



# Bereavement

Information for  
family and friends

One team, many dreams.

Care / Respect / Innovation / Teamwork / Integrity



## In sympathy

The staff at Sir Charles Gairdner Osborne Park Health Care Group wish to extend our deepest sympathy for your recent bereavement. This may be a sad and difficult time for you and your family.

This booklet is designed to provide guidance, information and practical suggestions to help you.

If you would like further information, or wish to speak with someone, please contact:

### **Social Work** on

(08) 6457 4666 - Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital (SCGH)

(08) 6457 8111 - Osborne Park Hospital (OPH)

or

### **Chaplaincy** on

(08) 6457 3425 (SCGH),

(08) 6457 8455 (OPH)

Monday, Wednesday & Friday


If you require an interpreter, please contact (08) 6457 4698.



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# The first steps after someone has died

- 
- Inform family and friends.
  - Locate the deceased's will and inform executor/s (refer to pages 9-10).
  - If financial assistance is required, contact the Department for Communities and Centrelink (refer to page 11).
  - Arrange the funeral (refer to page 14).
  - Seek bereavement support from family, friends, GP, social worker or chaplain (refer to page 24).

# Practical and legal matters

## Viewing the deceased

After a person has died, the next of kin is notified and family and friends are provided with the opportunity to say goodbye and pay their respects.

You can spend time in the hospital room with your loved one, and you can ask to speak to a chaplain or social worker if you require additional support. It is important to let staff know if there are any customs and beliefs that need to be considered.

If you have any questions about the medical situation, you may ask to speak with the medical or nursing team.

Where the death occurs at Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital, the deceased is then transferred to the State Mortuary, located in JJ Block. If family or friends would like the opportunity to say goodbye, they are able to do so in the mortuary bereavement viewing room.

The deceased will remain in the mortuary until a funeral director is chosen. The funeral director will collect the deceased from the mortuary and transport them to the funeral home.

To speak to the State Mortuary or to make an appointment to view the deceased, contact the mortuary on (08) 6383 4884.

Where the death occurs at Osborne Park Hospital, it is important to notify the hospital of the chosen funeral director as soon as possible as there is no mortuary on this site.

## Death certificate

A doctor must certify the death and determine the time of death. The doctor completes the form Medical Certificate of Cause of Death, which includes the cause of death (the disease or condition directly leading to death) and any other factors contributing to the death.

The funeral director receives the Medical Certificate of Cause of Death from the hospital or mortuary. Then, along with other information provided by the family of the deceased, they lodge the certificate with the Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages.

The official death certificate is provided to the funeral director. The funeral director places a copy on file and forwards the original to the family. Families need to have the death certificate to assist with finalising the deceased's affairs.

## The Registry of Birth Deaths and Marriages

Phone: **1300 305 021**

<https://www.wa.gov.au/organisation/departments-of-justice/the-registry-of-births-deaths-and-marriages>



## The role of the Coroner's Office

In some circumstances, the death may have to be referred, by law, to the Coroner. These may include:

- If the death was unexpected or unexplained
- If your relative died from an accident or injury
- If it occurred during or following anaesthetic, surgery or procedure
- If the doctor has been unable complete the Medical Certificate of Cause of Death

Anyone can also write to the Coroner to request an autopsy/ post-mortem to be performed if they do not agree with the cause of death.

The Coroner will then determine whether a post-mortem is required to establish the cause of death. A post-mortem can involve an internal and external examination with retention of some tissue and blood samples for analysis.

The next of kin can request a post-mortem or object to all or part of a post-mortem. The objection should be lodged within 24 hours of receiving the *When a person dies suddenly* brochure. To make an objection, contact the:

- Office of the State Coroner on (08) 9425 2900 during office hours,

or

- Police Service's Coronial Investigation Unit after hours on (08) 9420 5200

The Coroner will consider the family's wishes before making the final decision. The body will be released as soon as possible to the chosen funeral director with the Coroner's report to follow.

