



Navigating Loss

A Guide for Family & Friends



Navigating the Death of Your Loved One

We know this time can be devastating and unbearable. We offer our condolences and we are so sorry that you and your family are going through this. You may feel like you do not know what to do next or how to pick up the pieces and move forward. That is okay.

As victim advocates, our job is to try and make this a little easier on you, your family, and your friends. If you have any questions during this process, please don't hold back. Our goal at this exact moment is to help you through these next 48 hours and this booklet will make it easier to process the next steps in the following days. We can only hope to lessen your burden along the way.

When the phone calls subside and family members leave, we understand that you may be left with your thoughts and processing the loss of your loved one. If you are the person in the family that everyone turns to for support and guidance, you may be feeling the weight of the world on your shoulders. There is no time limit on the grieving process. Please be patient with yourself and know that it is okay if you do not have all the answers.

We are here for you. We hope that this guide can provide you with some assistance and options during this difficult time.

My Primary Advocate

24-Hour Hotline
330.376.0040

What to Expect

The First 24 to 72 Hours

Finding out about the death of a loved one isn't easy. In the first few days, you will probably speak to a lot of people who ask you questions or offer advice. You may also feel like your to-do list is growing and you cannot keep up with everything that needs to be done.

It is normal to not remember everything you are told, and you do not have to do this alone. Here are some ideas of what you can expect and options to help you along the way:

Keep Track of the People You Meet

Refer to page 5 for a space to write down contact information in one place. If any information is missing, contact a victim advocate and they can help you.

Identify Your Support People

Pick a friend, family member, or another trusted person to help you. Think of your support system as a small team who can help with making big or difficult decisions. You may also invite a victim advocate to be part of this team.

Collecting Information

During this time, you will speak with a lot of people. It may be hard to remember their names and what they tell you. Completing this booklet will help you easily find their name and phone number if you need to speak with them or ask a question.

Victim Assistance Program Advocates

Victim advocates are trained professionals who help people who have experienced something traumatic. Your team of advocates are here to **listen to you, support you, and answer questions**. If you have a question that an advocate cannot answer, they will help you find the person who can.

Victim Assistance Program advocates are available 24/7/365. You can speak with an advocate any time by calling or texting 330.376.0040. You can also chat with an advocate on our website www.victimassistanceprogram.org.

Primary Advocate: _____

Phone #: _____

Email: _____@victimassistanceprogram.org

Work Hours: _____

Secondary Advocate: _____

Phone #: _____

Email: _____@victimassistanceprogram.org

Work Hours: _____



Support People

Telling Others

Once you've picked your support person or team, you can now come up with a plan to tell others. Common examples include family & friends, employers, schools, and your faith community.



Tip:

Have your support person or team help you make phone calls. It may be helpful to create a script, so everyone shares the same information. Your support team can also help you share your needs, like asking for this news to not be posted on social media.

Information to be Shared



Police Officer/Detective

A police officer will arrive on scene after someone dies to determine if someone's death was due to natural or unnatural causes. Sometimes, a detective (who is also a police officer) may investigate what happened. If a detective is assigned, they may ask to speak with you right away or schedule a meeting later.

You can ask an advocate to be with you when you speak with any law enforcement officer. An advocate can also help you speak with the officer or detective if you feel nervous, overwhelmed, or have a hard time getting in touch with them.

Police Department

Department: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Police Report #: _____

Officer/Detective

Name: _____

Phone #: _____

Email: _____

Work Hours: _____



Other Contacts

There may be times when you speak with others not listed above. You can add their information here if needed.

Name: _____

Agency: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

Name: _____

Agency: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

Name: _____

Agency: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____



Medical Examiner

Medical Examiners are professionals who conduct medical exams post-mortem (after death). Their exam, also known as an autopsy, gives information about how your loved one died. Often, an investigator, who works for the Medical Examiner, is assigned to your family.

Just like with police officers or detectives, an advocate can help you speak with a member of the Medical Examiner’s team if you feel nervous, overwhelmed, or have a hard time getting in touch with them.

Medical Examiner’s Office

Address: 85 N. Summit Street

City: Akron State: Ohio Zip: 44308

Investigator Name: _____

Phone #: _____

Email: _____

Work Hours: _____



Medical Examiner Process

If your loved one is taken to the Medical Examiner’s Office, you can plan for the following:



Autopsies are usually done within 48 hours. During this time, you and your support person/team can begin planning funeral and memorial services. Pages 9 - 11 will guide you through this process.



