessary calls** to others. Alternately, an email "message chain" can be established to communicate important updates/info to multiple family and friends at one time.

~**Designate one person to answer the door** so you can rest and avoid having to visit with a multitude of concerned visitors.

~Call the funeral home to make arrangements for any viewing and/or funeral services desired by family. Designate someone to check on options, pricing, available times and dates.

~Decide who you would like to conduct the service/ give the eulogy. Are there going to be other speakers? Establish who will be pall bearers. Contact them all regarding date and time.

~Write an obituary (oftentimes the funeral home will do this). You may want to include age, place of birth, cause of death, occupation, military service and any other accomplishments, list of survivors/immediate family, time and place of services (if appropriate) and where people can send flowers or make donations.

~Check with all life and casualty insurance plans, as well as Social Security, for possible death benefits. If the deceased was a veteran, contact Veterans Affairs. Also check on any benefits for survivors from these plans.

~Notify and cancel insurance policies (including auto insurance). Check for refunds.

~Check on all debts and installment plans. Some may include insurance clauses that will cancel the debt upon death. If your loved one lived alone, notify their landlord and notify utilities. Put in an address change at the post office to re-route the mail.

~Notify the lawyer and Executor of the Will (if applicable). Obtain multiple copies of the death certificate (through the funeral home). Most banks and other agencies will require a certified copy.

The Roller-coaster of Grief

You will experience a roller-coaster of emotions, all of which are completely normal right now. You will likely experience anger or rage, depression, tearfulness, guilt, numbness or denial and more...and not in that order. Your emotions will be “all over the map” and can/will change within a moment’s notice. You will likely feel out of control or like you are “losing your mind” at times. This is the normal course of grief.

Common responses to the loss of a loved one can include anxiety, difficulty concentrating or focusing, nightmares or intrusive thoughts.

Anger, fantasies of revenge or a need to blame someone or something for your loss are common. Many feel angry with God (this is ok, God has broad shoulders. He will accept your anger and continue to love you). Still others experience feelings of guilt, as if they somehow should have been able to prevent the death from happening, or guilt over still being alive or experiencing occasional moments of joy or happiness. Some people develop a sense of hyper-vigilance, or a sensitivity to noise or light. Others become socially withdrawn. Depending on circumstances, the death of a loved one can cause changes in your world view, such as the world now appearing to be an unsafe place, or feeling like you are somehow “in a bubble” and seeing yourself as “separate” from the rest of the living world.

Some people (especially children) experience somatic symptoms such as headaches or stomachaches. Disturbances in appetite and sleep patterns are very common, as are impaired judgment, inability to concentrate, inability to motivate yourself (or the opposite: a need to constantly be “in motion”). Fears of going to sleep or leaving the house, or having “panic attacks”, are not uncommon.

It is important to allow yourself to feel all of your feelings without trying to stifle them. Stifled feelings will simply reappear later, and may effect your performance at work or role within your family.

Acknowledge your feelings and work through them in whatever way you can. Some people need a lot of “alone time”. Others shout into their pillows or spend time exercising strenuously. Some people write or draw about their emotions/feelings. Some seek out a compassionate friend or therapist who will simply listen. There is no right or wrong way to grieve, nor is there an appropriate “time-line” for how long you will or “should” grieve. Everyone grieves in their own unique way.

Grief can be extremely difficult on a marriage. Men and women frequently grieve quite differently. Women typically are more comfortable expressing their emotions than men. Men may more readily feel anger or simply shove their emotions down, in order to “hold it together”, return to work, or be “strong for the family”. Men are also more likely to offer advice and try to “fix things” for their wives and children, whereas women oftentimes simply want to be heard. Differences in how men and women grieve can create a terrible strain on the marriage, and the children as well. If you find yourself and your spouse growing further and further apart as you both struggle to cope, please seek ***professional counseling***.

It can be very difficult to experience such intense emotions. You may feel incredibly lonely or angry or be unable to control your tears or other emotions. ***Beware of any increase in drug or alcohol use. Beware of any increase in risk-taking or destructive behavior.*** If this occurs, it might help to seek out professional counseling for a short while.

Although you may not think so right now, your grief ***will*** become less intense over time. Grief is a long process, and realistically, it may take a year or more before you think hopefully towards the future once again and experience joy without pain, sadness or guilt.