When a death is subject to a coronial inquiry, the death will be registered without a cause of death. This is called an 'incomplete' death registration.

At a later date, the Coroner will advise the Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages of the cause of death and details will be added to the death registration. A Complete Death Certificate will then be issued by the Registry to the funeral director, or an eligible applicant can apply to the Registry for a death certificate.

For further information, please contact the Coronial Counselling Service on (08) 9425 2900 or refer to the brochure *When a person dies suddenly*, available from the Coroner's Office.





## Enduring Power of Attorney, Enduring Power of Guardianship, legal guardians and administrators

The date and time of death is recorded by the doctor who certifies death. It is at this point that Enduring Power of Attorney, Enduring Power of Guardianship, legal guardians and administrators' roles cease. Then the role of the executor/s of the deceased person's will commences.

### The will

A will is a legal document containing instructions about what should be done with a person's assets after death. It may include their wishes for the funeral.

If a will has not been made, there are laws that govern how a person's property will be distributed.

If you are unsure whether a person has made a will, useful places to check include the person's bank, insurance company, lawyer, accountant, trust corporations and the Public Trustee.

### Public Trustee

Phone: **1300 746 116**

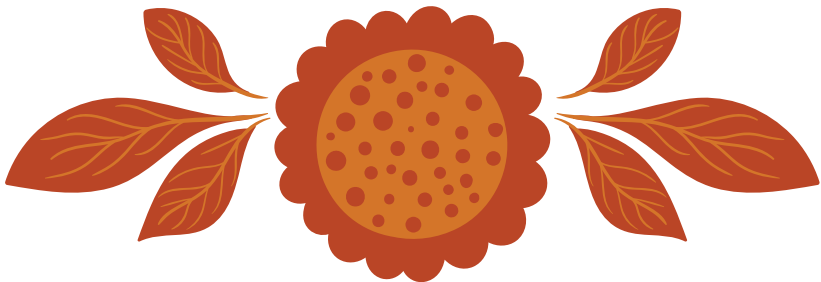
[www.publictrustee.wa.gov.au](http://www.publictrustee.wa.gov.au)

## The role of the executor

The executor is the person named in a will to carry out the wishes of a person after they die. They organise to notify the beneficiaries, collect the assets of the deceased, pay the debts and distribute the property as set out in the deceased's will.

It is important that the executor is contacted prior to planning the funeral. If the will sets out the deceased's wishes on funeral arrangements or organ donation, the executor needs to make the necessary arrangements.

Executing a will can be complicated. It may be a good idea to get advice from a lawyer. The deceased's estate will cover reasonable fees charged for legal advice.



## Probate and Letters of Administration

If you have been appointed executor of a will, you may need to apply for a Grant of Probate. Probate is the process of proving the validity of a deceased person's will in the Supreme Court of WA and is the first step in administering the estate.

If a deceased person does not have a will, if their will does not appoint an executor or if the executor is unable or unwilling to apply for a Grant of Probate, then a Grant of Letters of Administration may be required.

Banks and other financial institutions, Landgate, share registries and utility companies may decline to discuss any dealings in relation to a deceased person's estate until the Supreme Court has made a grant.

To obtain either of these grants, an application to the Supreme Court must be made. For a Grant of Probate, there is a standard form that needs to be completed. This form can be obtained from [www.supremecourt.wa.gov.au](http://www.supremecourt.wa.gov.au).

For a Grant of Letters of Administration, there is no standard form. This can be a complex area of the law and the Probate Office recommends seeking legal advice.