Unlike what we see on TV, the Medical Examiner’s Office does not have viewings or ask families to identify their loved one. Instead, you can arrange a private viewing through the Funeral Director.



Once you choose a funeral home, let the Funeral Director know that your loved one is at the Medical Examiner’s Office. Usually, you will sign a form and they will handle transportation.



Other

Although the below resources may not apply in every situation, a victim advocate can help you determine if additional resources may be useful.

Crime Scene Clean-Up

Sometimes there are cleanup needs that are unsafe without specific tools and protective equipment.

Note: Crime scene clean-up is not free and is usually not covered by insurance. Victim Assistance Program works closely with local businesses who offer this service and may be able to offer a payment plan or discounted rate. If this is a service that you need, a victim advocate can refer you to local companies.

Victim Compensation

The Ohio Attorney General's Office has a fund to help reimburse victims of violent crimes and their families for select out-of-pocket expenses. Some examples include funeral costs, crime scene clean-up expenses, counseling services, medical expenses, and lost wages due to your loved one's death. There is an application process and decisions are made within 120 days. A victim advocate can help you access, complete, and submit the application.

Note: This fund is not managed by Victim Assistance Program and certain eligibility restrictions apply.

If you have questions about the status of an application you submitted, please call the **Crime Victim Services Division of the Ohio Attorney General's Office: 614.466.5610.**

Funeral Arrangements

Navigating the feelings surrounding the loss of your loved one can make it difficult to decide on funeral arrangements. No one is ever fully prepared to handle these tasks but having support throughout the process can lessen the burden, ease the pain, and reduce some of the stress you are experiencing. **Be kind and patient with yourself, and remember:**

You are in control of this process. Do not feel like you must make decisions that you are not comfortable with or that you do not feel honors the wishes of your loved one. Take your time and weigh out your options. If you are feeling stuck or need help, a victim advocate can provide funeral home referrals and ideas for vigils or memorials. Once you have selected a funeral home, you can add their information below.

Start with the basics. Do you wish to have a burial, cremation, donate to medical science, or something else? For services, do you wish to have a traditional funeral service, memorial service, graveside service, or no service at all? If you are unsure, you can contact the Funeral Director for guidance and support.

You are not alone. Remember, your support person or team can help you along the way.

Tip:



If funeral costs are worrying you, an advocate can help brainstorm ideas. Some options include:

Comparing funeral home prices on the phone and online;

Setting up online memorial funds;

Setting up in-person memorial funds at the funeral home or local organizations your family or friends are involved with, such as churches, work unions, and others.



Funeral Details Worksheet

This worksheet helps keep track of the details of the funeral. Once you have selected a funeral home, consider completing this with the Funeral Director. Once finalized, this information can be given to your support person/team who can help you share the information with others.

Funeral Home

Name of Funeral Home: _____

Funeral Director: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

Important Dates & Times

Date & Time of Wake/Viewing: _____

Date & Time of Funeral/Memorial/Mass: _____

Date & Time of Burial: _____

Date & Time of Reception/Gathering: _____



Wake and/or Funeral Services

Site Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Burial Site/Final Resting Place

Site Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Reception

Site Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Officiant Information

Priest | Clergyman | Minister | Rabbi | Chaplain | Other

Name: _____

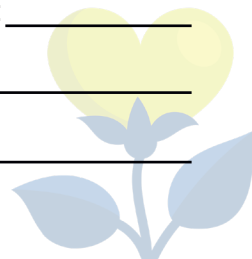
Place of Worship: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____



Taking Care of Yourself

Grief is the pain you feel when someone you love is taken away, and this pain can be overwhelming. You may experience all kinds of difficult and unexpected emotions, from shock or anger to disbelief, guilt, and deep sadness.

The pain of grief can make it difficult to sleep, eat, or even think straight. These are normal reactions to loss. Although there is no right or wrong way to grieve, there are healthy ways to deal with the grieving process.

This section briefly discusses types of responses you may have and options to nurture your physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing.

However, this list does not include all responses or ways to reduce them. If you need help coming up with ideas not listed here, contact a victim advocate.

An advocate can help you come up with new ideas or share methods that have been helpful to others who have lived through a similar situation.