After the First Weeks

After the funeral and all the immediate activities and arrangements associated with a death, guests and extended family will return to their homes and their work. Life returns to normal for others, ***but not for you. This can oftentimes be the most difficult time of all. Don't let this catch you by surprise.***

You may want to consider the following suggestions:

~Contact your physician to discuss any temporary need for medication to help with depression or sleep. Symptoms to watch for include a significant change in appetite (increase or decrease); inability to fall asleep or remain asleep; inability to stop crying; chronic feelings of rage or irritability; panic attacks; new and/or “unreasonable” fears (such as leaving the house or fear of the dark/nighttime). Talk with your physician or therapist about any of these symptoms.

~Seek out a bereavement support group, blog or professional counselor to give you a safe, supportive place to express your grief and process your feelings, as well as to help you realize you are not alone. Seeking professional help is not a sign of weakness. It is actually a sign of great strength that you are willing to wrestle with such painful emotions. It will also be good for you to meet other people who have suffered similar losses in their lives, to help you feel less isolated.

~Find a healthy outlet for your grief. It will be your constant companion for the foreseeable future, so you might as well find a healthy way to express it. Write about your loss in a journal. Express yourself through artistic channels - draw, paint, etc. Take up exercise - join a gym or take

a long daily walk. Exercise is an excellent way to physically release the overload of emotions during times of stress. Join a group with a cause (Mothers Against Drunk Drivers, foundations to find lost children or groups that educate parents about use of seat belts, helmets, river safety, etc).

~It is times like this that truly determine which friends will be there for you in your time of greatest need. You will likely be surprised which people can (and will) be there for you emotionally, and those who simply cannot. Determine who will be able to give you the patience, support and kindness you need as you cry, repeat your story a million times, refuse to get out of bed, forget to eat, and otherwise forget how to function.

~Let that person (and others) help you in meeting your day to day needs. Grocery shopping, cleaning house, caring for the children.... just let these “guardian angels” of yours be there in whatever ways you need for as long as you need.

Depression and Guilt: Red Flags

A multitude of emotions are to be expected as you grieve the loss of a loved one. However there are two emotions that must be kept in check.

~Guilt: Guilt is a common response to the death of someone you love. Feeling you should have been there, or somehow prevented their death. Things you wish you had said or done (or not said or done!), if only you had known. Guilt is a very common, but completely destructive and useless emotion when it comes to the death of a loved one. What has happened, has happened. Nothing will change that. The world unfolds according to it's own rules, and your actions would not likely have changed the outcome. Grief is hard enough. Don't make it harder than it already is. ***If you find yourself blaming yourself and shouldering tremendous guilt, please do not keep this to yourself.*** Consider short- term counseling, a support group, or contacting one of our chaplains for support.

~Depression: A period of deep depression is not unusual after such a devastating loss. Like all other phases you will experience, this too shall pass. You may find yourself ***temporarily*** experiencing sleep and/or appetite disturbances, difficulty getting out of bed, lack of willingness to take care of basic hygienic needs (showering, brushing teeth, changing clothes), inability to go back to work or daily activities, and/

or uncontrollable emotions (crying, rage, irritability). But if these symptoms ***persist past the couple months, it will be very important to address this with your physician.*** Antidepressant medications and/or professional counseling are two short-term, but very effective ways to manage such symptoms.

Again, all of these symptoms are normal in the short run. But if they do not resolve within a reasonable amount of time, ***they will likely not resolve on their own.*** Seek help.

Being Alone

Losing a spouse or life partner is a uniquely difficult kind of loss. You might feel a loss of your primary identity when you are no longer one half of a “couple”. You may instantly find your social life diminished. If you have been caring for a spouse who has been ill for some time, it will also mean a loss of your primary role as caregiver. Loneliness and lack of purpose, as well as fear and anxiety regarding how to function in the world as a newly and unexpectedly single person, can be overwhelming. Here are several things to consider:

~Although you will clearly need and want some time alone with your feelings, ***do not allow yourself to isolate!*** One of the most important things for you to do is remain in touch with friends and loved ones, and realize you are not alone.

~**Maintain your daily routine**, to the best of your ability. Go to bed and rise in the mornings at your usual times. Be sure to eat healthy and regularly. If you read, take a walk in the mornings, go to the gym- whatever your daily routine, try to stick close to it.

~**Don't make any major decisions or changes for at least a year.** If you are considering getting rid of your spouse's clothing or belongings, or selling your home and moving, it is best that you wait 6-12 months before making any big changes. There is no hurry, and you don't want to regret any of your decisions later.