### **Citizen's Advice Bureau**

Phone **(08) 9221 5711**

[www.cabwa.com.au](http://www.cabwa.com.au)

### **Law Society of Western Australia**

Phone **(08) 9324 8600**

[www.lawsocietywa.asn.au](http://www.lawsocietywa.asn.au)

### **Probate Office at the Supreme Court of Western Australia**

Phone **(08) 9421 5152**

[www.supremecourt.wa.gov.au](http://www.supremecourt.wa.gov.au)

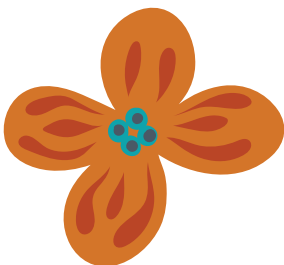
## Organ and tissue donation

Organ donation is a life-saving medical process. Registering as an organ donor is a personal choice. If you are unsure whether your relative wished to donate, or you would like more information, please ask to speak to the medical team. There is a screening process and you can withdraw consent to continue with the donation at any time.

Organ and tissue donation involve removing organs and tissues from someone who has died (a donor) and transplanting them into someone who, in many cases, is very ill or dying (a recipient). Organ donation can only occur when a person dies in hospital, usually on a ventilator in intensive care. Tissue donation can occur up to 24 hours after your loved one's death.

During and after the process, the donor's family is supported by Donate Life organ and tissue donation specialist staff. All donations and transplants are performed by specialist medical teams in the Australian public health system. Care, dignity and respect are always maintained. Organ donation will only proceed if there is a person on the waitlist for an organ that is a match.

Enquiries from family members relating to donation can be directed to the on-call donor coordinator who can be contacted 24/7 via the switchboard at Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital on **(08) 6457 3333**. Please refer to [www.donatelife.gov.au](http://www.donatelife.gov.au) for more information.



## Funeral arrangements

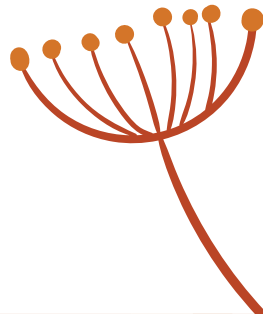
After a person has died, one of the first things to organise is appointing a funeral director. You may wish to check whether a pre-paid funeral exists. Deciding on a funeral director is a personal choice and it may be helpful to discuss your ideas and wishes with family and friends.

The Social Work Department can provide you with a list of funeral directors. It is recommended you contact the funeral director to ensure their service best suits your needs.

The funeral director's role is to assist you through the funeral process. This includes helping plan the funeral, collecting the deceased from the mortuary, lodging formal paperwork with the Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages, liaising with other services and managing the funeral service event.

## Involving children in the funeral preparation

Everyone is different, and all children are different. Some families and traditions do not involve children in a funeral. For others, including children in the planning of a funeral is very important. Some may like to allow children to provide music, photos or stories for the funeral. Older children may be involved in the service either by doing a reading or sharing a personal memory. This may help a child discuss death and their feelings about their loved one. There is no right or wrong way.



## Help with funeral costs

The Department of Communities offer support through their Bereavement Assistance Program. They may provide financial support in certain situations where there are insufficient funds in a deceased person's estate to pay for a funeral or where the deceased person's family are unable to meet the cost of a funeral. If the eligibility criteria are met, the financial support can go towards the funeral notice, service, burial, transport and the attendance of a minister or celebrant.

For more information, contact the Department of Communities on 1800 176 888. Applications can be made after the death through your local Department of Communities office.

<https://www.wa.gov.au/organisation/department-of-communities/bereavement-assistance-program>

***Please note: This contact must be made prior to engaging a funeral director.***

## Other resources

**Insurance Commission of WA (for road crash trauma):  
(08) 9264 3333**

**Department of Veteran Affairs: 1800 838 372**



## Financial assistance after death

Services Australia (Centrelink) may provide financial assistance to help people adjust to life after someone close to them has died. It is important that Services Australia (Centrelink) is notified soon after the death.

For more information or to see if you are eligible for a bereavement payment or other financial assistance, contact the Centrelink Older Australians line on 132 300.

