with heartfelt sympathy for your loss



A Guide to Next Steps

First, please accept our sympathy for the death of your loved one. Our staff and volunteers feel privileged to have shared your family's journey.

This booklet was designed to provide you with tools and information about next steps most often involved after losing a loved one. It will provide an overview of the grieving process and give information about our grief services.

You may be surprised at your response to the loss of your loved one. Every person reacts differently. Some experience complete shock. Others may be exhausted physically from caregiving, and often there is a period of confusion and inability to focus or make decisions.

The information in this booklet is organized by things that need immediate attention and ideas that may help you work through the next weeks and months of decision making regarding your loved one's possessions and estate.

Asking a family member or trusted friend to assist you during this time is appropriate and helpful. People will feel honored to help. There are also a number of resources on our website, HopeWestCO.org, that may be helpful.

We encourage you to call us for additional assistance or guidance.

Things to do right away

Contact Others

- ❒ Family member or friend – it is often helpful to ask a friend or family member to help make phone calls for you.
- ❒ Agencies involved – if your loved one had other agencies involved in addition to HopeWest, they will need to be contacted, such as Medicaid or other benefits and hired caregivers, etc.
- ❒ Churches – your loved one's church and your own if it is different.

Visit the Mortuary and Discuss

- ❒ Options for burial or cremation if not already decided.
- ❒ Memorial or funeral services – as difficult as it can be, grieving family members and friends cope better when a remembrance service is held. Your minister or the mortuary can help you plan what would be meaningful to you.
- ❒ Death Certificates – we recommend getting 10 -12 copies for your records. Original death certificates are needed to collect various benefits, change bank accounts, work with insurance companies, etc.
- ❒ Whether your loved one is eligible for any burial allowances through the social security administration, Medicaid, and/or the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.
- ❒ The newspaper notice and obituary – notices are free, and you can influence the content of the notice. Obituaries are a paid service you may want to consider. The mortuary will review this with you.
- ❒ Social Security needs to be notified of the death – decide if you or the mortuary will notify them.

If Your Loved One was Cared for at Home

- ❒ Return rented medical equipment, and/or talk with your HopeWest team about where to donate equipment and supplies you own.
- ❒ Dispose of prescription drugs in a safe manner. Cross out any personal information on all medication containers. Keep medications in their original containers, when feasible. If not, use a plastic container, such as a plastic beverage container, with a screw-top lid. Render all medications unusable by following the instruction below, in order to prevent the unintended ingestion of discarded medication.

  Liquids and suppositories – add kitty litter or flour to the container, recap, and shake.

  Tablets/capsules – add rubbing alcohol or water to the container followed by kitty litter or flour, recap, and shake.

  Transdermal (skin) patches – while wearing disposable gloves, remove the patch from the packaging. Cut the patch in half, handling it by the edges. Place the patch in a plastic container, add kitty litter or flour to the container, and recap.

  Medicated ointments and creams – add kitty litter or flour to the container and recap.

  Syringes and needles – place in puncture resistant containers, such as empty bleach or detergent bottles.

- ❒ These medical disposal containers should be kept out of reach of children and adults. When 3/4 full, seal with heavy tape, such as duct tape. Place all containers in a plain paper bag to discourage identification and tampering. Dispose of the paper bag in a trash bin.

Things to do in coming weeks

Contact Financial Institutions and Advisors

- ❒ Banks - may need to determine what automatic withdrawals have been authorized
- ❒ Credit card companies
- ❒ Financial planners
- ❒ Loan holders such as mortgage companies, credit unions, and car dealers
- ❒ Empty lock boxes
- ❒ Tax preparation services

Contact Legal Counsel

- ❒ If any property was possessed that was not held in joint tenancy
- ❒ For assistance in administering a will

Contact Service Providers to Cancel Service or Change Billing Information

- ❒ Post Office
- ❒ Newspaper & magazines
- ❒ Utilities
- ❒ Insurance companies – home, vehicle, long-term care, life, health
- ❒ Locate passwords for online accounts

Organize Important Papers

You might consider getting a plastic hanging file tote to keep all the important papers pertaining to the death of your loved one. The documents you should include are:

- ❒ Original death certificates
- ❒ Copy of the will, if available
- ❒ Deeds of property
- ❒ Last tax return filed, and any tax related papers for current year
- ❒ Insurance policies – life and health
- ❒ Employment benefits
- ❒ Property titles – home and vehicle
- ❒ Bank account, credit card statements, and/ or other bills
- ❒ Stock certificates
- ❒ Investment or retirement account statements
- ❒ Birth certificates
- ❒ Marriage certificates
- ❒ Military documents and any veterans benefit information
- ❒ Copy of person's ID or driver's license





Grief's Journey

HopeWest will continue to provide care throughout your first 13 months of bereavement, through *Grief's Journey,* our monthly newsletter that combines general information about loss and grief with proven tips and coping strategies. Newsletters are available to view online at HopeWestCO.org, or we can mail them to you by request.