~**It is most important that you stay socially engaged.** Loneliness and isolation are your worst enemy. It is important to still have something to look forward to. Stay in touch with people in your life that you love, and who love you. Attend church. Spend time with your grandkids. Consider getting a pet for companionship.

~Know that there are local support groups, “online chat” groups, and a multitude of books written for, by and about newly widowed people. It really does help to talk to, or at least hear from, others who have been down the path you are embarking on. It will help you to not feel so alone.

~If possible, incorporate some exercise in your daily routine.

Taking a nice walk each morning will not only elevate your mood, but it will make you stronger, help you sleep better, and give you something positive to look forward to each morning.

~Sometimes people will be reluctant to talk about your loved one. They avoid the uncomfortable topic of death. They don't want to “remind you” of that which makes you sad. People who have not lost their life partner do not realize the importance of acknowledging this person who was, and still is, central to your life. Do not hesitate to say their names out loud, tell and retell the same old stories, tales of love, laughter, what was most memorable and what you miss most. Stories are the fabric that weaves our families together, and our memories are what hold our loved ones closest to our hearts.

Children's Grief

Children grieve very differently than adults. Younger children do not yet understand that death is permanent and express their grief mostly through repetitive questions and through their play. They may show regressive behaviors such as bed wetting, fear of the dark or of going to sleep, nightmares, physical complaints such as stomachaches or headaches, temper tantrums, irritability or clinginess.

Older children have a better understanding of death as a permanent and irreversible event. They may shut down and not want to talk about their loss, or they may have the need to talk about it frequently and in some depth. They may show changes in appetite and/or sleep, may have difficulty concentrating on school and other tasks, and may have intense emotional outbursts of anger, sadness, guilt or anxiety. Teens may withdraw from family, relying on their peers for support. They might have unreasonable thoughts of being responsible for, or having failed to prevent, the person's death. They may entertain thoughts of self harm.

Children of different ages and developmental stages will struggle with

grief in very different ways. And although parents and other adults will need to respond differently to individual children, here are some general ways to respond to children during a time of loss and grief.

~Listen to your children. Let them talk about their feelings. As adults, we frequently try to offer advice instead of simply listening. Accept their feelings, even feelings of anger or sadness. Don't try to change, fix, or take them away.

~Allow them to express their fears and feelings, even if you find it difficult to hear. Don't tell them not to cry or be mad or frightened. These are normal feelings and children may need to express them. It is good for children to see that adults cry and are sad too. With younger children, simply let them know by "labeling" your feelings for them: "Mommy and daddy are sad and confused too. We miss him/her too. We are sad because we loved him/her".

~Answer questions honestly and simply. You may find yourself wanting to shelter your child from difficult realities. Children are much more perceptive than we give them credit for. They need, and deserve, the truth. For younger children, what you share may be short, simple, and age appropriate. For teens, full disclosure is important. You don't want them to hear "the truth" at school or from someone else.

~Reinforce that they are safe. Re-establish their daily routine as soon as possible in order to reinforce that not every aspect of their life has changed. Offer lots physical and emotional nurturance.

~Provide creative and/or active outlets for their emotions. Encourage outdoor play or exercise. These are great ways to "let off steam". Suggest they draw pictures of their loved one or write/journal about their feelings. Suggest the family plant a tree together in their loved one's honor.

~Provide choices whenever possible. "I know you have homework. Would you like to do it now or after dinner?" Set limits, but be flexible whenever possible.

~Seek professional counseling if symptoms and/or behaviors become extreme or do not resolve with time. There are many excellent child therapists who can help with children who are exhibiting signs of trauma, serious acting out, or suicidal thoughts.

~Should children attend the funeral? This is a very common question! Some people don't think so, but often that is because of their own discomfort with seeing children grieve. Your child's grief is as significant as yours, and their bewilderment even greater. Children of all ages need to say their goodbyes and attending the funeral will help them with this. With younger children, explain what they can expect to see there (adults will be sad and may be crying, their loved one may be in the front of the room and look like they are sleeping, people will be talking about all the nice things they remember about their loved one, etc). Ask your child if he/she would like to attend with you. Even young children are amazingly adept at knowing if they should go or not, and if given the choice, they will tell you.

~Whether or not you allow your children to attend the funeral, it is always helpful to give them a concrete way to say goodbye. Suggest they draw a picture or write a letter or card to put in the casket with their loved one, that will remain with them forever. Children love this and it is a very healing experience for them.