## Who to notify

A list of organisations to notify can be obtained from the Services Australia website or the hospital social worker can provide you with a copy of this checklist.

[www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/sites/default/files/who-to-notify-checklist.pdf](http://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/sites/default/files/who-to-notify-checklist.pdf)

# Managing grief

## What is grief?

Grief is a normal response to loss. It is natural, unique and can affect every part of our life. Each person has their own way of dealing with and expressing grief – there is no right or wrong way to grieve.

Grief affects feelings, thoughts and the physical body.

**Feelings:** As a bereaved person, you may experience a wide range of feelings, which may include sadness, anger, anxiety, disbelief, panic, relief, fear, confusion, guilt, restlessness, shock, aloneness or numbness.

**Thinking:** Grief may also affect your thinking. You may notice changes in your memory or difficulty with decision-making. You may question how you will go on without the person or constantly think about the cause of death. You may question your understanding of how and why the person died.

**Physical symptoms:** Sometimes grief can result in difficulty sleeping or other physical changes, such as appetite changes, tiredness and difficulty motivating oneself, headaches, rapid breathing, and nausea.

When people grieve, they are coming to terms with what has changed in their lives. It is important to remember that grief is not something that individuals 'get over' but is a process of learning to live with and manage your grief reaction.





## Living with grief

Grief takes time. Initially people tend to experience grief more strongly. Over time most people learn to manage their grief.

It is a process of ups and downs and there is no time frame.

Some people will express their grief privately, or they may want to distract themselves and keep busy. Others will want to express their thoughts and feelings with family and friends. People may behave differently at different times.

Many people find grief does not go away; rather, life grows around it. As a bereaved person you may fear losing touch with or forgetting your loved one as your life continues. Maintaining a bond with your loved one can be very helpful and comforting.

## Here are some ideas to manage your grief

Allow people to help you; don't be embarrassed to accept their help.

- Talk to friends and family about how you are feeling. Sharing memories and stories, thoughts and feelings can be comforting and strengthen your connection with your loved one.
- Consider joining a support group to share with others who have had similar experiences.
- Take care of your physical health. Grieving can be exhausting so it is important to eat a healthy diet, exercise and sleep, and try to have a routine. Exercising can help with using up energy – try walking, swimming or gardening.
- Manage stress. Consider asking friends, family members or work colleagues to help you with chores or commitments.
- Do things you normally enjoy, even if you don't really feel like doing them. This could be your hobbies, visiting a friend, walking at the beach or in a park, or going out for a meal.

- Try to defer major irreversible decisions for six to 12 months (such as disposing of belongings).
- Keep a diary or journal, write a letter or poem, draw, or collect photos.
- Develop your own rituals – light a candle, listen to special music, make a special place to think, create a memorial.
- Draw on religious and spiritual beliefs you may hold.
- Read about other people’s experience – find books and articles.
- Do things that are relaxing and soothing, such as meditation, relaxation, massage and aromatherapy.
- Talk with a counsellor to focus on your unique situation.
- Speak with your GP about how you are feeling physically (such as sleep and appetite) and emotionally.

## When to seek further help

Most people find that with the support of their family and friends and their own resources, they gradually find ways to learn to live with their loss, and they do not need to seek professional help.

However, sometimes the circumstances of the death may have been particularly distressing – such as a traumatic or sudden death – or there may be circumstances in your life which make your grief particularly complicated or difficult.

### **You could consider seeking professional help if:**

- You do not have people who can listen to you and care for you.
- You find yourself unable to manage the tasks of your daily life, such as going to work or caring for your children.

- Your personal relationships are being seriously affected.
- You have thoughts of harming yourself or anyone else.
- You persistently overuse alcohol or other drugs.
- You experience panic attacks or other serious anxiety or depression.
- Over time you remain preoccupied and acutely distressed by your grief.
- You feel that for whatever reason, you need help to get through this experience.

