



# Experiencing Grief: Coping with Loss

Pima County Attorney's Office  
Victim Services Division

Contact us Monday through Friday 8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.  
(520) 740-5525

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## **INTRODUCTION**

There is nothing in life more painful than experiencing the death of a loved one. Initially, those impacted by the death of a loved one may be overcome by disbelief and a sense of emptiness. Then, they begin to consciously realize the impact of the loss by expressing normal feelings of resentment, anger, and depression. All of these feelings are muddled in a state of confusion and despair.

There is no universal law pronouncing how one should or should not react to death. Everyone experiences and expresses the feelings and emotions of grief differently. The manner in which people deal with grief depends on their upbringing, their relationship with the deceased, and their reaction to the cause of death.

Victim Services has prepared this brochure to help the citizens of Pima County understand the dynamics of grief and work through it. The staff has gained a lot of insight about grief by serving thousands in the community who have dealt with the loss of a loved one.

## **THE ACUTE PHASE**

### **Shock and Disbelief**

Many reactions are common to people who have just received the tragic news of the death of a loved one. The first reaction is usually a dazed sense of disbelief or shock. It is often hard to believe that the person who died is really gone. It is not unusual for some people to refuse to believe that their loved one is dead, and it may take some time for them to accept that fact.

Some people react with an outpouring of emotion, expressing the pain and emptiness inside through screaming or crying. In contrast, some people completely withdraw and internalize all their feelings. These reactions are healthy and should be allowed to occur. The important point to remember is that everyone handles grief and loss differently – in the way that is most comfortable for them.

### **Anger and Guilt**

Another common initial response is anger. Some get angry with the circumstances under which their loved one died. Some get angry at friends or family members, or even the person who died. Some get angry at themselves. It is common to feel a sense of guilt, or to feel a need to place blame for the loss of a loved one. It is important to keep in mind that everyone attached to the person who died is operating within a state of shock, making it difficult to process information logically. In an effort to make sense of the tragedy, people need to explore all of the possibilities in their mind. In time, many come to the realization that they had no control over the circumstances that led to the death of their loved one. Often the “why” of the person’s death must be put to rest without an answer before progressing through the grieving process.

### **Sadness and Depression**

An overwhelming sense of sadness or depression is frequently experienced by those grieving. It is hard to imagine how life will ever go on or get back to normal. Many people feel completely lost. In this time of grief, some people express that they do not want to face the daunting task of redefining their entire existence without the companionship of the person who died. It may seem easier to give up on living altogether. Some say they wish they could trade places with the person who died. In time though, a new sense of normal can be achieved.

### **Physical Reactions**

All of the emotional responses experienced put a physical strain on the body. Some people immediately feel weak or dizzy. Muscles may feel sore and achy. A loss of appetite or feelings of nausea are also common, but make sure you eat, even if there is no feeling of hunger. It can be helpful to drink as much water as possible. Humans need nutrition and water in order to survive. If there are any medical concerns, consult a family doctor or emergency physician.

## **THE TRANSITION PHASE**

### **Unexpected Changes**

It is difficult to cope with all of the changes taking place following the death of a loved one. Many decisions will need to be made by the next of kin. Funeral arrangements will have to be made and personal possessions will have to be distributed. Insurance companies and debtors may need to be notified of the death. Anxiety and fatigue contribute to the difficulty in making rational decisions, so a good support system of family and friends can be helpful in dealing with both the emotional and situational changes.

### **Physical Changes**

For a while, memories will preoccupy most of the thought process. Many people believe that they feel, hear, or see the person who died. It is a common experience that some find comforting. Sleeping for any length of time may be difficult due to intense emotions. Additionally, personal stresses may cause some temporary physical problems, such as loss of appetite and headaches. These symptoms are normal. Some people react by withdrawing from outside activities. It can be difficult for relatives, friends, or acquaintances to know how to approach the person experiencing the loss of a loved one. In an effort to be considerate, those people may not initiate contact or may avoid talking about the death. When ready, those grieving will regain control in their lives and re-engage daily activities.

## **THE RECOVERY PHASE**

### **Deciding About Arrangements**

Whether to attend a funeral or memorial service is a personal choice. Making funeral arrangements or attending the funeral can help some come to terms with the death of a loved one. For others, it is simply too painful or difficult to attend. It can be more harmful than helpful to pressure someone who is ambivalent to attend.

### **Establishing a New Normal**

Mementos of endearment thoughtfully placed throughout the house may help a grieving person face the future. After the funeral service, most people try to decide whether to remove or retain clothing, furniture, and personal objects. Rash decisions to give away or sell everything previously belonging to the deceased often leads to regret later. After some time, many come to feel comfortable with keeping some possessions as a reminder of the good memories shared with their loved one.

