

# SUDDEN LOSS AND THE GRIEF THAT FOLLOWS

Information and support for families after a workplace death



**NTWorkSafe**



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A heartfelt thank you, acknowledgment and enormous appreciation for the assistance of icare Insurance & Care New South Wales for providing NT WorkSafe with their materials and giving permission to use the excellent tools developed on this important topic. This guide and the information it provides will be invaluable to families and next of kin in the Northern Territory who are dealing with grief, and in particular grief arising from work related injuries and fatalities.

NT WorkSafe would like to thank Rebecca for your open letter about your experience of loss and grief, and the years that follow. It is hoped her courage might give you comfort when it is most needed.

Peggy Cheong  
Executive Director,  
NT WorkSafe

Work Health Authority  
Electrical Safety Regulator



### Disclaimer

The content of this document is provided for information purposes only. While all reasonable care has been taken to ensure the information is correct at the time of printing, NT WorkSafe makes no warranties as to its accuracy, currency or suitability for a particular purpose. You should seek professional advice and support from health and legal professionals familiar with your personal circumstances. This pack provides contact information for various external organisations and bodies. Please note that NT WorkSafe does not warrant or represent that information or advice provided by these organisations or bodies is correct or suitable for any particular purpose, or free from any bias.

## FOREWORD

*"This too shall pass"* ...of Persian origin reflecting on the temporary nature of ephemerality of the human condition....

While it may be human nature to look on the bright side and subscribe to the age old adage *"it won't happen to me"*, many people have had to deal with the effects of the death of a loved one. This is arguably even more difficult if the death is employment related, as one expects people at work to be safe and protected from harm.

Therefore on behalf of everyone at NT WorkSafe, I wish to convey my sincere condolences to you and your family at this difficult time. We are saddened by your loss and our thoughts are with you and your family.

To try and offer some assistance to you and your family, the following information sets out some of the things that might need to happen straightaway and some other things that may help over a period of time. There is also information and details as to who may contact you and other organisations that are available for advice and support.

Grief is a very powerful emotion, it is personal to each individual and everyone. We all deal with grief in different ways. Over time, we have collected a few stories that may assist you. These are from people who have experienced your journey as a result of your loss, and who are grieving someone they have lost too.

We hope that in a small way, you will find this information helpful and more importantly we will do what we can to assist where and when we can. Please feel free to reach out to NT WorkSafe.

**Peggy Cheong**

*Grief is like the ocean. It comes on waves ebbing and flowing. Sometimes the water is calm, and sometimes it is overwhelming. All we can do is learn to swim."*

**Vicki Harrison**



*"Grief is not a disorder, a disease or sign of weakness. It is an emotional, physical and spiritual necessity, the price you pay for love. The only cure for grief is to grieve."*

**Earl Grollman**



## WHO IS INVOLVED AND WHY





**NT Police** may attend the site when a serious workplace incident occurs. If the police are involved they may:

- Tell the family of the person who has died
- Inform NT WorkSafe and the Coroner that a death has occurred
- Accompany a family member or close friend to identify the person who has died
- Collect statements from colleagues, witnesses and sometimes family in order to prepare a police report

**What you can do: if the police are involved, you can keep in touch with the allocated Police Officer who can provide you with updates about the investigation.**

**NT WorkSafe** is the office of the Northern Territory's Work Health and Safety Authority and Regulator ("Regulator"). NT WorkSafe investigates fatalities and serious workplace incidents. NT WorkSafe inspectors will carry out enquiries into any workplace incidents to determine what happened and may be in touch with you to gather information which may help.

All work related workplace fatalities are considered and reviewed by NT WorkSafe Inspectors and Investigators. NT WorkSafe Inspectors carry out the initial enquiries into fatalities with the assistance of NT WorkSafe Investigators. If the Inspectors, with initial input from the Investigators form the view that further investigations are required into the circumstances of a fatality, NT WorkSafe Investigators will carry out a thorough investigation into the case.

These investigations form part of the Regulator's deliberation process on whether:

- the evidence suggest any potential breach of the work health and safety legislation has occurred in relation to or resulting in the fatality;
- how to proceed in the event that contravention of the legislation has been identified; and
- in the appropriate cases, the investigation may result in the preparation of a brief of evidence, and a detailed report containing recommendations for potential prosecution;
- such a report may be considered by legal counsel, the NT Director of Public Prosecutions and the Regulator to determine whether prosecution action (if and as appropriate) will be taken.

NT WorkSafe commits to finalising 75% of investigations within 12 months.

