

The colors



of healing

A guide for parents/guardians in the hours
and days following a child's death





Right now, you may feel shocked, devastated, immensely sad, and numb, among many other things. In the midst of your grief, figuring out the immediate next steps may overwhelm you. Below, find a checklist of practical matters that need attention. Remember: you do not have to do all or any of this alone. Ask for help; share with friends and family who can support you during this time.

WHAT TO DO THE *first day*

- Choose a funeral home or hospital placement. To find a funeral home, contact your social worker or bereavement coordinator, or ask family and friends for recommendations. Families often choose a funeral home they already know.
- Inform a hospital staff person of the funeral home or other option you have chosen. They will understand if you cannot make a decision immediately. When you have made a decision, call 720-777-6442. If this is a coroner's case, contact the Adams County Coroner at 303-659-1027.
- Surround yourself with loving people who let you be yourself.
- Take the time you need to be with your loved one. After you've said your goodbyes, staff will arrange for the funeral home to transfer your loved one (or they will help with other arrangements).


"If you have difficulty looking at your child's possessions, close his or her door or have someone pack and store them for you. Do not make any major decisions about their things until a later date."



WHAT TO DO IN THE *first week*

- Choose a funeral home or hospital placement. To find a funeral home, contact your social worker or bereavement coordinator, or ask family and friends for recommendations. Families often choose a funeral home they already know.
- Inform a hospital staff person of the funeral home or other option you have chosen. They will understand if you cannot make a decision immediately. When you have made a decision, call 720-777-6442. If this is a coroner's case, contact the Adams County Coroner at 303-659-1027.
- Surround yourself with loving people who let you be yourself.
- Take the time you need to be with your loved one. After you've said your goodbyes, staff will arrange for the funeral home to transfer your loved one (or they will help with other arrangements).
- Make arrangements for the service, gathering, final resting place and other matters. Your funeral director or religious advisor will guide you through these decisions.
- Make a list of immediate family, close friends, and employer or business colleagues. Notify each by phone or ask someone to help you make these calls.
- Arrange for family members or close friends to answer the door, phone or emails, and to keep records of calls, visits, and items delivered/received.
- Arrange care for the child's pets, if there are any.
- Make sure to plan meals for the next few days. Have a friend or family member step in to help coordinate and/or make food.
- Consider special needs of the household, such as cleaning, paying bills, cooking, and other things; ask a friend to help.

"Have a level-headed advocate (friend or family member) help you with funeral arrangements. This person will be more clear minded."



“Just pick a time for the memorial service or funeral. Try not to worry about accommodating everyone else’s schedule.”

- **Write the obituary.** Include age, place of birth, school, and a list of survivors in the immediate family. Be sure to include the time and place of the service(s). If you’d like, you may also include personal information, such as things he or she enjoyed. It is okay to ask someone else to help write this.
- If you do not want flowers, decide on the appropriate memorial to which gifts may be made, such as a school or charity.
- **Arrange hospitality for visiting relatives and friends.** Again, it is okay to ask a friend or family member to help.
- **Select pallbearers and notify them** (if you are having a funeral with a casket).
- **Prepare content for printed programs for services, if you are having a service and if you would like a program.**
- If there are flowers, plan for their placement after the service(s). You could give them to a hospital, rest home, to family; anywhere you would like to donate them is fine.
- **Send thank-you cards.** You may want to thank those who helped with arrangements, sent flowers, offered support, etc. It is helpful to make a list of those you would like to thank and have a friend help write and send the cards.

“Writing thank-you notes is great for understanding that you are not alone. It helps you recognize how many people care. However, if you feel overwhelmed, have someone help you and then you can focus on doing the special notes.”



ABOUT WHAT'S HAPPENING TO YOU

right now

What you might be feeling:

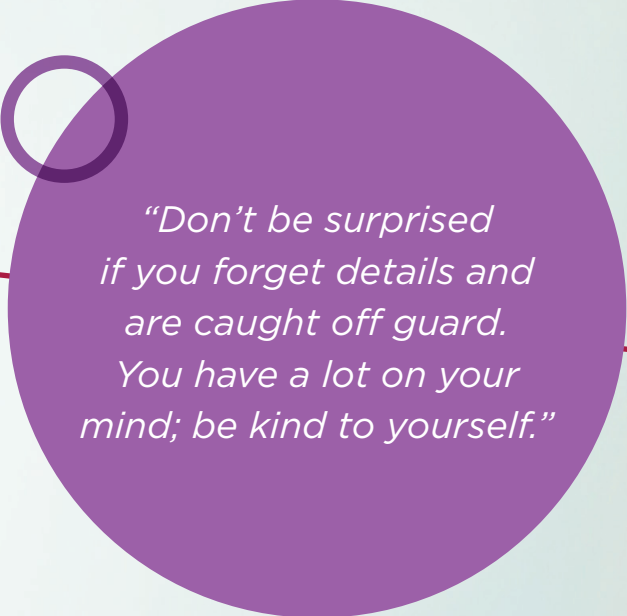
You may feel stunned one minute, and then angry, panicked, or distressed the next. You may find it difficult to make decisions and concentrate. Maybe you feel this is all a dream or that it's not really happening. Maybe you cry uncontrollably, stare into space, or feel out of control.

