

Our social work staff and chaplains are available to offer you support during this difficult time.

To request their support, please call 352.265.0224 or after regular business hours, call the operator at 352.265.0111.

To request support by email, please contact adultbereavement@shands.ufl.edu.

IN YOUR TIME OF SORROW

A guide for you and your family during your time of loss and grief.



What is Grief?

Grief is a multifaceted response to loss. The experience of grieving is personal and unique to every individual. Grief is our body's natural ability to heal our emotional pain. Grieving can be hard. A lack of understanding can make it even harder.

When we experience a loss, we are often flooded by grief, an emotion that may stay with us for years, though its intensity will often vary. Acute grief is all-consuming, hindering our ability to do our normal, everyday tasks. However, in time, this grief experience will begin to heal and fade to a more subtle form of grief. Often grief will begin to be expressed through remembrances of happiness and joy. These diverse emotions — acute grief, subtle grief, happiness and joy — develop a spinning spiral, similar to a hurricane. The event serves as the eye of the emotional storm with bands of conflicting emotion circling about. The process of grieving involves restructuring your life without the presence of someone you may have thought would always be there. It is the process of figuring out again “Who am I and how can I honor my loved one?” In time, your grief journey becomes a part of who you are. You will find ways to create meaning out of your life and those you love, and have loved, so deeply.

If you experience any of these feelings, it is important to be aware that, although intense, they are a normal part of grief and in many ways are helpful to the healing process. However, if you feel you would benefit from additional support than what is available to you, please consider seeking professional help and grief services.



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“Above all, allow yourself time
— time to reflect, time to grieve
and time to heal.”

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Helpful resources for coping with grief and loss can be found at the websites listed below:

- ▶ UFHealth.org/bereavement
- ▶ UFHealth.org/palliativecare
- ▶ HavenHospice.org/grief-support-and-counseling.aspx
- ▶ HospiceofCitrus.org/programs/grief-services
- ▶ Compassionatefriends.org
- ▶ Sevenponds.com

Remembering to Take Care of Yourself

It is important to nurture and take care of yourself by recognizing your physical, spiritual and emotional needs. Here are some ways to do so:

- ▶ Find time to grieve. It's what will lead to your healing.
- ▶ Go easy on yourself. It's normal to have problems concentrating.
- ▶ Seek out and communicate often with those who offer you support.
- ▶ Find comfort in sharing memorable stories about your loved one who has died.
- ▶ Surround yourself with the people with whom you feel most comfortable and safe.
- ▶ Feel and express your emotions, whether it is through tears, laughter or silence.
- ▶ Physical activity is a healthy stress reliever; try to exercise regularly.
- ▶ Take care of your physical self. Get enough sleep and drink plenty of water.
- ▶ Give yourself permission to enjoy life again.
- ▶ Allow yourself the time needed to mend before making big life changing decisions.
- ▶ Be kind to yourself.
- ▶ Find strength and comfort through your spiritual beliefs.
- ▶ Seek out professional bereavement support if the need should arise.

Grief Takes Many Forms

Grief is not only about sadness. You may be in shock or experience difficulty focusing on your daily tasks. You may be experiencing a range of intense feelings or an overall emotional feeling of numbness, especially soon after your loved one's death. From moment to moment you may:

- ▶ Not want to believe the death of your loved one is real.
- ▶ Experience feelings of anger or helplessness.
- ▶ Question yourself about what else you could have done.
- ▶ Find yourself experiencing sad moods and feelings of hopelessness or despair.
- ▶ Feel guilty for experiencing feelings of relief.
- ▶ Accept the loss and feel able to cope.
- ▶ Become numb and feel disconnected from your surroundings.

Death can often leave a sense of emptiness in your life where your loved one used to be. The loss can also affect the way you see yourself and your ability to function day to day. Healing from a loss starts with facing the facts.

- ▶ Accept that the loss did happen and, as a result, you and your life have been forever changed.
- ▶ Know that it is possible for you to experience feelings of loss for an extended period of time.
- ▶ Understand you will experience happiness in your life again.
- ▶ Accepting the loss does not mean that you will forget your loved one.
- ▶ Acceptance allows for hope and joy to return as part of your life again.



Avoid Common “Grief Traps”

Because grief hurts, it is tempting to look for ways to avoid the pain. Be careful not to avoid your feelings during this time since it is common for unresolved grief to resurface in your life at a later time. Make an effort to avoid anything that delays healing and may cause new problems. Some “grief trap” examples are:

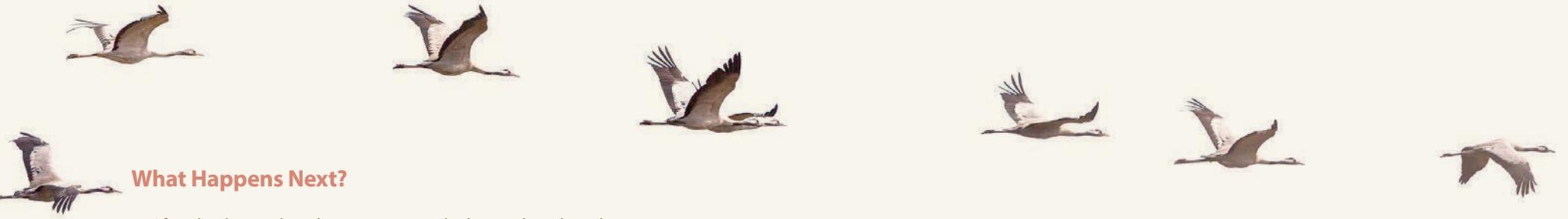
- ▶ Using drugs or alcohol to numb your feelings.
- ▶ Making the loss seem smaller than it actually is (“we weren’t very close”).
- ▶ Working extra-long hours to avoid the pain of returning home.
- ▶ Turning to food to numb your pain.
- ▶ Staying alone to avoid sad feelings that may arise around friends or family.