In some instances where it appears that work, health and safety laws have been breached, NT WorkSafe may initiate legal proceedings in the Local Court of the NT. If this happens, the NT WorkSafe Support Officer will talk with you about the investigation or any action being taken.

What you can do: you can contact the NT WorkSafe Support Officer on 1800 019 115 about the role of NT WorkSafe when there is a workplace fatality. Counselling support services and financial assistance contact information is available on NT WorkSafe's website on the "Support" page.

The **NT Coroner** is responsible for confirming:

- The identity of the person who died
- When, where, how and why they died (medical cause of death)

The Coroner may decide that an inquest is necessary to answer these questions. Alternatively, the Coroner may not recommend, nor proceed with an inquest if the information given by the police, NT WorkSafe and medical specialists provides the necessary answers.

#### Releasing of the body

When there is a workplace fatality and an autopsy needs to be undertaken, the NT Coroner will need to release the body.

What you can do: you can find out more information on the Coroner and inquests on the NT WorkSafe website "Support" page.

### **Workers Compensation**

In the unfortunate situation where a worker is fatally injured arising out of or in the course of their employment, there may be benefits payable under the *Return to Work Act 1986* (the Act).

The death claim form for dependants is available on the NT WorkSafe website and should be completed and passed onto the deceased's employer. The employer may be able to assist in completing this form.

The employer will then pass the form onto their insurer who will make the liability decision on your claim.

The Act specifies what benefits are paid and who they are paid to, including, but not limited to:

- Payment or reimbursement of the reasonable costs of medical and like services received by the worker because of the work-related injury or disease leading to death.
- Funeral costs to the person liable to meet the expense.
- Family counselling.
- A lump sum payment of prescribed proportions to dependants.
- Prescribed children's benefits.

Where the amounts payable for particular benefits is capped to a maximum amount, this is reflected in the legislation and the insurer will advise you of the amount.

All claim benefits and management of the claim services are provided by the approved insurer for the employer, or self-insurer, the Nominal Insurer or Gallagher Bassett (in relation to Northern Territory Public Sector employees).

*Access to counselling through the Workers Compensation Case Manager: counselling may be helpful to you now, or in the months to come, to help with the overwhelming feelings that many people experience after a traumatic death.*

NT WorkSafe or your Case Manager will talk with you about the counselling services available. Please call NT WorkSafe's Workers Compensation area on 1800 250 713 or your Case Manager if you would like more information.

Your Workers Compensation Case Manager will:

- Provide information and access to counselling support services for immediate family members
- Examine the circumstances of injury and other information to decide if compensation can be paid (this is called determining liability)
- Provide the outcome of that decision in writing, including what you should do if you disagree with the decision

**What you can do:** stay in contact with your Case Manager and provide what information you can so that a decision can be made as quickly as possible. Ask questions – if your Case Manager doesn't have the answer, you can contact NT WorkSafe on 1800 250 713 and they may be able to help you find the right person to help you.



**GRIEF:  
EVERYONE'S WAY IS  
DIFFERENT  
(AND THAT'S OK)**

*Your own experience and expression of grief will be different from anyone else's. You may seek company or need solitude in your sadness; you might express your feelings openly with others, or reflect on your feelings privately. You may do all of these things at different times as your needs change, and that's ok.*



There is no right or wrong way to grieve, but there are emotional reactions which are common to most people when somebody dies. You may experience some or all of these feelings with varying intensity, in no particular order, and some feelings may return again and again, and for a time, feel overwhelming.

It might be helpful for you to recognise these to know that you are not going mad; you're grieving.

## Shock

The loss of someone close to you is a tremendous shock and when it is unexpected, the feelings are intensified. You may experience shock for days, weeks or for some, months after the death.

## Feeling numb

You may experience a period of feeling 'numb'; like living in a fog, you may think, 'this can't really be happening', and that you will wake up from it. This numbness is our mind's way of protecting us for a short time from the loss. This is why some people are able to participate in the practical arrangements after the death, or may not cry at the funeral. However, once the shock wears off, the loss becomes real and the emotional pain emerges.

## Disbelief & searching

It's natural to have difficulty believing what has happened is real; on one level you know that your loved one has died, but on another level it's impossible to accept. Moving between denial and realisation is a natural part of mourning and coming to terms with your loss. You may also find yourself unconsciously searching for your loved one – talking to their photographs, looking for them on the street and waiting for them to walk through the door. Confusion, panic and fear are common during this time.

## Physical & emotional stress

Grief may be felt both physically and mentally. You may feel restless and exhausted at the same time, you may have disturbed dreams and find it difficult to concentrate or remember things.

