



Understanding  
Your Loss



*Dear Family Members,*

*Please accept our deepest sympathy for the loss of your loved one.*

*We have prepared this booklet to answer questions you may have during this time of grief. Some of the materials may not be easy for you to read at this time.*

*We understand, and we hope, as time goes by, that you are able to use this resource to help ease the burden of this difficult experience.*

*We know that while this booklet may be helpful, it is no substitute for the human touch. The comfort of friends, relatives and others who have faced loss can be very helpful to you at this time.*

*Sincerely and with sympathy,*

*The Staff of Inova*

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# Funeral Arrangements and Considerations

## Choosing a Funeral Home

If you have decided to have a burial or cremation, you must first select a funeral home to handle the arrangements. The funeral director will discuss the services provided, as well as the types of funerals and burials available.

The funeral home is required by law to tell you exactly what they are charging for each service before they provide it, and they are required to provide their fees over the telephone. The final cost will depend on the funeral home, the type of funeral and services, and the cemetery you choose.

If you feel you cannot handle these details yourself, perhaps another family member or friend could help.

## Connecting the Hospital with the Funeral Home

Once you have selected the funeral home, contact the hospital listed below where the deceased was a patient:

**Inova Alexandria Hospital** – Patient Registration will coordinate the release of the deceased. Contact Patient Registration at **703.504.3050**. If no one answers, contact the Inova Alexandria Hospital operator at **703.504.3000** and ask for Patient Registration.

**Inova Fairfax Hospital Campus** – The Office of Decedent Affairs (ODA) will coordinate release of the deceased. Contact the ODA at **703.776.3506**. If the office is closed, please leave a voice message for the next business day.

**Inova Fair Oaks Hospital** – The Office of Decedent Affairs (ODA) will coordinate the release of the deceased. Contact the ODA at **703.391.4145**. After normal business hours or on the weekend contact the Administrative Supervisor at **703.391.4650**.

**Inova Loudoun Hospital** – The Nursing Supervisor will coordinate the release of the deceased. Contact the Nursing Supervisor at **703.858.6320**.

**Inova Mount Vernon Hospital** – The Office of Decedent Affairs will coordinate the release of the deceased. Contact Patient Registration at **703.664.7524**. If you are unable to reach this office, contact the Inova Mount Vernon operator at **703.664.7000** and ask for Decedent Affairs.

## Burial Considerations

Here are some important considerations to keep in mind when making arrangements for the funeral and burial:

**Casket** - The size and style of the casket may affect the cost.

**Direct Burial** - Many funeral homes can arrange a short, private viewing for immediate family members before a direct burial. Services are held at graveside or in a church.

**Church/Community Burial** - Some churches maintain burial land for their members that is free or available at a greatly reduced rate. Some towns and cities have community-owned cemeteries that may have available space at lower cost.

**Viewing/Funeral Home** - This usually means one or two days' use of a room in the funeral home for greeting friends and relatives. Viewing may also be held in your church, home or other facility. Services may be held at the funeral home or at a church before the graveside service.

**Cemetery** - Fees vary for a plot and the opening/closing of the grave. Cemeteries also sometimes limit the number of individuals that can be buried in one plot.

**Cremation** - While a casket is not necessary if there is no formal viewing, there are crematory and medical examiner fees. If formal viewing for friends and family is desired before cremation, a casket must be purchased or rented. Most funeral homes will allow a short, private viewing for family members only before direct cremation. Remains may be buried or scattered. Check with the local authorities or your funeral home regarding local customs and laws.

## Financial Matters

Funeral and burial expenses are normally paid for by the deceased's estate, family or friends. We understand that the cost of a funeral may be a burden on your family's resources. Some counties offer financial help to families that qualify. Normally, these funds only provide for very basic cremation or burial services, and upgrades are not permitted.