Healthy Coping Strategies

Strategies for coping with your loss can help you find ways to remember your loved one. Certain activities may enable you to identify and process the emotions and memories of the person who died. Below are a few healthy coping ideas for adults and children:

- ▶ Start a journal.
- ▶ Create a scrapbook.
- ▶ Participate in life review — sharing stories and fond memories.
- ▶ Express the emotions you are experiencing.
- ▶ Write a letter to the person who has died.
- ▶ Exercise or find other physical activities you enjoy doing.
- ▶ Breathe deeply, practice Tai Chi or yoga.
- ▶ Listen to music you enjoy hearing.
- ▶ Create a list of the good things in your life.
- ▶ Find or return to hobbies and activities you enjoy doing.
- ▶ Answer questions about death when asked by children.
- ▶ Join a support group.
- ▶ Participate in your familiar rituals, like religion or spirituality.
- ▶ Create a memorial or tribute for special occasions.

People sometimes try to deal with grief by engaging in dangerous or self-destructive activities. These can include excessive drinking, abusing drugs or engaging in other destructive behaviors to escape from the feelings of loss and emotional pain. Sometimes, these lifestyle choices can be linked to an increased feeling of depression and sadness. If you find yourself making these choices as a way to numb your grief and sadness, you may benefit from speaking with a mental health professional.



What Happens Next?

- After death, your loved one remains at the hospital until you have designated a funeral home or crematory. If you have not decided on a funeral home, your loved one can remain temporarily (approximately 48 hours) in the hospital holding area until arrangements are completed.
- If you are the family spokesperson, you will be asked to make the decisions on the final arrangements for your loved one. If you already made these arrangements, please provide the information to the medical staff who will convey this to the coordination clerk. You will be asked to sign a form verifying your choice for final arrangements. If you and your family need some time to think about this, please call the coordination clerk at 352.265.0930 within 48 hours to provide the information. They are open 24 hours a day, seven days a week.
- Any personal belongings that arrived at the hospital with your loved one are placed in a secure location with UF Health Shands Hospital security. In some situations, additional personal belongings may be at a towing company or the Florida Highway Patrol station.
- Death certificates are completed by the funeral home. You may purchase as many original copies as needed from the funeral home. Many places will only accept originals of the death certificate. To save time, calculate how many death certificates you will need for life insurance policies, bank accounts, tax purposes, etc. and request all copies at once. If needed, you can obtain additional copies later through the Department of Vital Statistics.
- If you are wondering about an autopsy, you should discuss this with your loved one's physician. If an autopsy is performed, the patient's physician will provide you with the results. The results typically take six weeks; however, they can take up to 90 days. If you would like a copy of the report, you must contact UF Health Autopsy Services.
- If the death was a result of an accident or occurred outside of the hospital, the medical examiner is required to evaluate the case.

What to Expect in Medical Examiner's Cases

The types of cases in which the medical examiner will become involved are dictated by Florida State Statute (406.11).

Examples of cases that go to the medical examiner's office include:

- ▶ Accident or injury
- ▶ Suspicious cause or unusual circumstances
- ▶ Motor vehicle, boating and diving incidents
- ▶ Unexplained death
- ▶ Suicide

An autopsy is generally required in all of the above situations. Other accidents and traumas may require an autopsy as well. The autopsy will be performed in the county where the person's death occurred. In some cases, this means the medical examiner's office may not be the Alachua County location. It usually takes one to two days for the medical examiner to complete an autopsy. Once a decision is made about final arrangements, the patient's spokesperson should call the medical examiner's office to give to them the information.

Practical Matters You May Need to Know About Your Loved One When Finalizing Plans

- ▶ Full legal name, Social Security number, date of birth
- ▶ Name and address of spouse and children
- ▶ Location of birth certificate, marriage and/or divorce records
- ▶ Military records
- ▶ Sources of income and assets, banking establishments — pension, IRAs, savings/checking, etc.
- ▶ Location of safety deposit boxes
- ▶ Bank account numbers
- ▶ Insurance information — life, health, long-term care
- ▶ Copy of last will and testament
- ▶ Existing debts
- ▶ Location of expensive personal items, such as jewelry, valuable collectibles or important family treasures

Places you may need to contact can include the **Social Security Administration, the lawyer/executor of the estate, Veterans Affairs and financial institutions where your loved one has accounts.**

Helpful Resources and Contact Information

**Coordination Clerk's
Desk for Funeral
Arrangements**
352.265.0930

**Social Security
Administration**
800.772.1213
ssa.gov

Veterans Affairs
800.827.1000
va.gov

Veterans Crisis Line
800.273.8255

**North Central Florida
United Way**
352.331.2800
unitedwayncfl.org

**Alachua County
Crisis Center**
352.264.6789

**Alachua County
Social Services**
352.264.6750

**Alachua County
Medical Examiner**
352.273.9292

**UF Health
Autopsy Services**
352.273.5900

**UF Health
Medical Records**
352.594.0909
UFHealth.org/medical-
records

**UF Health
Shands Security**
352.265.0109