Write down 3 things you like to do to relax:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Now, challenge yourself each day to spend one hour doing at least one of these things. It doesn't have to be all at once, just one hour total. Pay attention to the changes you are experiencing and continue to build a habit of adding this into your day-to-day routine.



Physical Responses

- Trouble sleeping
- Stomach problems
- Tiredness
- Headaches
- Tight or sore muscles
- Unexplained medical conditions or existing medical conditions getting worse

Helpful Practices

- Physical activity, even if it is a short walk
- Allow time for rest
- Drink water
- Eat well-balanced and regular meals
- Do things that help you relax

Mental & Emotional Responses

- Nervousness & anxiety
- Anger, confusion, & forgetfulness
- Avoiding people and places
- Nightmares
- Guilt & shame
- Negative worldview

Helpful Practices

- Reach out to your support system
- Write down your thoughts & feelings if talking about them is uncomfortable
- Have a daily routine
- Seek professional help or attend a peer support group



Who to Notify

Below is a list of places you may need to call to tell them your loved one has died. A victim advocate can help you brainstorm additional places as well.

Important information you may need when making calls:

Your loved one's social security #: _____

Date of birth and death: _____

You can purchase a copy of your loved one's death certificate:

Online: odh.ohio.gov/wps/portal/gov/odh/home/vital-records

In person: Summit County Public Health
1867 W. Market St. Akron, OH

Only a few places require certified copies of the certificate while most others accept photocopies.

Government Agencies

Social Security Administration: 1.800.772.1213

Reason: You can call to report if your loved one or their children are receiving social security benefits, if your loved one is assigned as a "payee" for someone else's social security benefits, or to see if you are eligible for survivor's benefits.

US Department of Veteran's Affairs: 1.800.827.1000

Reason: There are certain benefits you may qualify for if your loved one is a veteran and/or is receiving VA disability benefits. Benefits may include burial benefits, survivor's benefits, and/or health insurance.

**Summit County Department of Job and Family Services:
1.844.640.6446**

Reason: Those who have an active benefits case are required to report any household changes within ten (10) days to prevent delays in receiving those benefits.

Checklist

When informing companies of a loved one's death, be prepared to submit a copy of the death certificate for their records. You may be reimbursed if your loved one is no longer on the prepaid account.

Financial Companies

- Checking and savings accounts and credit unions
- Utilities
- Credit card companies
- Mortgage companies and lenders (house loans, car loans, student loans, etc.)
- 401ks or other retirement funds

Insurance Companies

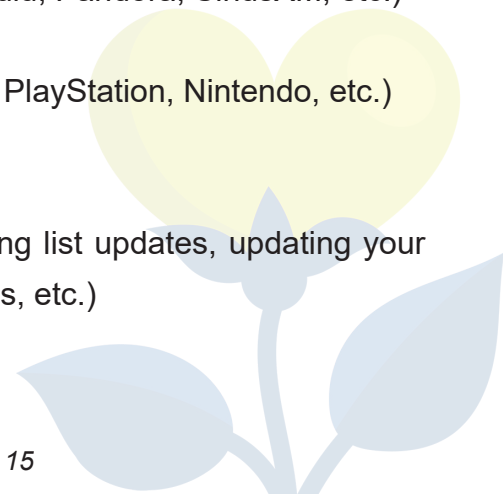
- Life insurance
- Car insurance
- Homeowners/renter's insurance
- Health, dental, and vision insurance

Memberships

- AAA (American Automobile Association)
- Gym memberships
- Streaming services (Netflix, Hulu, Pandora, SiriusXM, etc.)
- Amazon Prime
- Gaming services (X-Box Live, PlayStation, Nintendo, etc.)