*We realize that it is very hard to make the important decisions about the final care of your loved one at this most difficult time. It is our sincere hope that the following information will help you make those decisions according to the wishes of the decedent and/or family.*

*Some of the words and ideas in this booklet may seem impersonal. We do not intend it to be that way — we have found that direct and concise language is the clearest and most compassionate way to convey this information.*

Additionally, some counties or cities may require the family to use a specific funeral home for which the county or city has contracted services. Contact the social service agency in the decedent's county or city of residence for eligibility.

**Fairfax County Area on Aging: 703.324.7948**

**Alexandria City Department of Human Services:  
703.746.5700**

**Loudoun County Department of Family Services:  
703.777.0353**

**Arlington County Department of Human Services:  
703.228.1300**

For more information about social services agencies, contact:

**Inova Alexandria Hospital Case Management Department  
703.504.3580**

**Inova Fairfax Hospital Case Management Department  
703.776.3508**

**Inova Fair Oaks Hospital Case Management Department  
703.391.4772**

**Inova Loudoun Hospital Case Management Department  
703.858.8017**

**Inova Mount Vernon Hospital Case Management  
Department 703.664.7238**

## Other Finances

In addition to funeral expenses, you may also be responsible for areas of financial management with which you are not familiar. For help in dealing with questions about hospital bills, contact Patient Accounts at **571.423.5750**.

## Anatomical Body Donation

Bequeathing the deceased's body to a medical school is an alternative to burial or cremation, and it generally involves no cost to the deceased or family. Anatomical donation provides a valuable gift for advancing medical education and research.

The medical school typically will use the deceased's body for 18 months, and then the remains are cremated. Some schools, if requested, return the ashes to the family. In lieu of traditional funeral services, many families choosing anatomical donation hold memorial services in their homes, churches or other designated places.

For information on anatomical donation and eligibility, contact the anatomical program of your choice. Certain medical conditions and other factors may disqualify donation.

Commonwealth of Virginia Department of Health  
Anatomical Program  
Richmond, VA  
**804.786.2479**

Georgetown University Medical Center  
Department of Anatomy  
Washington, DC  
**202.687.1219**

George Washington University Medical Center  
Anatomy Department  
Washington, DC  
**202.994.3511**

Howard University Medical School  
Anatomy Department  
Washington, DC  
**202.806.6557**

## Organ/Tissue Donation

The deceased may have discussed his or her views of organ and tissue donation with family members or may have completed a donor card. The family also has the opportunity to make decisions regarding donation of organs and tissues.

It is possible to successfully transplant many different organs and tissues including corneas, heart, heart valves, liver, kidneys, bone and cartilage, bone marrow, skin, pancreas and lungs. Patients who are waiting for organ and tissue donation far outnumber the organs and tissue available.

The Washington Regional Transplant Community (WRTC) is the federally designated organ procurement organization in the Washington metropolitan area. Hospital staff and/or a representative from WRTC may approach you about the possibility of donation. For additional information regarding organ and tissue donation, contact WRTC at **703.641.0100**.

## Hospital Autopsy

An autopsy is a postmortem examination of the body, including the internal organs and structures, to determine the cause of death or the nature of pathological changes. An autopsy may also help physicians learn more about disease processes and treatments.

A hospital autopsy may be requested either by the patient's physician or by the family; and it may be comprehensive or limited to a particular organ or system. When requested, eligibility will be determined and the legal next-of-kin must give consent and sign a permit before a hospital autopsy is performed.

When the autopsy is completed, a written report is issued, usually within six to twelve weeks – sometimes longer, depending on the complexity and specialty of tests being performed. The report becomes a permanent part of the deceased patient’s medical record. The family may contact either the requesting physician or the hospital medical records department for final results.

Autopsies are performed by pathologists, who are specially trained physicians. In most circumstances, an autopsy does not delay funeral plans, nor does it prevent an open-casket service.

Hospital autopsies are performed at Inova Fairfax Medical Campus. If the deceased patient is not eligible for a hospital autopsy, a private autopsy performed outside of Inova may be requested instead, at a cost to the family.

