

VICTIM SERVICES BRANCH

Established in 1992, Victim Services is a Branch of the Hamilton Police Service. It is the only 24-hour crisis intervention service for victims of crime and trauma serving the residents of the City of Hamilton.

We respond to the immediate needs of people who have been victimized by crime and/or trauma such as homicides, suicides, sudden death, assaults, sexual assaults, traffic and fire fatalities, robberies and harassment.

Victim Services Branch staff and specially trained volunteers provide practical assistance, emotional support and referrals for additional community resources.

If you need someone to talk to, please call our 24hr line at (905) 546-4904. We are here to assist you with emotional support, information and community resources.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:

VICTIM SERVICES BRANCH

PHONE:

905.546.4904
(24 hours)

Hamilton Police Service
Central Police Station
155 King William Street
Box 1060, LCD 1
Hamilton, Ontario L8N 4C1



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INFORMATION FOR

SURVIVORS *of* SUDDEN DEATH



VICTIM SERVICES BRANCH
Hamilton Police Service

www.hamiltonpolice.on.ca

WHEN THERE IS A SUDDEN DEATH

Police officers routinely attend residences where a death has been reported or to notify family members that a death has occurred. This pamphlet tries to address the most common questions asked of Police Officers and other professionals in an attempt to help survivors through a difficult time.

Of course, individual situations differ, but some of the most common suggestions to help survivors are:

- Gather your support system around you (family members, friends, your faith, others—anyone you can talk to, anyone you can count on and anything that gives you strength and encouragement).
- Notify the people closest to you about the death, and ask them to notify others.
- You may inquire with the police or the Victim Services Branch about both financial and emotional support/resources for you and your family to help you deal with the loss.
- Know that the police may call upon you to identify the deceased, answer questions or reclaim personal belongings.
- If the scene of death (your home, car, etc.,) needs cleaning, you have a choice not to do it yourself - blood and bodily fluids can be hazardous to your health. Once the investigation is finished, you can make arrangements with a local biohazard recovery service to clean affected areas. Check with your insurance company before making arrangements.
- Deal with legal matters (i.e. determine the number of copies you want of the death certificate, locate the will, begin filing insurance and other related claims).
- Above all, get some rest and take care of your own health.

MAKING FUNERAL ARRANGEMENTS

Funeral arrangements should be made soon. Choosing a funeral home or crematory service can be done by looking in the yellow pages or by recommendations of friends and family. Some families make their selection by closeness of the facility to the family's neighbourhood. Once a funeral home has been selected, you will need to call and ask for an appointment to be made within the next few days.

At the appointment, be prepared to discuss:

- *Suitable dates and times*
- *Clothing choices*
- *A designated charity for memorial donations*
- *Financial arrangements*
- *Burial/cremation, visitation, and viewing*
- *Types of services you would like (e.g. style of service, religious/non-religious, cultural related requests, etc.)*

A funeral home is responsible for:

- *Transporting the deceased*
- *Preparation and embalming*
- *Organizing and staffing the service*
- *Composing and releasing the obituary*
- *Filing the death certificate and transmitting copies to you*
- *Administrative and ceremonial arrangements*

All funeral homes and companies described as transfer services offer an inexpensive alternative known as direct disposition. This option includes the removal of the deceased from the place of death, the placement of the deceased in a container or casket, the delivery of the deceased to the cemetery or crematorium and the filing of necessary documentation.

While there is no law requiring you to use a funeral home or transfer service, there are legal documents that need to be completed to register a death or arrange for cremation, embalming, entombment or burial. Cemeteries and crematoriums both require a casket or container be used, and transporting a body can pose challenges. Ensure you are complying with the law.

Costs depend entirely on the services selected by you. Every funeral director and transfer service operator is required by law to have price lists available to the public at no charge and without obligation.

WHEN A CORONER IS INVOLVED

A Coroner is an appointed public official. In Ontario, as outlined in the Coroner's Act, cases that fall under the jurisdiction of the Coroner include:

- *Sudden or unexpected deaths*
- *All deaths involving children under the age of 5*
- *Deaths from violence*
- *Suicides, and*
- *Those occurring in any suspicious, unusual or unnatural manner*

A Coroner can order an autopsy (post mortem). Post-mortems in Hamilton are conducted at the Hamilton General Hospital. In addition to determining the cause of death, the purpose of the autopsy may be to identify the deceased or verify the time of death. Materials are collected for medical evidence (e.g. bullets, hair, fibres, semen, etc.) and for toxicology testing (e.g. blood, bodily fluids, etc.)