This intense emotional pain may feel like physical pain and you may experience dizziness, palpitations, shakiness, headaches, nausea and changes in appetite (under- or over-eating).

## Anger

Feeling angry is a natural response to loss; intense feelings of rage often reflect a sense of helplessness at not being about to change what has happened. Anger may be directed at friends and others for carrying on with their lives as if nothing has happened. You may even feel anger towards the person who died. Anger is often felt most intensely shortly after the death but lessens over time.

## Despair

Feelings of despair are common once you fully realise that your loved one is not coming back. Relationships with others are often affected because you feel drained and numb. You may feel that there is no purpose and feelings of suicide are not uncommon.

## Fear

A significant loss can trigger different worries and fears. You may panic that this could happen to someone else in your family and become overly protective of them. You may also worry about the responsibilities you now face.

## Grief & depression

Deep sadness and despair can feel a lot like depression, and people who have experienced a deep loss can be prone to depression for some years following the death. If your grief leads to a lasting depression however, additional help may be appropriate (you can find out more on page 28).

## Some things you can do for yourself

- **Spend time with people who know what you're going through** and who allow you be open about your feelings
- **Find a space where you can be alone** when you need to
- **If it's right for you**, let others know that it's ok to say your loved one's name, to talk about them, to remember and share stories about them
- **Ask for help and let people help you.** Others feel helpless by a death too – helping you lets them show that they care. Practical tasks such as cooking, picking up/dropping off kids, grocery shopping and lawn mowing are some examples
- **Cry when you need to.** Crying releases endorphins which reduces stress and produces a calming effect
- Little things might upset you that normally wouldn't. **It's ok – grief presents in many small ways**
- **Be patient with yourself and others** – you will have good days and bad days
- **Talk with others who have lost a loved one** – it may help you feel less alone. The contacts page has some counselling and support service contacts that may assist (see page 30)
- **Try not to make any major decisions** in the months that follow, such as moving house or changing routines; familiarity can be helpful during this time
- **Remind yourself that there is no time limit on grieving**, and there is no 'right' way to grieve. Your way of grieving is the right way for you.

## What others have shared

It can be helpful to know how others who have been through a loss have reacted, and to remember that there is no right or wrong way to respond to the loss of a loved one.

*"We wanted things sorted out, we wanted to get to the bottom of everything... Families need to be made aware that these are cases that aren't over quickly".*

*"We thought we would just get Dwayne's body quickly and be able to move forward with a funeral, however we didn't understand that we had to wait...because of the legal processes that held this up"*

*"They may hear about it on the local radio, on national news etc. It takes your breath away when you hear it for the first time".*

*"Dwayne simply went to work, saving money for his deposit to buy his first home, only to never be able to return home "*

*"Work place accidents hit hard. Death is hard, but knowing that your loved one isn't coming home because they were killed at work, it's a whole new level of hurt".*



## A letter from Rebecca Beaumont

*29th April 2019 was the day that changed our lives forever! I received a phone call that no one ever wants to receive. It was telling me that there had been an accident involving my brother. "Is he ok?" "No". "Is he alive?" "No".*

*Then the task began of calling my sisters and letting them know what had happened, and making my way around to my parents to tell them that their only son and youngest child had been taken from us! It is a day I wish we never had to face, but we did and 5 years on, we have overcome so much.*

*We fought hard to get justice for Dwayne. He deserved to have his story heard and make it known what an amazing young man he was. How he would light up a room when he walked into it, how he was always the first to crack a joke and how he was always making people smile and laugh with his quick wit. Dwayne simply went to work, saving money for his deposit to buy his first home, only to never be able to return home on that fateful Monday afternoon.*

*I truly wish Dwayne was still here with us. We continually wonder what he would be doing now, what his first home would be like, how many children he may have, how much he would enjoy hearing all about his nieces & nephews accomplishments.*

*We take comfort in the small signs that he sends us regularly and we continue to speak Dwayne's name daily. We have his picture on our fridge so we get to see his face multiple times a day.*

*Work place accidents hit hard. Death is hard, but knowing that your loved one isn't coming home because they were killed at work, it's a whole new level of hurt. I truly wish that no one ever has to go through this pain, unfortunately though I know this will not be a reality in this lifetime.*

*#forever30*

*Vale Dwayne Benjamin Beaumont*

*22/08/1988 - 29/04/2019*

**Rebecca Beaumont**

Sister of Dwayne Beaumont

## Grieving – we all grieve in different ways

### How men, women and children may grieve differently

Both social conditioning and biology influence the way we grieve. For many men, showing feelings may feel like a sign of weakness. Grieving men will often want to do things; sort out practical problems; take on physical tasks; actively seek answers. Providing practical support can provide men with the space to process their feelings, but it may appear to others like they are withdrawing or are in denial.