*(Source: Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement)*

If you would like to speak with someone about your grief, you can contact the Social Work Department at:

**Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital**

(08) 6457 4666

**Osborne Park**

(08) 6457 8111

There are also some suggested counselling services on pages 24-26.



# Children's and teenagers' grief

## Understanding children's grief

Generally, children cope with grief much better than adults imagine. Many adults hesitate to talk about death, particularly with children, as adults are concerned about how best to meet the needs of their children. Each child is an individual so what we say to them about death, and when we say it, will depend upon their age and experience. Each child has unique grieving needs, which should be considered when deciding how to best support them.

## How can we help?

- Answer all questions as honestly, clearly and simply as possible while being sensitive to the feelings your answers may evoke. Younger children may need the same questions answered many times.
- Accept the feelings the child expresses without telling them how they should be feeling.
- Reassure the child that they are loved and will continue to be cared for.
- Ensure as much continuity and consistency in their life as possible.
- Sharing memories (both good and bad) can help children come to terms with the loss and what it means. They will need to express their own thoughts and behaviours in their own ways. Encourage this however you can. Examples include making a scrapbook with the child containing photographs and other mementos and talking with the child about the deceased.
- Help them understand that the grief reactions they see in adults are normal and will not last forever.

- It is important for the child to know that it is still okay to go on with everyday activities, such as playing and seeing friends. This helps to reassure them that life can continue with some things unchanged. Play may also provide opportunities for children to express their grief.
- Involve the child in planning for the funeral and the anniversary of the death.
- Reassure them that they and other family members cannot 'catch' the illness their loved one had. This will reassure them if they fear that another family member may die soon.
- Be aware of the child's level of comprehension and relate to the child at that level.
- Some well-meant explanations can be confusing and frightening to a child. For example, an explanation that 'Mummy just went to sleep' could instil a fear of going to sleep in case they never wake up.
- Don't force a teenager to talk about his/her feelings. If the teen feels comfortable and feels you are willing to listen, he/she will talk when ready. When they are ready to talk, give them your undivided attention.

For more detailed information, please refer to the following:

**Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement**

[www.grief.org.au](http://www.grief.org.au)

**Canteen**

[www.canteen.org.au](http://www.canteen.org.au)

**Lionheart Camp for Kids**

[www.lionheartcampforkids.com.au](http://www.lionheartcampforkids.com.au)

**Kids Helpline**

[www.kidshelpline.com.au](http://www.kidshelpline.com.au)

**Headspace**

[www.headspace.org.au](http://www.headspace.org.au)

**Your child's school principal, chaplain, counsellor, teacher**

## Supporting the bereaved

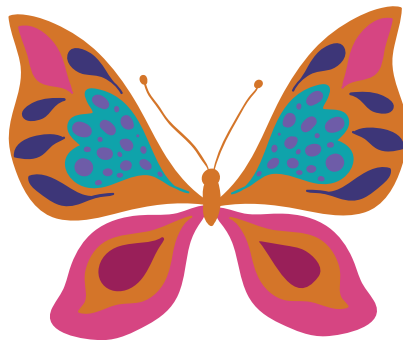
Many things can influence the way in which grief is shown or experienced. These include cultural norms and practices, the way in which someone died, the attachment to the deceased person, or even the bereaved person's perceptions of how they should grieve.

Sometimes how someone grieves can be different from our own experiences and this can cause worry or conflict. It is important to be respectful of these differences and to be supportive as there is no right or wrong way to grieve.

## Listening and acknowledging the loss

Listening is your most valuable resource so be available and prepared to listen. Talking and expressing emotion (even repetitively) may be helpful in allowing the person to make sense of their loss.

Avoid making judgmental statements or expressions of how they should feel. Many people just need to express their sadness without worrying about how others will perceive them. Alternatively, some people do not want to talk and just need you by their side.