Contact the facility where the death occurred for eligibility and information:

Inova Alexandria Hospital  
Pathology Department  
**703.504.3469**

Inova Fairfax Hospital Campus  
Office of Decedent Affairs  
**703.776.3506**

Inova Fair Oaks Hospital  
Office of Decedent Affairs  
**703.391.4145**

Inova Loudoun Hospital  
Pathology Department  
**703.858.6096**

Inova Mount Vernon Hospital  
Office of Decedent Affairs  
**703.664.7524**

## Medical Examiner Autopsy

For deaths under investigation by the police or county medical examiner, the state medical examiner may perform an official examination or autopsy. The autopsy is performed at the state medical examiner’s facility, and family authorization for autopsy is not required. Contact the medical examiner’s office regarding examination and/or autopsy findings and to make disposition arrangements:

Commonwealth of Virginia  
Chief Medical Examiner’s Office  
Northern Virginia District  
10850 Pyramid Place  
Manassas, VA 20110  
**703.530.2600**

## Death Certificate

The Commonwealth of Virginia Certificate of Death is completed by the funeral home and physician. The funeral home obtains required demographic information from the family and medical certification from the physician. The funeral home then files the death certificate with the local health department’s vital statistics bureau in the jurisdiction where the death occurred.

There is a fee for each certified copy of the death certificate. A certified copy of the death certificate may be obtained from:

- The funeral home at the time of filing
- Fairfax County Health Department - Vital Statistics\*  
3750 Old Lee Highway  
Fairfax, VA 22030  
**703.246.7100**  
\*Available up to 5 years
- Alexandria City Health Department - Vital Statistics\*  
4480 King Street  
Alexandria, VA 22302  
**703.746.4991**  
\*Available up to 5 years
- Virginia Department of Health  
Office of Vital Records and Health Statistics  
P.O. Box 1000  
Richmond, VA 23218  
**804.662.6200**  
[www.vdh.state.va.us/Vital\\_Records](http://www.vdh.state.va.us/Vital_Records)
- Loudoun County Health Department  
1 Harrison Street, S.E., 2nd Floor  
Leesburg, VA 20175  
**703.777.0234**  
\*Available up to 5 years

## Understanding Grief

### Acknowledging Grief

Grief, with its many ups and down, lasts far longer than society recognizes. There are many factors that determine the length and intensity of grieving. Be patient with yourself. Here are some things to remember about grief:

- Crying is an acceptable and healthy expression of grief and releases built-up tensions for both men and women. Cry freely as you feel the need.
- There may be times when friends and relatives are uncomfortable around you and don’t know what to say. Let them know when it is okay to talk about your loved one. Socializing may be difficult for awhile.

- Physical reactions may include loss of appetite or overeating, difficulty sleeping and lack of energy. You may also find it hard to concentrate on your usual activities. Try your best to take care of yourself: eat well, rest and exercise as you are able.
- Avoid the use of drugs and alcohol. Medications should only be taken under the supervision of a physician.
- Feelings of guilt are very common after a loss. It is normal to look back on the relationship and feel regrets. Be easy on yourself; forgiveness takes time.
- Recognize the individuality of your grief. It will be different and you will cope differently than others.
- If you feel that you are having particular difficulty or just want to talk with someone, ask for help. Family, friends and clergy may be able to assist you.
- For some people, professional counseling may be helpful. Or, it might be helpful to join a group of people having similar experiences — it eases the feelings of loneliness and helps you understand and express your grief.
- Anniversaries, birthdays and holidays can be stressful times. Planning ahead can help you reduce stress and gain some control.
- You may question the meaning or value of your own life. Be assured that others have similar feelings. The pain does ease.
- You may want to put off major decisions for a period of time to give yourself a chance to think more clearly.
- Give your faith the opportunity to grow through your religious affiliations. Questions and feelings of anger are normal parts of grief. For many, faith offers the help necessary to accept the unacceptable.