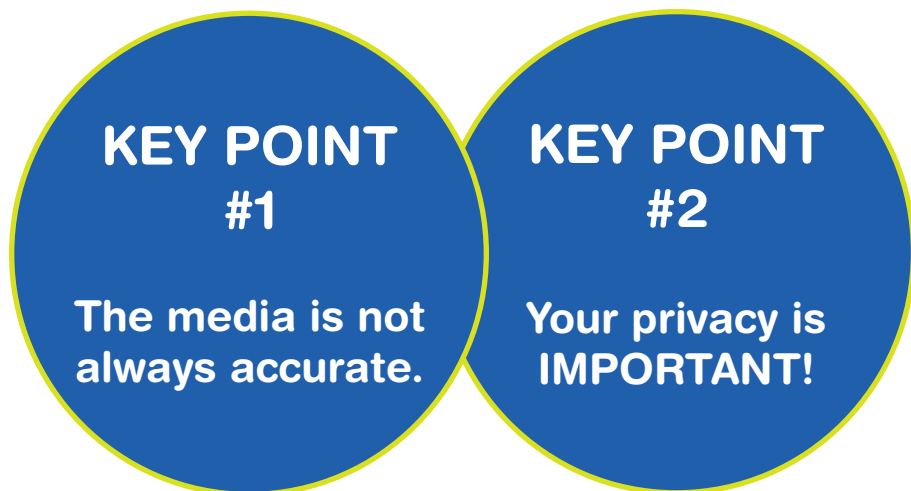
Other

- Cell-phone provider
- Housing (public housing waiting list updates, updating your landlord about leasing changes, etc.)
- Email accounts
- Social media accounts



Managing the Media

Sometimes a reporter may ask to speak with you or your family about the death of your loved one. This choice is yours to make. If you do choose to speak to the media, a Victim Assistance Program Advocate can help.



Your loved ones social media accounts

Facebook and Instagram allow users to delete or memorialize an account. Memorialized accounts are a place for friends and family to gather and share memories. Memorializing an account also helps keep it secure by preventing anyone from logging in.

Memorialized Facebook Account: Search 'how to memorialize a Facebook account' on Google and follow the link to Facebook's Help Center.

Memorialized Instagram Account: Search 'how to memorialize an Instagram account' on Google and follow the link to Instagram's Help Center.

Twitter allows users to deactivate an account: Search 'how to contact Twitter about a deceased family member's account' on Google and follow the link to Twitter's Help Center.

Moving Forward

Special days can be hard when you have lost a loved one. This section will help you navigate and prepare for how to handle birthdays, holidays, and anniversaries.

It's okay to be up front about what you need. Let your friends and family know if you need support or if you need space.

Traditions may change. You may feel differently about special days or family traditions without your loved one there. Consider some of these ideas to remember your loved ones while making new traditions:

- Cook a loved one's favorite food on holidays.
- Set aside time to share memories of your loved ones with your support people.
- Each year, on the first Monday of December, our agency hosts the Victim Assistance Program Angel Tree Ceremony for surviving family members of those who have died due to violence. This event is free to attend. **You can submit a picture of your loved one to be displayed during the event and throughout the month of December on the Wall of Remembrance to info@victimassistanceprogram.org - please include your loved one's name with the photo.** Invitations for the Angel Tree Ceremony will be sent out through email. Ask a victim advocate for more information.

To Go or Not to Go? How you spend your holidays is up to you. Don't stress yourself out with decisions about whether to go to a social gathering. Consider telling the host that holidays can be difficult for you, and that you might need to decide whether to attend on the day of the gathering.

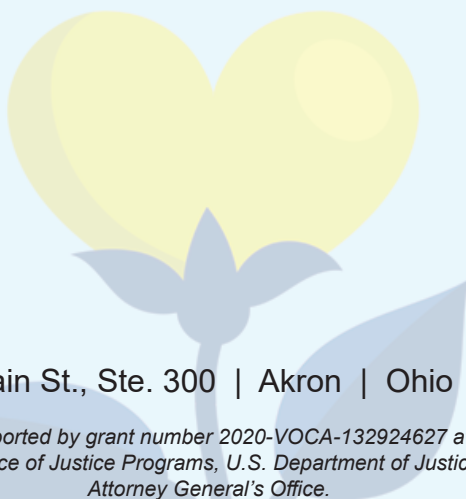


The path to healing may be one of the most difficult things you ever do. As you go on this journey, remember, it's okay to feel what you feel. You are not alone. Victim Assistance Program is here for you every step of the way with 24/7 support. Do what feels right to you; you are worthy of compassion and dignity, no matter what.

24-Hour Phone & Text Hotline
330.376.0040

24-Hour Website Chat
victimassistanceprogram.org

“Grief is not a disorder, a disease, or a sign of weakness. It is an emotional, physical, and spiritual necessity, the price you pay for love. The only cure for grief is to grieve.”
- Earl Grollman



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