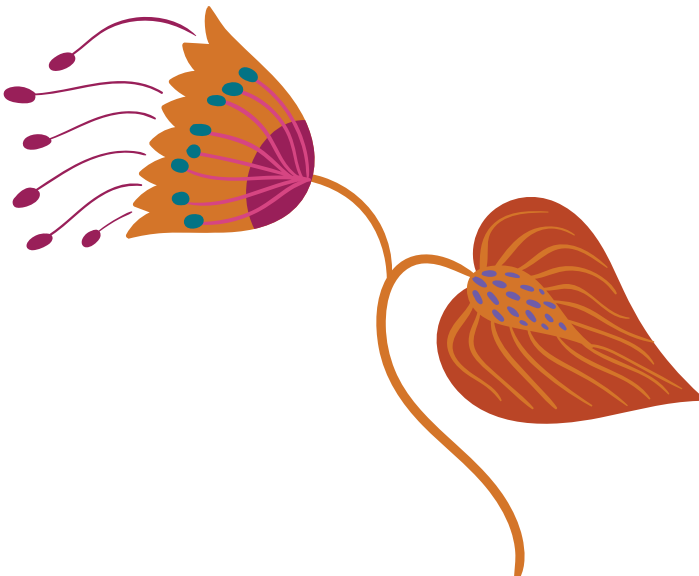
## Practical support

Practical support can be very helpful in the initial stages.

Ask how you can help and be consistent. Be aware of what level of commitment you can realistically offer and how you can sustain it in the long term. Grief does not end after the funeral and loneliness can intensify in the following weeks once the initial levels of support reduce. Involve the bereaved in social outings and enjoyable activities and let them know it is okay to not feel sad.

Offer extra support on special days such as Christmas, birthdays or wedding anniversaries. These times can intensify the feelings of loss and can be especially difficult. Some people find it helpful to celebrate these occasions with family and friends to commemorate the deceased person.

There is nothing you can say that will take away the pain. Acknowledging the loss, offering ongoing support (both practical and emotional) and listening are the best ways to show you care about the bereaved.



# Resources

## Crisis lines

### Lifeline

Crisis support line  
Phone 13 11 14 (available 24/7)  
[www.lifeline.org.au](http://www.lifeline.org.au) for web  
chat counselling

### Beyond Blue

General counselling  
Phone 1300 224 636  
(available 24/7)  
[www.beyondblue.org.au](http://www.beyondblue.org.au)  
(for web chat counselling  
available 7 days, 3pm to  
12 midnight AEST or email  
support. The website also has  
general information and the  
ability to search for a mental  
health professional.)

### The Samaritans

General counselling, including  
those bereaved from suicide.  
Phone 13 52 47 (available 24/7)  
[www.thesamaritans.org.au](http://www.thesamaritans.org.au)  
(for email support)

### Grief Line

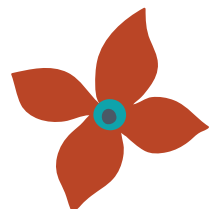
Helpline and online counselling  
for people experiencing loss  
and grief  
Phone 1300 845 745  
(noon to 3am AEST,  
every day of the year)  
[www.griefline.org.au](http://www.griefline.org.au)

### MHERL Mental Health Emergency Response Line

24/7 phone support  
Phone (metro) 1300 555 788  
Phone (Peel) 1800 676 822  
[www.mhc.wa.gov.au](http://www.mhc.wa.gov.au)

### Kids Helpline

24/7 phone support  
Phone 1800 551 800  
[www.kidshelpline.com.au](http://www.kidshelpline.com.au)





## Counselling and support groups

Your general practitioner (GP) may be able to provide a referral to a clinical psychologist in your local area for counselling.