"Little Anniversaries"

The thing that catches most people by surprise is how the littlest of events and routines can trigger tears and bring you to your knees with fresh grief. You will naturally expect your loved one's birthday and major holidays to be difficult days. You prepare for that. But the things you are not prepared for are the small, day to day reminders of your loss. The empty place at the table at mealtimes. Seeing their car or bike in the garage. Watching a television show or hearing a particular song your loved one enjoyed. You may actually be having a relatively good day when you drive down a particular street, smell a particular smell, or simply think a particular thought and suddenly you become a bundle of tears. Just expect this.

It is your heart letting your profound grief express itself in small amounts, over time. Just being aware that the smallest things can sometimes trigger the biggest emotions can be exceedingly helpful.

Getting through the Holidays

Holidays are another profoundly difficult time after losing a loved one. And once again, there is no right or wrong way to approach this. But here are a couple suggestions to consider:

~Decide ahead of time what you can and cannot do. Don't pressure yourself to stick with your usual celebration. Don't let others tell you what you "should" or "shouldn't" do. Change it up in whatever way you need to, and offer no apologies for this. Ask your children/spouse for their input. It can help lower your anticipatory anxiety, as well as the anxiety of the rest of the family.

~Honor your feelings. Some people decide to still set a place at the table for their loved one. Others may choose to light a memorial candle in their loved one's honor. Another idea is to invite everyone in the family to share a special memory about your loved one at the dinner table. Honor your loved one in your own unique way.

~If attending a holiday event, be informed. Be prepared to see lots of people who may not yet know of your loss, or may express their condolences to you in a variety of ways. Some people may avoid you due to their own discomfort. Give some consideration to how you might respond to these various comments or greetings. Give yourself permission to leave early if you need to.

~Ask for help. Even if it is difficult, ask for (and accept) help. Don't try to do it all. Get plenty of rest. Keep your expectations low and your plans simple. Sometimes your entire goal will simply be to get through the holiday, and that is ok too.

How We Remember

As time passes, many grieving people, both children and adults, worry that they will slowly forget small details about their loved one who has died. The smell of mom's hair; grandpa's laugh; how their little sister liked to sing songs in the car. It's important to honor your loved one by holding on to as many memories as possible, as well as to honor their place in your life going forward.

There are many creative ways to honor your loved one and preserve their memory. Here are some ideas:

~Plant a tree in their honor. Pick it out as a family. Choose a special place in your yard to plant it. Have family members take turns watering it and caring for it. Take pictures of it in every season, and document its growth. Put a placard near it with your loved one's name or a small poem written by family.

~**Establish a special box** that you and your family can fill with pictures, written memories, momentos and whatever else reminds you of your loved one. Go through the box as a family on your loved one's birthday or other special holiday.

~**Occasionally cook your loved one's favorite meal or dessert.** Invite additional family and close friends over to partake. Make a toast to your loved one, and allow everyone at the table to share their favorite memories.

~**Have family and friends write down stories** about your loved one, especially stories that you or your children may not know about. Collect them and make them into a memory booklet.

~**Acknowledge the day you lost them.** It is a painful date, yes, but one that you will never be able to forget. So treat it with the respect it deserves. Plan a family picnic, a trip to the mountains, or simply a family dinner on that date every year, so family can come together to acknowledge and honor your loved one.

We all have our own unique ways of remembering and honoring those we love. Create your own.

Faith, Relationships and Hope

After a devastating loss, it is inevitable that issues of faith arise. For some, their faith is severely challenged; for others, it is a source of great comfort or a cause for new exploration.

It's not uncommon for people to be angry with God. Simple phrases such as "It was God's plan" or "He is with God now" may not provide the comfort intended. Grief and faith are both very complex and are not mutually exclusive. Grief is a natural reaction to being abruptly separated from those we love. And unfortunately, faith does not eliminate our anger, guilt, sadness or regret. So yes, death can sometimes over-whelm or challenge our faith. It's ok. As a friend once told me, "Go ahead. Be mad at God. He has broad shoulders." Sometimes our grief can confuse our faith and our faith can confuse our grief. This will work itself out in time. But as soon as you can, return to your place of worship for the faith, support and love you so desperately need, and will receive there.

Your church community can offer respite from those darkest moments in your life. It can be a lifesaver, even more so if you are not surrounded by family at this difficult time. So open yourself up to God's helpers. They will help you remember God's goodness at a time when you might be tempted to forget.