We hope the information in these newsletters will be helpful throughout your grieving process. You will find suggestions and information that normalize many of the reactions you may experience.

If you would like to talk about your loss, reactions, or concerns, we invite you to call us so we can connect you with one of our experienced grief counselors.

View all issues of *Grief's Journey* at HopeWestCO.org

Grief is a natural, necessary, and highly personal experience.

The illustration below offers a picture of many of the common experiences during the grief journey. Your grief is unique, and this may not provide an accurate map of your personal path through these experiences.

A Path Through Grief



Grief is a Normal Response to Loss

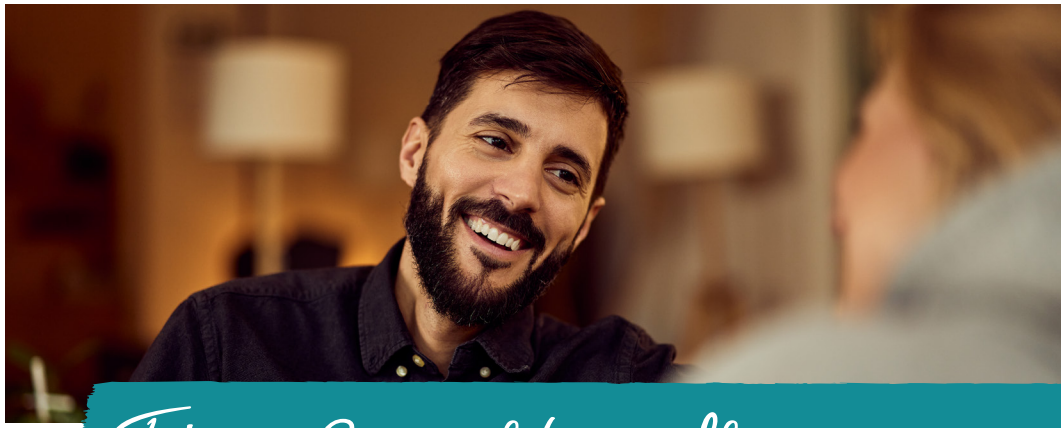
Grief can be so painful and overwhelming that it can be frightening and confusing.

Many people worry if they are grieving in a normal and healthy way. It may help to know that most people who suffer a loss experience similar feelings.

One or more of the following are normal and natural reactions to a loss:

- Tightness in the throat or heaviness in the chest.
- An empty feeling in the stomach and loss or gain of appetite.
- Restlessness and the desire to look for activity but having difficulty concentrating.
- Feeling as though the loss isn't real and that it didn't actually happen. This may include trying to find your loved one.
- Feeling a sense of your loved one's presence, including expecting them to walk in the door at the usual time, hearing their voice, or seeing their face.
- Difficulty sleeping and having frequent dreams or visions of your loved one.
- Assuming mannerisms or traits of your loved one.
- Feeling guilty or angry over things that happened or didn't happen in your relationship with the person who died.
- Feeling intensely angry at your loved one for leaving you.
- Feeling as though you should not talk about your feelings of loss because other people seem uncomfortable when you do.

- Experiencing sudden mood changes over the slightest things or without explanation.
- Crying at unexpected times.
- Feeling despair over beginning a life without your loved one.



Taking Care of Yourself

The course of a serious illness has many ups and downs. HopeWest cares for patients and families throughout this season of life.

The highly-trained staff at HopeWest also supports families and friends, even after the death of a loved one. It is important to remember to make time for yourself. Find a way to bring the memory of your loved one into your activities.

Here are some suggestions:

- Light a special candle in memory of your loved one.
- Prepare your loved one's favorite meal and share it with friends and family.
- Visit the cemetery or another special place. Go alone or with others. Say a prayer or bring flowers.

- Make an ornament for the Christmas tree. This ornament could be made of something that was special to your loved one, or it could be made from a picture of your loved one.
- Plant a tree, bush, or other plant in memory of your loved one. You may want to plant it in a pot in the house, and transplant it in the spring to the garden.
- Create a scrapbook of pictures, stories, or other moments that you can look at from time to time with your family.
- Give friends and family small gifts that belonged to, or were special to your loved one.
- Pick a charity that was special to your loved one, and make a donation in their name. The donation does not have to be large – every little bit helps.
- Buy a present for your loved one in the form of a gift for your home, the church, or synagogue.

Remember, there is no timetable for grief. You will need support from friends and family members in the weeks and months following your loss.

Most importantly, know the resources that are offered within your community. HopeWest is western Colorado's most trusted resource on learning to cope with the loss of a loved one, offering an array of bereavement services that help families learn to cope with grief.