Women may be more likely to openly express their feelings and seek support from friends and family. Sharing their grief and talking about their loved one helps to make sense of their loss.

While these are very broad generalisations and do not reflect everyone's experience, it recognises that men often seek to distance themselves, where women seek closeness and support, which can put a significant strain on relationships. Grieving differently does not mean that one person loved the deceased more than the other; only that their expression of loss is different.

### Young children and grief (1–6 years)

It is normal to want to protect children from pain and grief, but it's important for children to learn that it's ok to talk about feelings of loss and sadness.

Children experience the same feelings as adults, but can express it differently. They may even appear to be unaffected by the death, but this does not mean they are not grieving.

The behaviours below reflect some of the ways children express their grief. While these are normal reactions, if the behaviours continue, it may be helpful to seek professional advice.

Behaviours may include:

- Being 'clingly' and easily upset
- Playing out the loss with toys
- Anger towards friends, parents, toys
- Copying behaviours of the deceased
- Acting like a younger child or behaving more like an adult
- Not wanting to go to school, problems with school and school work
- Changed eating behaviours

- Disturbed sleep
- Physical symptoms such as stomach pains and headaches
- Asking the same questions repeatedly about the death or the absence of the loved one

Some things you can do to help your children with their grief include:

- Advise the school of the death; talk with the teacher and the school counsellor about support
- Practice with your child what they can say to people who might ask about what happened
- Maintain routines such as meal and bed times, after school activities and play time with friends. This provides a sense of consistency and security
- Include children in planning around special days such as birthdays or special occasions; they may want to make a card, write a letter or draw pictures for the person who has died
- Let them see your grief; it will help them to express their own grief in their own way

## Older children and grief (6-12 years)

Children grieve differently at different ages. Some of the grief reactions that older children may experience include:

- Feeling guilty; that they may have done or said something that caused the death
- Creating stories to fill in gaps in understanding
- Being overly protective of self and others
- Anxiousness about being separated from family
- Attempting to 'parent' the parent and other family members
- Withdrawal and isolation including avoiding school and social activity
- Seeming 'spaced out', including difficulty concentrating at school
- Aggressive behaviour, emotional outbursts
- Regression (behaving like a younger child)
- Disturbed sleep and lethargy

## Pre-adolescent, adolescents and grief (12–18 years)

Young adults may experience any of the responses mentioned on page 24, as well as:

- Depressed mood
- Rebellious behaviour including reckless risk-taking
- Excessive focus on physical or other activity
- Focus on revenge and punishment towards those who are perceived to have caused the incident, which may include the deceased

Everyone responds to grief differently, and these are just some of the behaviours that are described by families. If you are worried about changes in your child's behaviour, talk with your doctor or counsellor.

## Some days are more difficult than others

### Special dates, places, things:

Significant dates such as birthdays, Christmas, Father's or Mother's Day and anniversaries, including the date that your loved one died can be very difficult. The 'first' of each of those events following the death can be especially painful and it may be helpful to plan ahead with your family or close friends about what to do. You may choose to celebrate or recognise the event in memory of your loved one, or you may choose to keep busy with activities until the day passes. There is no right or wrong way, and how you get through these days will change over time.

### Why it can feel worse a few months after the death:

After the funeral, there may have been a lot of visitors, calls and support, but after some weeks, people return to their lives and the activity dwindles. It is about this time, too, that the shock begins to wear off and the loss becomes painfully real. The intense feelings of loss may feel overwhelming and relentless. This is a normal grief response, and while it may seem impossible, the intensity of these feelings will lessen over time. Talk with caring friends or health professionals who can support you through this.

#### How long will I feel like this?

There is no timeline for grief and it may feel like it will never be ok again. These feelings are especially strong for the first 12 to 18 months. Many families describe a change in the intensity of their grief after about two years, and while the loss is still deeply felt, they have begun to learn how to accommodate their feelings into their lives, and are less often overcome by it. Over time, a new 'normal' emerges, one which provides space for your loss, alongside the necessary day to day tasks and routines.

*"The reality is you will grieve forever. You will not 'get over' the loss of a loved one; you will learn to live with it. You will heal and you will rebuild yourself around the loss you have suffered. You will be whole again, but you will never be the same again. Nor should you be the same nor should you want to."*

**Elizabeth Kubler-Ross**



# GETTING HELP: WHEN AND WHERE

It can be difficult to know when to get help in coming to terms with the death of your loved one. Some people will find that the support of family, friends, workmates and community is enough. For others though, when grief feels relentlessly overwhelming, getting professional help might be appropriate.