### **Grieving**

The process of grief is not a simple one, nor is it one that is simply overcome in time. Special days like birthdays, anniversaries, and holidays will bring remembrance and sadness. However, the depressing periods become shorter and less frequent while the fond memories become clearer and more frequent. Grieving is a process that develops and changes over time. Things may never be the same as they once were, however, the death may bring new meaning to life. Death is a part of life and we can learn from it and be enriched by it.

## **HELPING CHILDREN**

### **Telling Children**

The best approach to take in telling children about death is to be honest and straightforward. Of course, children of different ages understand the concept of death on different levels. For young children, it may be better to explain in simple terms how flowers, animals, and people live and die. Older children may already understand the concept of death. Once the concept is introduced, or understood by the child, it is helpful to tell the child you have something sad to say, and then inform them what happened in simple, honest terms they can understand.

### **Providing Support**

Once the child works through his/her initial reactions, it is important to provide positive emotional support. Explain that death is not sleep and that physical death is final. This may be difficult for the child to understand, and children may worry their remaining loved ones will not wake up. Provide security. Children often worry that another special person will also die. The child should know there will always be someone to care for them. Explain that death is not a punishment for anything the deceased did wrong, and assure the child that he or she is not the cause of the death. Listen carefully to whatever expression

the child gives, and allow all feelings. Encourage talking, not acting out. Let the child be part of the family's grieving process. Don't try to protect the child by hiding facts about physical death.

### **Answering Questions**

Give children factual, truthful information about death. Be honest in answering any questions that may arise. It is important to use concrete terms like dead or death. Misrepresentations confuse children and delay progress in the grieving process.

### **Making Small Decisions**

Death is a scary and confusing disruption in any child's life. It can be helpful if the child involved is given some say in what they do or don't do to memorialize the person who has died. Offer choices whenever possible. Children should get to make their own decisions about whether to attend the funeral, the viewing, or the gravesite service. Provide opportunities for children to talk, draw, or write about their own memories of the deceased. Children often appreciate being given pictures or other mementos of the deceased person as a way of supporting their grieving process. Allow them to choose the objects they like.

### **Things That Help**

Children express grief in a variety of ways. Some common reactions include stomachaches, headaches, and sleep or appetite disturbances. Children may withdraw, or act out. They may express thoughts of disbelief, finality, or suicide. They may have feelings of shock, sadness, depression, guilt, anger, fear, relief, or peace.

Provide materials and encouragement for expressing feelings through symbolic play. Materials such as clay, crayons, markers, doll houses, or other toys may provide a way for the child to express emotions for which they have no words. Don't expect a picture, or product that you can immediately recognize.

One of the best gifts you can give your child is to deal with your own grief. As you do, you model for them the acceptance of grieving and having feelings. Help is available for both you and your child. ***Tu Nidito*** is a local organization that specializes in helping people and their children move through the grieving process with several programs tailored to specific needs. The phone number is: **(520) 322-9155**.

## **MAKING ARRANGEMENTS**

### **Federal Benefits**

If the deceased meets certain employment criteria, the Social Security Administration provides a modest, one-time payment to help offset funeral costs. Under certain circumstances, Social Security benefits are also offered to the widow and/or children. To determine eligibility for these benefits, contact the Social Security Administration at **1-800-772-1213** Monday through Friday, 7:00 a.m. - 7:00 p.m.

### **Veteran Benefits**

If the deceased was a veteran, burial may be provided at a national cemetery. An American flag and grave marker are provided for every veteran with an honorable discharge by the U.S. Government. In some situations, there are pensions allowed for the widow and/or children. To determine eligibility for any of these benefits, contact the Department of Veterans Affairs – **1-800-827-1000**, or the Arizona Department of Veterans Services – **(520) 247-4960**. These organizations can provide assistance in obtaining benefits, transportation, home visits, and advocacy (no fee).

### **Victim Compensation**

If death is caused by a criminal act, victim compensation may be available for expenses such as funeral costs, medical costs, lost wages and/or counseling. Contact the Arizona Crime Victim Compensation Program through the Pima County Attorney's Office at **(520) 740-5525** for information and application.

### **Office of the Medical Examiner**

Under Arizona law, the Office of the Medical Examiner may perform an autopsy on persons who die unexpectedly or die without an attending physician. The forensic examination is usually completed within 24-48 hours; however, the results are usually not available for 6-8 weeks. If the person died as a result of a crime, the process can take much longer. The Forensic Science Center does not generally permit viewings by family or friends. Any questions or concerns can be addressed by phone at **(520) 243-8600**.