### **Carers WA**

Bereavement counselling and group/social support

Phone 1300 227 377  
or 1800 007 332 (counselling line), available 8am to 5pm, Monday to Friday

[www.carerswa.asn.au](http://www.carerswa.asn.au)

### **Relationships Australia**

General and bereavement counselling

Phone 1300 364 277  
or (08) 6164 0190 counselling line

[www.wa.relationships.com.au](http://www.wa.relationships.com.au)

### **Centrecare**

General and bereavement counselling

Phone: (08) 9325 6644

[www.centrecare.com.au](http://www.centrecare.com.au)

### **Anglicare**

General and bereavement counselling

Phone 1300 11 44 46, available 8.30am to 4.30pm, Monday to Friday

[www.anglicarewa.org.au](http://www.anglicarewa.org.au)

### **Road Trauma Support WA**

Information, support and counselling for people affected by road trauma

Phone 1300 004 814  
or (08) 9420 7262

[www.rtswa.org.au](http://www.rtswa.org.au)

### **Yorgum Healing Services**

Bereavement counselling for Aboriginal families

Phone 9218 9477  
or 1800 469 371

[www.yorgum.org.au](http://www.yorgum.org.au)

## **Metropolitan Migrant Resource Centre**

Bereavement counselling for migrants

Phone (08) 9345 5755, available 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday

[www.mmrcwa.org.au/counselling](http://www.mmrcwa.org.au/counselling)

## **Coronial Counselling Service**

Bereavement counselling when the Office of the State Coroner is involved

Phone 1800 671 994 or (08) 9425 2900, available 7am to 6pm daily, or 0419 904 476 after hours

## **Grief Group by Solaris Cancer Care**

Support group facilitated by counsellors, run by the Solaris Cancer Care but includes deaths of any cause

Phone (08) 9384 3544

## **Solace Grief Support WA**

Peer support group and phone support for those grieving the death of a partner

Phone 0488 991 084 or [info@solacegriefsupportwa.org.au](mailto:info@solacegriefsupportwa.org.au)

## **Compassionate Friends WA**

Peer support group after the death of a child (any age, any cause); for parents, siblings or grandparents

Phone 1300 064 068 or (08) 6107 6257

[www.compassionatefriendswa.org.au](http://www.compassionatefriendswa.org.au)

(General information and support)

## **Centre for Grief and Bereavement**

[www.grief.org.au](http://www.grief.org.au)

## **Palliative Care Australia**

[www.palliativecare.org.au](http://www.palliativecare.org.au)

Palliative Care WA

Phone 1300 551 704

<https://palliativecarewa.asn.au/>

## Other useful numbers

### Services Australia (Centrelink)

Phone 13 24 68

[www.servicesaustralia.gov.au](http://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au)

### Citizens Advice Bureau

Phone (08) 9221 5711

[www.cabwa.com.au](http://www.cabwa.com.au)

### Coroner's Office

Phone (08) 9425 2900

[www.coronerscourt.wa.gov.au](http://www.coronerscourt.wa.gov.au)

### Department of Veterans' Affairs

Phone 1800 550 254

[www.dva.gov.au](http://www.dva.gov.au)

### Legal Aid WA

Phone 1300 650 579

[www.legalaid.wa.gov.au](http://www.legalaid.wa.gov.au)

### Probate Office

Supreme Court of WA

Phone (08) 9421 5152

[www.supremecourt.wa.gov.au](http://www.supremecourt.wa.gov.au)

(Click on left menu FAQ link)

### Public Trustee

Phone 1300 746 116

[www.wa.gov.au](http://www.wa.gov.au)

(Click on Wills on left menu)

### Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages

Phone 1300 305 021


[www.wa.gov.au](http://www.wa.gov.au)

### State Mortuary

Phone (08) 6383 4895

### Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital

 Hospital Ave, Nedlands WA 6009

 Main line (08) 6457 3333

 Patient enquiries (08) 6457 4444

 Hearing impaired 133 677

 [scgh.health.wa.gov.au](http://scgh.health.wa.gov.au)

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This document can be made available in  
alternative formats on request.

