

# Grief

Grief is a normal and natural reaction to the death of a loved one. Most of us are not prepared for the long journey of grief.

The range of emotions that you may feel is enormous. You may experience:

- Anger.
- Disbelief.
- Sadness.
- Shock.
- Horror.
- Guilt.
- Relief.
- Confusion.
- Rage.

These emotions may make it hard to function on a daily basis. It may be difficult to eat, sleep, think or care about anyone or anything. All of this is natural and normal. Losing a child is one of life's most devastating and painful experiences.

Grieving is a long, difficult process that everyone experiences differently. There is no way around it, only through it. Trusting yourself and taking care of yourself will be important throughout the difficult times ahead.

Most of all, be patient with yourself. There is no right or wrong way to begin this process.

## Important names and numbers

Investigator/police officer

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Coroner/medical examiner

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Hospital contact

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Funeral home:

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

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# When your child dies



Developed by  
Infant Death Center of Wisconsin  
and the office of the  
Milwaukee County medical examiner

It is with sadness that we extend to you our sympathy upon the death of your child.

Even in your grief, there are decisions to be made and things that must be done. Many people never have experienced such difficult decisions.

You will receive a lot of information from various professionals over the next several hours and days. During this difficult time, it is common to feel overwhelmed and to forget much of what is said.

Because grieving can be lonely and frightening, it is important for you to know you don't have to do this alone. There are many resources available to help you.

It is very common to have a variety of questions. This pamphlet was developed to provide you with some basic facts and answers to some frequently asked questions. However, each question is important and each situation is unique. Please do not hesitate to contact any resources listed on the back. These professionals will assist you in obtaining the answers.

### **Why is there an investigation?**

A death-scene investigation is a standard component of determining cause of death. The investigation is needed to define the circumstances surrounding the death, including the environmental aspects. This may include removal of certain items for testing.

### **Why is an autopsy important?**

A Wisconsin mandate requires an autopsy when a child under the age of 2 dies suddenly and unexpectedly. An autopsy is necessary for the pathologist to determine the cause of death and to identify congenital and/or familial conditions. This information may be helpful to you as you make decisions about your future.

### **What is an autopsy?**

An autopsy is the careful examination of organs for causes and/or factors that may have contributed to your child's death. An autopsy is done with sensitivity and care. Nothing is done during the autopsy that will prevent or complicate a funeral or viewing of the body. It may take several weeks for all of the laboratory tests to be completed. A written report then will be available to you. The autopsy is performed at no cost to the family.

## **Roles**

### **Investigator/police officer**

The primary role of the investigator is to be an advocate for the deceased person. He or she must maintain an objective approach in investigating the cause and manner of death.

### **Coroner/medical examiner**

Each Wisconsin county has a coroner or medical examiner. These individuals become involved in the investigation of deaths that are sudden, unexpected or of a traumatic nature. The coroner or medical examiner can explain the autopsy procedure and facilitate discussion of the autopsy findings.

### **Pathologist**

A pathologist is the physician who performs the autopsy and prepares a report of the findings.

### **Funeral director**

One of the first decisions you will need to make is the choice of a funeral home. The funeral director will assist you in making arrangements for your child. This person will offer you a variety of options, including the opportunity to spend time with your child prior to the service. Remember, the final decisions are yours. There are several things you can do in memory of your child. Some choices are formal and public, and others are more personal and private.