

MANAGING GRIEF

OVER THE DEATH OF A LOVED ONE DURING COVID-19

The need to social distance to reduce the spread of the coronavirus (COVID-19) has changed how we do things in our daily lives. It also means changes to the way in which we grieve the death of a loved one. While services and support may look different for the time being, there are still ways to safely stay connected and receive help and support throughout the grieving process.

UNDERSTANDING GRIEF

- It is normal to experience feelings of stress, anxiety, sadness, anger, and confusion when someone you know dies.
- Individuals may feel anger and frustration towards institutions and organizations because loved ones are becoming ill or dying.
- In unprecedented events, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, it is natural to want to place blame.
- It is common to feel guilty about surviving COVID-19 while others you may know have not. It is not your fault that you survived and they, unfortunately, did not.

HOW COVID-19 IS IMPACTING GRIEF AND LOSS

Losing a loved one is always difficult. It can be even more difficult to process without being able to gather with family and friends who are also mourning. You can expect to feel increased anxiety and sadness as social distancing restricts our ability to:

- Visit dying loved ones;
- Honor memorial gatherings or burials;
- Adhere to religious observances;
- Support loved ones in person.

HOW COVID-19 IS IMPACTING GRIEF AND LOSS

It's okay to be upset. Frustration and anger are natural and common emotions to experience after losing a loved one. Coping with the loss of a loved one is far more challenging now than it is outside of a public health emergency. It's important to recognize these feelings and use healthy tools to manage them. While it's critical that as a community we continue to practice social distancing, it does not mean social isolation. There are ways to alter grieving rituals to practice public health guidance and still receive support and comfort for yourself and loved ones:

- Check in with loved ones via phone calls, texting, video chat or social media;
- Hold virtual group memorials;
- Create memorials or pages via social media that can be shared with close friends and family;
- Create a plan for an in-person memorial for when social distancing guidelines are no longer recommended.

MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT

- The Department of Behavioral Health (DBH) has established a 24/7 Mental Health Hotline at 1-888-793-4357 for individuals coping with grief or experiencing stress and anxiety related to coronavirus COVID-19. This 24-hour, seven-day-a-week line is staffed by professionals who can refer a caller to immediate help or ongoing care. **For families experiencing the loss of a loved one related to COVID-19, call the hotline to:**
 - get grief counseling;
 - learn about DBH services including mental health support services and substance use disorder services;
 - learn about early interventions and behavioral health services for children and youth;
 - determine whether to seek ongoing mental health support.
- The Mental Health Hotline at 1-888-7WE-HELP or 1-888-793-4357 is the easiest way to get connected to services provided by the Department of Behavioral Health and its certified providers.
- Residents over 60 years of age can contact the Department on Aging and Community Living's Talk Line by calling 202-724-5626 Mondays through Fridays from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

DECEDENT HANDLING AND MORTUARY AFFAIRS

If your loved one has passed away from COVID-19 within the District of Columbia:

- He/she will be transported to the DC Office of the Chief Medical Examiner (OCME).
- A DC Medical Examiner will certify the death of your loved one.
- Please contact a funeral home to initiate the funeral arrangements.
- The legal next of kin will be required to sign an *Authorization to Release a Body* form and the funeral director will provide you with the form. The funeral director will fax the completed form to the OCME.
- Once the form is received, OCME will contact the funeral director to arrange for the transfer of your loved one to the funeral home.
- Once you have initiated the arrangements with a funeral home, OCME and the funeral director will work together. You do not need to contact OCME.
- We encourage families to make final arrangements within **5 days** of the death of a loved one. If for any reason, you have a problem making final arrangements, please let the OCME know as soon as possible so that we may offer assistance. If you have any questions regarding the handling of your loved one, please dial **202-698-9000 and select option 1.**

BURIAL ASSISTANCE

What does the burial assistance program provide?

- The Burial Assistance Program provides a maximum of \$1,000 towards the cost of a burial or \$650 towards the cost of a cremation. Assistance is provided if the deceased is determined eligible and the total cost of the burial or cremation is no more than \$2,000. The total cost of a burial for a deceased person requiring an oversized casket cannot exceed \$3,000. Burial Assistance payments are made directly to the contract funeral home selected by the decedent's next of kin.

WHO IS ELIGIBLE FOR THE BURIAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM?

An individual may be eligible if:

- The money available to the deceased on the date of the death does not exceed \$1,000. This amount includes any remaining money from banking and checking accounts, Social Security checks, etc.
- When determining eligibility, the income and assets of his/her spouse (if married) or parents (if a minor child) will be considered.
- To be eligible, the deceased must be a resident of the District of Columbia, even if death occurs outside of the District of Columbia. Also, burial or cremation services must be arranged through a funeral home under contract with the District and the deceased's body must not have been released to a non-contract funeral home at the time of the application.

WHAT FUNERAL HOMES ARE UNDER CONTRACT TO THE DISTRICT FOR THE BURIAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM?

- **Hackett Funeral Chapel**
814 Upshur St NW, Washington, DC 20011
(202) 829-0243
- **Hunt Funeral Home**
908 Kennedy St NW, Washington, DC 20011
(202) 636-3612
- **McLaughlin Funeral Home**
2518 Pennsylvania Ave SE, Washington, DC 20020
(202) 889-7111
- **Ronald Taylor Funeral Home**
1722 North Capitol St NW, Washington, DC 20002
(202) 882-2732

HOW DO I APPLY FOR ASSISTANCE?

- Online at <https://dcbenefits.dhs.dc.gov/>
- In person at the Economic Security Administration (ESA) Service Center at 645 H Street NE, between 7:30 am and 4:45 pm, Monday through Friday or by phone at (202) 698-4112 to complete an application and provide information to determine if the deceased is eligible.

WHAT SHOULD I HAVE WHEN I APPLY?

Please bring documents that:

- Verify income and assets, such as pay stubs and bank account statements for the deceased and his/her spouse if married (or parents, if a minor child);
- Verify that the deceased is a District resident (e.g. lease, utility bill);
- Establish your relationship to the deceased (e.g. birth certificate, marriage certificate); and
- SSN of the deceased.

WHERE CAN I FIND MORE INFORMATION ON THE BURIAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM?

- Call the ESA Burial Assistance Unit at **(202) 698-4112** or **(202) 698-6662**