Is this normal? What is normal?

- All emotions are acceptable, and all are quite normal. Each person grieves in his or her own way.
- Crying is a healthy expression of grief; cry freely.
- Not crying is also okay; feeling numb is also normal.
- Physical reactions to the death of a child may include loss of appetite or overeating, sleeplessness, anxiety, loss of concentration, and sexual difficulties.
- The shock and numbness are most intense during the first two weeks. Grief lasts much longer than people usually assume.

"Do not be afraid of asking 'dumb questions.' You may never have had to arrange a funeral until now."





*“Don’t be surprised
if you forget details and
are caught off guard.
You have a lot on your
mind; be kind to yourself.”*

Take care of yourself.

- Be patient with yourself.
- Eat a balanced diet.
- Rest.
- Try to get moderate exercise.
- Avoid drugs and alcohol.
- Use medicine sparingly (and only under the supervision of your health care provider). Sometimes medicine can stop or delay the necessary grieving process.
- If possible, delay any major decisions (e.g. changing residence, changing job) during this time.
- Avoid making hasty decisions about your child’s belongings.
- Let your friends and relatives know how they can support you (you can also give them the enclosed booklet). Though they want to ease your pain, they may feel uncomfortable because they don’t know how.

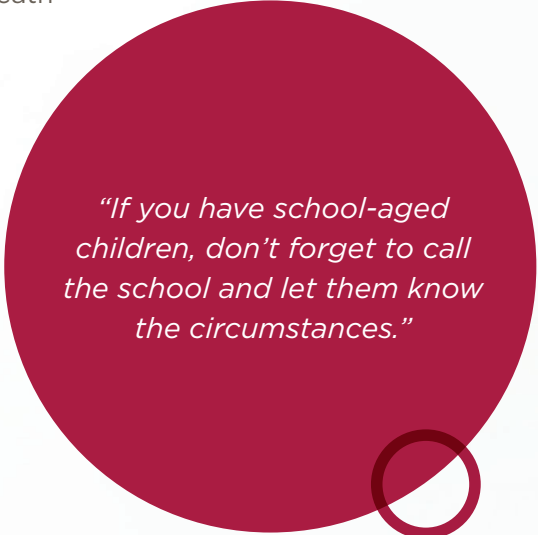
Things to remember

- Allow yourself to feel everything.
- Talk, write, or sing about how you are feeling – it will help begin your healing.
- Allow others to help you, because it helps both you and them.
- You know how to take care of yourself better than anyone.
- Sometimes it makes sense to act unpredictably or unconventionally.
- You own your grief. No one else can tell you how to feel or act.
- A time of loss can be a time of recovery.
- Not all questions have answers, but they’re worth asking.
- You get to choose how you respond to this loss.
- This loss will shape your soul like nothing else ever will.
- Sometimes a loss will bring up any other loss you’ve experienced.
- Losing a child might also mean losing your hopes/expectations for the future.

HOW GRIEF AFFECTS CHILDREN

You may have other children in your life who are grieving. When talking to children about death, remember:

- Some children understand the finality of death better than others. Tailor your language to the child's level.
- Use a warm and gentle tone. Establish eye contact and get on the child's level when talking to him or her. Take time to listen and ask about their concerns.
- Encourage them to ask questions. Children may not have an immediate or obvious response to learning that a loved one has died. They may take time to process and repeat the same question over and over again. This repetition is normal and helps them to begin understanding what death means.
- Children tend to think in simple terms. Use direct language like "died" and "dead." Avoid using terms such as "went to sleep and never woke up," or "we lost her."
- Allow your child to participate in the funeral/ memorial if they want, but do not force them. Prepare them by discussing what the funeral might be like. Talk about who will be there, where the body will be during the ceremony or viewing, and what kinds of emotional reactions people may have.
- Be honest. Express your own feelings about death. It is okay to cry in front of children - this shows them how they can express their grief.
- Not all children have immediate or obvious reactions after learning a loved one has died. Grief is a process that takes time. Be patient and available as they process what the death means to them.
- There are people in the community who can help. If you are worried about a child in your life, contact the Bereavement Coordinator at Children's Hospital Colorado or a local mental health professional.



"If you have school-aged children, don't forget to call the school and let them know the circumstances."

MAKING ARRANGEMENTS

When it comes to saying goodbye and finding a resting place for your child, you have many choices and considerations. Your funeral director or religious advisor can help you make decisions about the service, holding a viewing, having a gathering, your child's final resting place and can help answer any other questions. They are experienced in guiding people through this process; however, if you feel they are not addressing your concerns, call your social worker or Children's Colorado's Bereavement Coordinator.