## Tips for Moving Through Grief

Grief is a journey you must endure after the loss of a loved one. It's easy to become overwhelmed as you work through the phases and tasks of grief, so it's important to remember to care for yourself. Following are some suggestions to help you through your grief.

- Draw on your memory of past coping experiences. What you learned from those experiences can help you now.
- Allow yourself grieving time. Try to declare other non-grieving times. This can help you find at least short times of peace.
- Learn what you can do when the pain overwhelms you (go to a movie, call a certain friend, go for a

walk, clean house, etc.). Have your coping mechanism in reserve for those times. Don't let helplessness overwhelm you — work with it.

- Keep on with your life even if the joy seems gone. Even if you feel you are only going through the motions, it helps to maintain your life structure.
- Be kind to yourself. Pretend you are a friend who needs your help and support. What would you do for them?
- Seek out people who have experienced a similar tragedy or can relate to it. It's good to seek out people in a similar situation who need your help, too. Groups may be helpful.
- Be supportive of your family. Your family still needs you. Try to balance their needs while allowing yourself time to grieve.
- Absorb the beauty and wonder of the natural world and try to become a part of it. Let yourself flow with the spirit of the universe rather than focusing on your individual pain. You are part of a larger reality.
- Pets can be a source of peace. Animals give unconditional love: they live one day at a time, aren't judgmental, need your care and are always there for you.
- Continue any sort of creative work. Creativity renews the self.
- Recognize that others may have problems and may be hurting. It may help you to give them compassion.
- Remember to appreciate the good moments that you had and all you have left. Try to be thankful for the rest of your life and everything you have going for you. Recognize the blessings.
- Concentrate on the feeling that you are "whole" and have not really lost a part of yourself or suffered partial death. Even though you are stunned and wounded emotionally, you can still be "whole."

## Helping Children Cope with Death

Working through grief and adapting to loss is important for children. It's critical that family members and others recognize the needs of grieving children and help them access the resources they need.

- Be direct, simple and honest. Explain truthfully what happened in terms that children can understand. Do not use euphemisms for death with children, it confuses them.
- Encourage the child to express feelings openly. Crying is normal and helpful.
- Accept the child's emotions and reactions. Don't tell the child how he or she should or should not feel.

- Offer warmth, physical presence and affection.
- Share your feelings with the child. Allow the child to comfort you. It is okay for children to see you cry.
- Be patient. Know that children need to hear “the story” and ask the same questions again and again.
- Reassure the child that death is not contagious; that the death of one person does not mean the child or other loved ones will soon die.
- Maintain as much order, stability and security in the child’s life as you can.
- Listen to what the child is telling or asking you, then respond according to the child’s needs.
- Allow the child to make some decisions about participation in family rituals, i.e., visitation, the funeral and socializing after the funeral. Be sure to explain in advance what will happen.

## Coping with Holidays

Holidays and anniversaries are times when people remember the past and think about the future. A death in the family often leaves emotional wounds that are magnified during these times of warmth and cheer. Feelings of isolation and loneliness may increase.

With planning and forethought, it is possible to get through these times.

- Realize that this is a new holiday, unlike the holidays of the past.
- Acknowledge the absence of your loved one. Have a dinner or toast in their honor. Visit the cemetery or memorial site. Don’t be afraid to cry — or to smile!
- Engage in spiritual activities that feel comfortable to you.
- Do things because you want to do them, not because your loved one “would have wanted it that way.”

## Five Stages of Grief

Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, a Swiss-born psychiatrist, named five stages of grief. She observed that grieving people move in and out of these stages as they journey toward acceptance.

1. Denial – “No! It can’t be!” Upon hearing the news, the grieving person feels shocked and refuses to believe that a loved one has died. Kubler-Ross says this denial is a healthy, normal reaction and helps the person come to terms with the reality of loss.
2. Anger – “Why? Why my loved one?” The bereaved feels angry and may direct anger at anyone such as the doctor, family members, oneself, God, or even the deceased person for abandoning them.

