

BEREAVEMENT SUPPORT

Palliative care does not end with the death of a person. Bereavement support, is a key component of quality palliative care, and includes the person, family, whānau and friends as the unit of care. Carers are more likely to have poor health and wellbeing outcomes if they perceive that support has not been available both before and following death of the person they are caring for¹.

Death of a loved one is one of the most significant and difficult life events families, whānau and close friends can experience. Grief is a normal human response to difficult loss including death. The grief process assists a person to gradually adjust to the reality of what has happened, experience the pain of the loss and become able to move forward. Grief can disrupt lives, and can be overwhelming. This is a process that takes time, and is individual.

Grief is experienced in different ways including:

- Kind of relationship shared with person who died
- The way on which the person died and if they were present
- Age and stage of development
- Personality
- Gender
- Culture
- Spiritual beliefs
- Pre-existing health conditions
- Usual coping mechanisms
- Previous experience with loss and grief
- Degree of personal support available

Grief affects the whole person, not just a person's emotions.

Five key areas of a person's life impacted are:

- Emotions
- Physical
- Mental/ cognition
- Spiritual
- Social

A lack of bereavement support has been linked with poor health outcomes such as depression, social isolation and increased mortality¹.



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There are common grief reactions, and these can be strong and intense and any mix of them can be experienced simultaneously. Examples include:

EMOTIONAL REACTIONS:

Numb	Sad
Disorientated	Fearful
Tense	Angry
Betrayed	Guilty
Hopeless	Lonely
Relieved	Empty
Strong	Hopeless

PHYSICAL REACTIONS:

Exhausted	Weak
Tense	Shaking
Tearful	Energised
Nervous	Hot/cold
Dehydrated	Nauseated
Change (eating)	Change(sleeping)
Feeling unwell	Headaches

MENTAL/ COGNITION

Slowed thinking, processing	
Confusion	Flashbacks
Disbelief	Vivid dreams
Forgetful	Preoccupied
Extreme positivity	Reacting slowly
Difficulty making decisions	
Difficult imagining a future	

SPIRITUAL REACTIONS:

- Questioning, Why?
- Looking for meaning
- Feeling closely connected to deceased
- Feeling let down by God
- Moving towards or away from faith

SOCIAL REACTIONS:

- Wanting, or not wanting to talk about it
- Withdrawal
- Impatience
- Increased marital tension
- Sensitivity to what others say

The Midcentral District Health Board (MDHB) Palliative Care District Group. (2015) Palliative Care Bereavement Support Guidelines. (Courtesy of Skylight, www.skylight.org.nz).

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The Palliative Care Bereavement Support GUIDELINES RESOURCE TOOLKIT² was produced by the Midcentral District Health Board (MDHB) Palliative Care District Group, and can be found on either Arohanui Hospice, or Midcentral District Health Board (MDHB) websites, and is a useful resource for health professionals who support those experiencing loss and grief, including anticipatory grief.

<http://www.arohanuihospice.org.nz/useful-links/resources/>

<http://www.midcentraldhb.govt.nz/Publications/AllPublications/Documents/Bereavement%20Support%20Guidelines-2232%20Links.pdf>

Bereavement support begins with preparation for dying, and this should be implemented early. The discussions with whānau, family, and friends should be documented and reviewed regularly by the interdisciplinary team. Services need to be personalised to the person's age, cultural and belief diversity, disability or gender factors, which may be adversely affecting interpersonal dynamics.

Preparation includes:

- Providing information to family, whānau and friends about what to expect
- Identifying the preferred place of dying
- Providing access to information about post-death factors that are consistent with a family's, whānau's or friend's needs (such as funerals, tangi, or memorials practice options.
- Information needs to be clear, up to date and reliable (written and verbal)

Resources and information for families, whānau's and friends may be found on the Arohanui website, and include the following:

- What to Expect When Someone is Dying
- Being prepared for Death
- What to expect when you are Grieving
- Bereavement Support in MDHB

1. <http://www.arohanuihospice.org.nz/wp-content/themes/arohanui/images/Bereavement-Support-Guidelines-2232-Links.pdf>
2. The Midcentral District Health Board (MDHB) Palliative Care District Group. (2015) Palliative Care Bereavement Support Guidelines. Resource Toolkit.

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Palliative Care Bereavement Support Guidelines and Resources Flow Diagram