Considerations:

- Take your time. There are few reasons to hurry when making final arrangements for your child.
- Bring along a trusted relative or friend when making arrangements.
- Consider talking to a religious leader and/or a local funeral director, even if you plan to go out of state.
- Ask funeral directors about their costs, and how the funeral home approaches care for a child. It is important that the funeral home is sensitive to your wishes.
- In the case of a baby or child death, many funeral homes and cemeteries will provide reduced rates.
- Ask funeral homes and cemeteries about unique services they may offer to families who have had a child die (e.g. balloon release or dove release).
- Some mortuaries promote family involvement, like parents and family members seeing their child at the funeral home, and perhaps even dressing and holding their child.

*"Do not be afraid to ask for help.
People really want to help."*



If you live far away


- If you are comfortable with a funeral director in your hometown, contact them. It may still be a good idea to contact a local funeral director for assistance even if you plan to take your child to your hometown or out of state.
- If you choose burial in another state, a local funeral home will need to embalm your child's body (in most cases). Embalming is a process that helps preserve the body. The funeral director in your home state can make those arrangements for you with a local funeral director.
- If you choose cremation, and you do not wish to have a viewing in your home state, choosing local cremation makes transportation easier.

Financial Resources

The funeral director can help file paperwork for payment source(s) if/when applicable.

Possible payment sources, if your child qualifies:

- **Medicaid:** if the child received Medicaid, contact the county's Department of Human Services where the child resided. You may need to meet with a department representative who will furnish you with a letter authorizing funding.
- **Veteran's benefits:** if at least one parent served in the military, there may be financial assistance available, and the child may be permitted to be buried in a military cemetery. Visit cem.va.gov.
- **Victims assistance:** if the child was the victim of a crime, contact the Crime Victim's Compensation Fund in the District Attorney's Office of the county where the incident occurred. Usually a local funeral home can do this for you.



“When shopping for a headstone, don't be afraid to shop around. Costs vary dramatically at different stores.”

“Have a family member or friend organize the after funeral get together at your home, church, funeral home or other location. A reception is a good time to share in a less formal setting.”

Autopsy Information

- In certain situations, a coroner is involved and they must have an autopsy; there is no choice. Some families choose to have an autopsy.
- An autopsy is a procedure in which a trained specialist will carefully examine your child's body to help determine the cause of death. There may be important information to learn about your child's death that may be helpful to you, or to other children who, in the future, have the same illness or condition.
- The laws of the State of Colorado require that any patient who dies in a hospital within 24 hours of admission must have an autopsy. This is referred to as a "coroner's case" or "medical examiner's case." There may also be other reasons why the county coroner/medical examiner requires an autopsy. However, many times permission for an autopsy is yours to give.
- There is no charge to the family if the coroner or medical examiner or Children's Colorado performs the autopsy.
- Having an autopsy should not delay arrangements for your child, although it may be a day or two, depending on the circumstances.
- It generally takes three months to complete the autopsy report. Your child's attending physician will receive the report; when you are ready, ask the physician to review those results with you, if you'd like.

"Dry some of the flowers from the funeral to make wreaths."

"You do not have to spend a lot of money to show you love your child."




A BEREAVED PARENT'S *wish list*

Bereaved parents share their thoughts and wishes about what has happened and how friends and family can support them.

- I wish my child hadn't died.
- Don't be afraid to speak my child's name. My child lived and was very important to me. I need to hear that my child was important to you too.
- You won't hurt me if I become emotional when you talk about my child. I cry because my child died. You have talked about my child, and you have allowed me to share my grief. I thank you for both.
- It hurts me when you remove my child's pictures, artwork, or other remembrances from your home.
- Don't shy away from me. I need you now more than ever.
- Allow me to talk about my child, even if it seems like it's too much. I need diversions, so I do want to hear about you; but I also want you to hear about me.

"Have someone stay at your home during the service and funeral. This person can answer the phone calls and make sure everything stays safe at the home."





“Decide if you would like donations made to a charity organization in your child’s name.”

- Let me know about the times you think and pray for me.
- Tell me how my child’s death has affected you.
- Don’t expect my grief to be over in six months; my grief will never be over. I will forever live with the death of my child.
- Don’t expect me to “not think about it” or to “be happy.” Neither will happen for a very long time.
- My life has shattered. I know it is miserable for you to be around me when I’m feeling miserable. Please be as patient with me as I am with you.
- My expressions of grief are normal. Depression, anger, frustration, hopelessness, and overwhelming sadness are some of the many emotions to expect. So, please excuse me when I’m quiet and withdrawn or irritable and cranky.
- Taking things one hour at a time is all I can handle right now.
- Excuse me if I seem rude – it is not my intent. Sometimes the world around me goes too fast and I react. When I walk away, let me find a quiet place to spend time alone.
- I am not the same person I was before my child died, and I will never be that person again.
- I hope you never have to go through this experience.
- Reacting to death reminds people of their own death. Be aware of how this makes you feel about your immortality. Sometimes people don’t acknowledge that, and it leads to thoughtless or insensitive remarks that can really hurt.

The Colors of Healing Bereavement Program is always available to provide support for you and your family.

Please let the Bereavement Coordinator know if you have any questions, needs, or concerns that need attention. Children's Colorado wishes you peace, comfort, and healing during this difficult time.





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