An autopsy will not generally affect the family's ability to view the body, however, be aware that an autopsy is a medical examination that can involve incisions and the examination of internal body organs and tissues. It may be emotionally difficult to see the after-effects.

Information pertaining to the death may be obtained from the Coroner. On written request, you can get a copy of the Coroner's Investigation Statement (it can take over 8 months to complete). There is a cost, and insurance companies can sometimes reimburse that cost depending on the situation. Once the Coroner completes the post-mortem, the body can be released to the funeral home or other service provider.

FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

If the cost of a funeral or burial is not affordable for you, speak to your provider (funeral home or transfer service) about potential death benefits available for the deceased. The most common benefits available are those provided by Canada Pension Plan (CPP), Veterans Affairs Canada and life insurance policies.

In emergency situations, the City of Hamilton can help pay for some of your funeral and burial expenses. To apply, call 905 546-2590.

THE ESTATE

Consulting a lawyer is a good first step.

If the deceased does not have a will, the Court will appoint the Office of the Public Guardian and Trustee as estate trustee, and all property will be distributed according to a formula fixed by law. Any person claiming a share of the estate will have to establish that they are entitled to inherit. Visit www.attorney-general.jus.gov.on.ca/english/family/pgt/ or call 1 800-891-0506 for detailed information. Also visit www.gov.on.ca for detailed information about what to do when someone dies as well as for important forms provided by the Government of Ontario.

GRIEVING

The death of a person close to you can be a very painful and difficult experience. You may have strong feelings at times, and sometimes they may seem overwhelming. You may experience shortness of breath, loss of appetite, feelings of vulnerability, guilt, lack of interest, forgetfulness and more. These are normal reactions. However, if they persist, seek professional help.

Be aware of how you and others around you are coping. Let others know that they are not alone, and remember that mourning for your loved one is a normal and important part of recovering. Give yourself time to heal and put off any major changes or decisions.

Pay particular attention to children - they need to grieve as much as adults. However, the grief may show itself in a different way. It is not unusual to see children acting out grief one minute, and then playing happily the next minute. Try not to limit their tears, feelings or even anger.

Above all, children need to feel safe, loved and cared for. Use simple, direct language to explain that a loved one has died. Some guidelines include:

- Answer the questions in a way that satisfies them and try not to give more information than required - give a brief explanation and answer in a language level that the child can easily understand
- Don't be afraid to use words like dead and death
- Never tell children anything they will have to unlearn later (e.g. "Grandma has gone away" or "Grandma is sleeping") the child should understand that death is permanent, and the loved one will not be coming back
- Let children know that it is okay to show their emotions, and
- Reassure the child that he or she is loved and will be cared for by others

COPING

It is important to remember that a sudden death falls outside of normal everyday life. You may need to implement some strategies to cope with an unusual experience. Helpful things to do may include:

- Talk to someone you trust
- Give yourself permission to reach out for professional help (e.g. family doctor, Employment Assistance Program [EAP]).
- Spend time with supportive family and friends
- Avoid over-using alcohol, drugs, caffeine, nicotine

- Acknowledge your response to the situation and give yourself permission to have difficult moments
- Try to stay positive and avoid self-defeating thoughts (e.g. "I can't manage....", "nothing matters....", etc.) and use thought-stopping (e.g. say: "stop" to yourself when you find yourself thinking negative thoughts)
- Resist making life changing decisions following a serious incident
- Give yourself time to mend
- Write out or journal your experiences, thoughts and feelings - this may be especially useful through sleepless nights
- Try to maintain your regular routine
- Try to eat properly and exercise
- Be aware that traumatic events can sometimes bring back memories of past sad or traumatic events.
- Practice deep breathing - inhale slowly to a count of 3, hold your breath to a count of 3, and exhale to a count of 3 and repeat until you are breathing more easily.
- Don't try to fight dreams or flashbacks. They are normal and will become less intense and painful over time. If they do not appear to be decreasing over time, you may need to seek assistance as there are exercises that may help manage these.