In and out of church, your relationships with others is what is going to sustain you and restore your sense of hope. It will not be a fast process, nor an easy one. But allowing yourself to be surrounded by loved ones, to feel ok about picking up the phone and saying "I need you right now", and allowing people to be there for you, is key to your eventual recovery of emotional health.

Will life ever be the same as it was before? Likely not. But will you eventually find a way to live a life of purpose and find some happiness in your world once again? Believe it or not, yes. The key is to maintain your relationships, your faith and hope.

Resources and Support

Grief and Loss Support Group (541) 997-3418 (Norma Wood, Clinical Social Worker): No fee. Meets every Wednesday 3:00-4:00 at St. Andrews Episcopal Church at 2135 19th Street.

GriefShare (541) 997-8913 (Steve Fonda): Faith based grief support group held at Florence Christian Church. Some classes are educational in nature with a featured speaker, other meetings are support group style.

Suicide Loss Support Group (541) 997-3212 (Lori Severance): Offered twice monthly at Siuslaw Valley Fire & Rescue 2625 Highway 101, Florence. Call for current schedule.

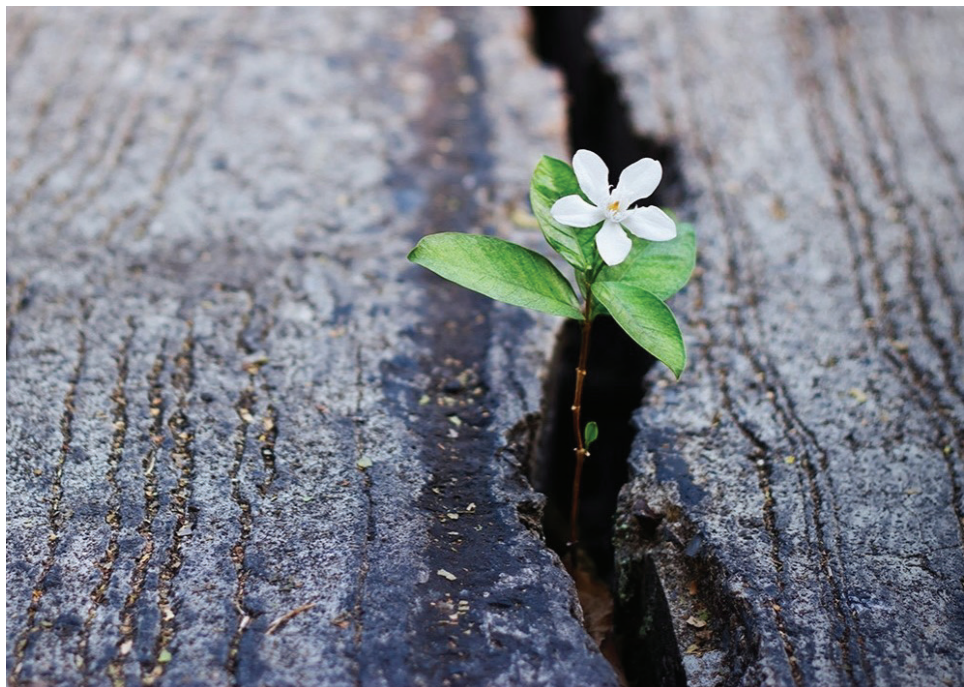
American Cancer Society (541) 484-2211 or (800) 227-2345 (24 hour line): Provides a variety of cancer-related services and information.

The Dougy Center (www.dougy.org) - a multitude of on-line resources for grieving children and families. Very helpful information regarding how to help children through grief.

Compassionate Friends - A safe, supportive community for those who have lost a child. Their national magazine is described as a “support group in print”.

GriefNet (www.griefnet.org) - An internet community of people dealing with grief, death and loss.

Coping with Loss: 115 Helpful Websites on Grief and Bereavement: www.Mastersincounseling.org/loss-grief-bereavement.html - A multitude of websites for written information, blogs, and other support for all types of grief, including the death of a parent, partner, child or pregnancy.



Pain is real. So is hope.

This resource guide has been developed by Western Lane Fire & EMS Authority Community Support Team (CST), to assist community members after the loss of a loved one. Please feel free to contact a member of our Community Support Team with any questions you may have or if you need further support.

The list of bereavement resources included in this booklet are not directly endorsed or recommended by WLFEA.



"Working Together For Our Community"