### **Funeral Services**

Planning a funeral or cremation can be difficult. Decisions may be easier if the deceased left a will that includes specific instructions on funeral arrangements. If there is no will, it may be appropriate to consult relatives, clergy, or friends about funeral homes and about the type of funeral or memorial service to hold. The funeral director can be very helpful by explaining the different options and services available. In addition, the funeral director can give information about private and public benefits, which may be available. There is a directory of Tucson area mortuary service providers in the back of this pamphlet.

### **Public Fiduciary**

Those without funds or resources with which to make funeral arrangements may contact **The Pima County Public Fiduciary Indigent Burial Program** for assistance. A minimal service is provided with cremation or burial as an option. Monday-Friday 9:00a.m.–5:00 p.m. **(520) 740-5454**.

### **Probate Process**

The purpose of probate law is to make sure that property owned by the deceased is transferred to people or organizations in accordance with the wishes of the deceased or, in the event there is no will, in accordance with state law. First, a determination must be made as to whether the deceased left a legally effective will. Then, an itemized list of assets should be prepared for the purpose of settling the estate. The main assets that need review are: household property, vehicles, bank and checking accounts, insurance policies, securities, real estate titles, and employer death benefits. If an attorney is not already

retained, it may be helpful to retain one to assist you. If there is a will, an attorney can review it along with the itemized list of assets to find out whether a legal advisor is needed. If family or friends cannot recommend an attorney, the **Lawyer's Referral Service at (520) 623-4625** can arrange an appointment for you. Charge for a ½ hour conference is \$35.00.

## **DOCUMENTATION**

The following is a brief list of the deceased's documents that may need to be collected by next of kin.

### **Certificates:**

Birth Certificate  
Marriage Certificate  
Baptism/Confirmation

### **Legal Papers:**

Copy of valid Will and Testament  
Military Discharge  
Social Security Card  
Employer  
Medicare Card  
Deeds/Land Titles to all real property  
Loan papers/Contracts  
Registration/insurance for cars, boats, trailers  
Death Certificates (several copies)  
Credit Cards

### **Claims:** (check benefits)

Life insurance (work, personal)  
Health insurance  
Mortgage insurance (pay off benefit)  
Car insurance (pay off benefit)  
Pension  
Employer (separation/vacation pay)  
Government Burial (Veterans)  
Widows and Orphans (Social Security, Veterans)  
Disability

## MORTUARY SERVICES

<b>Abbey Funeral Home</b> 3435 N. 1 <sup>st</sup> Ave., Tucson, AZ 85719 Fax: (520) 888-0092	<b>(520) 888-1111</b>
<b>Adair Funeral Home</b> 1050 N. Dodge Blvd., Tucson, AZ 85716 Fax: (520) 326-3591	<b>(520) 326-4343</b>
<b>Adair Avalon Funeral Home</b> 8090 N. Northern Avenue, Tucson AZ 85704	<b>(520) 742-7901</b>
<b><i>Funeraria Del Angel</i> Mortuary</b> 7 E. University Blvd., Tucson, AZ 85705 Fax: (520) 624-9185	<b>(520) 624-8685</b>
<b>Angel Valley Funeral Home</b> 2545 N. Tucson Blvd., Tucson, AZ 85716 Fax: (520) 327-0552	<b>(520) 327-6341</b>
<b>Bring's Broadway Chapel</b> 6910 E. Broadway, Tucson, AZ 85710 Fax: (520) 722-6595	<b>(520) 296-7193</b>
<b>Bring's Memorial Chapel</b> 236 S. Scott Ave. Tucson, AZ 85701 Fax: (520) 792-3723	<b>(520) 623-4718</b>
<b>Carrillo's Tucson Mortuary</b> 204 S. Stone Ave., Tucson, AZ 85701 Fax: (520) 622-4047	<b>(520) 622-7429</b>
<b>Desert Rose Cremation &amp; Burial</b> 2750 S. 4 <sup>th</sup> Ave., Ste. 106, Tucson, AZ 85713 Fax: (520) 628-4944	<b>(520)790-6388</b>
<b>Desert Sunset Funeral Home</b> 3081 W. Orange Grove Rd., Tucson, AZ 85741 Fax: (520) 297-9040	<b>(520) 297-9007</b>
<b>East Lawn Palm's Mortuary &amp; Cemetery</b> 5801 E. Grant Rd., Tucson, AZ 85712 Fax: (520) 751-2479	<b>(520) 885-6741</b>