Talk with your doctor if you:

- Continue to feel numb and empty some months after the death
- Feel constantly overwhelmed by feelings brought about by the death: guilt, anger, fear, abandonment
- Are not coping with the physical exhaustion, confusion, anxiety, panic or chronic tension that often accompanies grieving
- Work or exercise excessively to avoid thinking about your loss
- Feel like you have no-one to share your grief with
- Are drinking to excess or using drugs to cope
- Are thinking about suicide

Below are some options for accessing support for you and your family; you may have other supports within the community, such as a faith organisation or an interest group that you belong to.



## Counselling and Support

### BEYONDBLUE

Information & support about mental health.

Grief & loss information: [www.beyondblue.org.au/the-facts/grief-and-loss](http://www.beyondblue.org.au/the-facts/grief-and-loss)

Phone: 1300 224 636

Hours: 24 hours | 7 days

Online (via website): 3pm – 12am Suicide call back service: 1300 659 467 [www.beyondblue.org.au](http://www.beyondblue.org.au)



### HEADSPACE

Free online and telephone support for people between 12 and 25 years.

Phone: 1800 650 890

[www.headspace.org.au](http://www.headspace.org.au)



### KIDS HELP LINE

Phone, WebChat and email counselling for kids or teens.

Phone: 1800 55 1800



### LIFELINE

24 hour crisis support and telephone counselling.

Phone: 13 11 14

Hours: 24 hours | 7 days [www.lifeline.org.au](http://www.lifeline.org.au)



### MENSLINE

Telephone and online counselling support for men.

Phone: 1300 78 99 78

Hours: 24 hours | 7 days [www.mensline.org.au](http://www.mensline.org.au)



### SALVOS (The Salvation Army)

Provide support and assistance including family support and grief counselling and financial assistance.

Phone: 13 72 58 [www.salvos.org.au](http://www.salvos.org.au)





# PUBLIC AND LEGAL SUPPORT

## NT WORK SAFE

Workers rehabilitation and compensation

Phone: 1800 250 713

Email: [datantworksafe@nt.gov.au](mailto:datantworksafe@nt.gov.au)

<https://worksafe.nt.gov.au>

## NT CORONER AND INQUESTS

The coroner's office investigates deaths and suspected deaths in the Northern Territory (NT) on behalf of the community.

Phone: 08 8999 7770

[nt.coroner@nt.gov.au](mailto:nt.coroner@nt.gov.au)

<https://nt.gov.au/law/courts-and-tribunals/coroner-and-inquests/introduction>

## NT POLICE FORCE

The police investigate serious workplace incidents, including workplace fatalities.

Phone: 131 444

<https://pfes.nt.gov.au/police>

## LAW SOCIETY NT

Telephone: (08) 8981 5104

Email: [lawsoc@lawsocietynt.asn.au](mailto:lawsoc@lawsocietynt.asn.au)

Website: [www.lawsocietynt.asn.au](http://www.lawsocietynt.asn.au)

## LEGAL AID NT

Legal aid and advice.

Phone: 1800 019 343

[www.legalaid.nt.gov.au](http://www.legalaid.nt.gov.au)

## BIRTHS, DEATHS AND MARRIAGES

Phone: 08 8999 6119

Email: [AGD.registrarGeneral@nt.gov.au](mailto:AGD.registrarGeneral@nt.gov.au)

<https://nt.gov.au/law/bdm>



# ORGANISATIONS TO NOTIFY

*There are a number of people and organisations you may need to notify about the death. It can be distressing to receive letters with your loved one's name on them, such as rates notices, membership renewals and appointment reminders.*

Following is a list of some of the organisations that you might wish to notify. You may choose to contact the organisations yourself, or ask a friend to make contact on your behalf (note that some organisations might request confirmation of the death in writing).

Organisation	Phone Number or email address	Date notified
Accountant		
Australian Electoral Commission	13 23 26	
Australian Tax Office	13 28 61	
Bank/mortgage broker/other financial		
Centrelink - Services Australia	13 23 00	
Child Support Agency	13 12 72	
Club/sporting association		
Dentist		
Doctor/other health providers		
Executor of will		
Insurance companies (home/car/other)		
Medicare	13 20 11	
Optometrist		
Private health fund		
Property manager/landlord		
Schools		
Subscriptions (magazines etc)		
Solicitor		
Superannuation fund		
Vehicle registration/licensing authority		
Utilities (gas/electricity/water)		
Phone service provider (home/mobile/computer)		
Others:		

Notes

**NT WorkSafe**