How HopeWest Can Help You

We offer 13 months of bereavement support to the family after the death of their loved one who received hospice care.

This includes phone calls, personal visits from bereavement volunteers and access to Grief's Journey, a series of newsletters aimed at helping people work through the grief process. HopeWest offers an array of support groups where you can learn how to cope with grief and connect with others who may share a common bond.

Available groups include:

Drop-In Grief Group (Any Type of Loss)

Our come-as-you-can opportunity for grieving folks to connect with others in an open, supportive environment, where attendees voice concerns, share memories and ask questions. Designed for flexibility – members can attend or not, as they need.

Mending Hearts (Any Type of Loss)

10-Week Closed Group – In the safety of a group and in an atmosphere of acceptance and understanding, members talk about their feelings and concerns. As they share their experiences, members help each other work through their feelings and come to terms with the new realities of life.

Individual & Family Counseling

Appointments for counseling sessions are available to anyone who has experienced the death of a loved one, or for children who are connected to someone with a serious illness.

Community support opportunities and dates vary by location. Please call your local office to inquire what is currently offered.

Parent's Corner

Often parents ask how to talk to their children about death. Many feel helpless when trying to explain death, or they want to protect their children from emotional pain.

However, professional experience with children has shown that they are resilient and can work through their grief with time, understanding, and support. Without this opportunity, behavioral and emotional problems may arise, either immediately or in the future. Just as we encourage you to fully participate in your own healing journey, you can help your children move through their grief.

Below are tips that you may find helpful:

- You're a role model for your children; if you hide your grief, they learn to hide it too. Instead, set an example for your children by freely sharing your feelings with them. It's okay for your children to see you angry, upset, crying and relieved.



- Tell your children immediately when the death occurs. Gently explain what has happened, what is happening now, and why you are upset or crying. Explain the death in terms that your children can understand. Use terms such as "die," "died," "dying." Words and expressions like "sleeping peacefully," "passed away," "departed," "expired" and "lost" only confuse children.
- Don't force their feelings of grief. Allow your children to express them naturally in their own way, and in their own time.
- Really listen to what your children are asking or saying. To understand what they are expressing you may need to ask further questions without making it an interrogation.
- Maintain routines as much as possible. It may help your children to remain in familiar places (their rooms, their home) and with familiar loved ones.

HopeWest Kids

HopeWest Kids is the only program of its kind in western Colorado. It provides grief support to children, teens, and their families who are coping with the serious illness or death of a loved one. Specially trained counselors offer grief education and counseling in Delta, Mesa, Montrose, Ouray and parts of Garfield and Rio Blanco counties.

For more information contact HopeWest Kids at (970)245-5377 or visit HopeWestCO.org.

School Programs
Grief support groups are co-facilitated with school counselors, and provide education and experiences with peers who are coping with grief. This service is free of charge.

Individual & Family Counseling
Counseling can help children and families communicate about their experiences, learn to utilize coping skills, grow, and heal through their difficult experiences. Services are covered by some insurance plans, offered on a sliding scale and scholarships are available.

Family Support Groups
The 'Forget-Me-Not' grief group provides support for children and family members. Groups are held for different age groups, and utilize journaling, art, music, and other activities aimed at helping families adjust to their loss.

Summer Camps
Itty Bitty Day Camp and Camp Good Grief are age specific camps where children and teens can interact with peers who have suffered a similar loss of a loved one. Teamwork takes place, friendships are made, and healing occurs in this fun, camp environment.



Community support opportunities and dates vary by location. Please call your local office to inquire what is currently offered.

Forever in our hearts

Honor your loved one with a special tribute.
Tributes are a lasting way to remember your loved one, while enabling HopeWest to provide the same compassionate care and comfort to patients and families like yours.

Memorial Opportunities
A timeless way to remember those who have touched your life.

- Pathway Bricks and Plaques
- Garden Ornaments
- Lanterns
- Aspen Leaves
- Bronzed Butterflies
- Bronzed Plaques

Complimentary Online Obituary
Share stories and memories with family & friends.
Visit **hopewestco.org/obits** to begin.

**As a gesture of appreciation, HopeWest offers complimentary, personalized memorials to families who designate HopeWest to receive contributions in lieu of flowers.*

Heirlooms for Hospice
Donate your loved one's treasures and give them a renewed purpose. Proceeds support the mission of HopeWest.

Home Décor • Clothing • Jewelry • Antiques
Furniture • Kitchenware

HeirloomsforHospice.org

For more information, please contact the HopeWest Development Department at (970) 255-7210 or BKramer@HopeWestCO.org.

Notes

HopeWest

Providing Exceptional Care Across the Western Slope

Serving Mesa, Delta, Montrose, Ouray, and parts of Garfield and Rio Blanco counties.

(970) 241-2212
HopeWestCO.org

Scan to see area-specific contact information, or to complete an online contact form.

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