**Evergreen Mortuary, Cemetery & Crematory** (520) 888-7470  
3015 N. Oracle Rd., Tucson, AZ 85705  
Fax: (520) 888-7830

**Heather Mortuary & Chapel** (520) 322-6131  
1040 N. Columbus Blvd., Tucson, AZ 85711  
Fax: (520) 327-2162

**Hudgel's Swan Mortuary & Chapel** (520) 747-2525  
1335 S. Swan Rd., Tucson, AZ 85711  
Fax: (520) 748-2660

**Martinez Funeral Chapel** (520) 547-3400  
2580 S. 6<sup>th</sup> Ave., Tucson, AZ 85713  
Fax: (520) 547-3404

**MFC Burial Services** (520) 294-4556  
340 E. Vamorie St., Tucson, AZ 85706  
Fax: (520) 295-8806

***Funeraria del Angel South Lawn Mortuary & Cemetery*** (520) 294-2603  
5401 S. Park Ave., Tucson, AZ 85706  
Fax: (520) 295-8415

**Green Valley Mortuary & Cemetery** (520) 625-7400  
18751 S. La Canada Dr., Sahuarita, AZ 85629  
Fax: (520) 625-0952

**Vistoso Memorial Chapel** (520) 544-2285  
2285 E. Rancho Vistoso Blvd. Oro Valley, AZ. 85755  
Fax: (520) 825-6578

## **CRIME SCENE/DISASTER CLEANING SERVICES**

This list is intended to help to those in need of this service, but by no means is an endorsement by the Pima County Attorney's Office. It is recommended that an estimate be obtained before services are rendered. For homicides that occurred at a residence, the Crime Victims Compensation Program may be able to assist with the cost of the crime scene clean-up. Please call 740-5525 to speak with someone in Victim Compensation. Additionally, crime scene clean-up services may be covered by your homeowner's/renter's insurance policy. It may be helpful to check with the appropriate insurance agent prior to having services rendered.

<b>Abracadabra Restoration</b>	<b>(520) 323-3261</b>
<b>Action Bio-Care, Inc.</b>	<b>(800) 922-4214</b>
<b>Arizona Bio</b>	<b>(520) 882-4350</b>
<b>Bio Solutions</b>	<b>(520) 404-6032</b>
<b>Crime Scene Clean Up Tucson</b>	<b>(520) 445-4772</b>
<b>Quality Restoration</b>	<b>(520) 322-5326</b>
<b>Rainbow International</b>	<b>(520) 327-3613</b>
<b>Service Master Clean</b>	<b>(520) 223-9939</b>

## **COMMUNITY RESOURCES**

Listed below are several community resources for counseling and support. A brief description of services provided is listed with each resource.

### **Widowed to Widowed** **(520) 884-4570**

Widowed to Widowed is a group consisting of people who have lost a spouse. This group provides outreach on a one-to-one basis, either in person or by telephone, in addition to group support meetings, social groups, and newsletters.

### **Survivors of Suicide** **(520) 861-6632**

Survivors of Suicide is a support group for friends and families grieving a loss as a result of suicide. The support group meets monthly.

### **Tu Nidito Children and Family Services** **(520) 322-9155**

*Tu Nidito* offers group counseling, primarily for children ages 3-18, who have experienced a death loss. Support also is available for the child's family, caregivers, and schools.

### **M.A.D.D.** **(877)-255-6233**

Mothers Against Drunk Driving provides support groups and assistance to individuals who have been victimized by a drunk driver.

### **Homicide Survivors** **(520) 740-5729**

Advocacy group offers one-to-one peer counseling, telephone contacts, and monthly

meetings. May help with funeral expenses for deaths resulting from homicide. Weekdays Monday – Friday 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

**Compassionate Friends**

**(520) 721-8042**

Compassionate Friends is a self-help group offering friendship and understanding to bereaved parents. The group offers one-on-one contact, monthly meetings, telephone friends, lending library, and a newsletter.

**Footprints Support Group**

**(520) 873-6590**

A support group for parents who have lost a baby due to miscarriage, ectopic pregnancy, stillborn, or newborn death.

**Mexican Consulate**

**(520) 882-5596**

553 S. Stone Ave, Tucson, Arizona, 85701

**Pima County Public Fiduciary**

**(520) 740-5454**

32 N. Stone Ave, 4th floor, Tucson, Arizona, 85701

**Pima County Office of the Medical Examiner**

**(520) 243-8600**

2825 E. District St, Tucson, Arizona, 85714



**Pima County Attorney's Office**

**Victim Services Division**

32 N. Stone Ave., Suite 1400

Tucson, AZ 85701

Phone: (520) 740-5525