- Initiate activity yourself. Do not wait for others. Plan your own holiday. Make phone calls to your friends or relatives. Calls to people in similar situations can be worthwhile.
- Remember that one is a whole number. You need not be part of a couple to enjoy yourself.
- Time spent by yourself can also be rewarding.
- Be gentle with yourself. All wounds take time to heal. Realize you will feel sad at times.
- Take time to identify and take care of your needs. Get adequate rest and exercise. Be aware of the increased accessibility of sugar, caffeine and alcohol during the holiday season, and guard against overuse of these substances.
- Look at the holiday season as the beginning of a new journey, starting a new year.
- You may want to create a special ceremony or ritual as a way of working through the feelings that may occur at these times.

## Grief, Loss and Bereavement Resources

1. The Compassionate Friends: Supporting Family After a Child Dies  
**877.969.0010** • [www.compassionatefriends.org](http://www.compassionatefriends.org)
2. Hello Grief - [www.hellogrief.org](http://www.hellogrief.org)
3. American Association for Retired Persons  
877.333.5885  
[www.aarp.org/home-family/caregiving/grief-and-loss](http://www.aarp.org/home-family/caregiving/grief-and-loss)
4. National Widowers  
**800.309.3658** • [www.nationalwidowers.org](http://www.nationalwidowers.org)
5. Grief Net - [www.griefnet.org](http://www.griefnet.org)
6. Life With Cancer  
**703.206.LIFE (5433)** • [lifewithcancer@inova.org](mailto:lifewithcancer@inova.org)

3. Bargaining – “If I do this, will you take away the loss?” The grieving person may make bargains, such as asking God for help in exchange for something offered.
4. Depression – “Why go on?” Sorrow and hopelessness begin to surface when the plea bargaining fails to take away the pain of loss. Kubler-Ross says the grieving person does well to embrace this sorrow when it comes.
5. Acceptance –The final stage. After mourning the loss, the person begins to accept the reality that a loved one has died.

*Acceptance does not mean happiness, but rather peace.*

## Personalized Worksheet

Your loved one will be moved from the patient care area to the morgue until funeral home arrangements are made.

Remember to do the following:

- Notify family and friends — your own and your loved one's.
- Make funeral home arrangements.
- After you have decided upon a funeral home or made arrangements, call one of the following numbers with this information:
  - Inova Alexandria Hospital: Patient Registration - **703.504.3050**
  - Inova Fairfax Hospital Campus: Office of Decedent Affairs - **703.776.3506**
  - Inova Fair Oaks Hospital: Office of Decedent Affairs - **703.391.4145**
  - Inova Loudoun Hospital: Nursing Supervisor - **703.858.6320**
  - Inova Mount Vernon Hospital: Decedent Affairs - **703.664.7524**

### Notes:

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### Important Telephone Numbers

#### Inova Alexandria Hospital

Case Management .....	703.504.3580
Chaplain .....	703.504.3852
Hospital Operator .....	703.504.3000
Patient Registration .....	703.504.3050
Patient Relations .....	703.504.3128
Safety and Security .....	703.504.3565

#### Inova Fairfax Hospital Campus

Case Management .....	703.776.3508
Chaplain .....	703.776.3767
Hospital Operator .....	703.776.4001
Office of Decedent Affairs .....	703.776.3506

#### Inova Fair Oaks Hospital

Case Management .....	703.391.4772
Hospital Operator .....	703.391.3600
Office of Decedent Affairs .....	703.391.4145

#### Inova Loudoun Hospital

Case Management .....	703.858.8017
Chaplain .....	703.858.8462
Hospital Operator.....	703.858.6000
Nursing Supervisor .....	703.858.6320

#### Inova Mount Vernon Hospital

Case Management .....	703.664.7238
Chaplain .....	703.664.7263
Hospital Operator.....	703.664.7000
Office of Decedent Affairs .....	703.664.7524
Safety and Security .....	703.664.7980