



Advanced Home Care & Hospice for All Ages at All Times



Healing from the Loss of a Loved One

Newly Bereaved Survivors Guide

Healing from the Loss of a Loved One

We recognize that each person who loses a loved one responds and grieves in unique ways. There is no right or wrong way to grieve; your grief journey will be as individual as you are. Our highly qualified staff are available to offer support and companionship as you move through your grief.

This booklet is meant to reassure and guide you and help you recognize that the wide range of emotions you may be experiencing is a normal grief reaction. The information in this guide is also designed to bring comfort, compassion, and a small measure of calm to an unwanted and often-times chaotic situation.

We want you to know that you are not alone.

There is no right or wrong way to grieve

Do you find yourself having a hard time thinking clearly or making sense of anything? Is it difficult knowing how to respond to people and situations? It might feel like you are in a dream state, and you just want to wake up to how your life was before the death of your loved one.

The feelings associated with grief are complicated and confusing. We created this booklet to help walk you through some of the reactions and emotions that you might experience. However, we want to share that there is no “right” or “wrong” way to grieve. Despite many popular beliefs, there is not a set “order” to grief. You may or may not experience anything outlined in this booklet. Your grief experience will be as unique as you are; it is your own. It may take a different path from the grief that your friends or family experience, and that is ok.



The Grief Counselors at Capital Caring Health are here for you and your family.



How You Might Feel...

SHOCK is sometimes one of the first things that individuals experience. You may feel numb, and like you are in a “fog.” You might not cry and you might be surprised that you have no emotional reaction to the news that your loved one has died. The news of the death is literally a “shock” to your system. Our bodies are very protective and often when we are so overwhelmed and stunned by news our systems will retreat for a period of time. Then gradually, the information learned will start to sink in.

DENIAL is not at all uncommon. Once the devastating news is absorbed, we may react with, “It can’t be true! It has NOT happened. No, no, no!” Then over time this gives way to the realization that indeed the news is true. The emotions may then become evident through tears, crying, wailing, shaking, and a vocal expression of pain.



ANGER may emerge and surprise you. The reasons to feel angry about the death of your loved one can be complicated and confusing. Sometimes, you might lash out with hostility towards the medical professionals involved in their loved one's care, or family members or friends who are not providing the kind of support that you seek. Regardless of who the target is, it is important to recognize that feelings of anger after losing your loved one can be a normal part of your grief experience.



GUILT is almost always present after the death of a loved one. It is normal to second guess conversations and decisions that were made related to your loved one. Or perhaps your relationship was not strong and you feel responsible. Quite often, guilt centers around what could have or should have been done differently.

DEPRESSION is also a very normal response to losing a loved one. The death may leave you feeling sad, alone, and full of despair. It might be difficult to imagine how you will be able to live your life without the one who died. Feeling extreme sadness about the loss is common.



WITHDRAWAL occurs as you adapt to your new life and learn new roles. Daily routines have changed, and it takes time to learn new ways of relating to others, for the death impacts many familial and social relationships. Sometimes individuals will need to retreat from those relationships for a period of time as they learn how to redefine their world.

RESOLUTION and **READJUSTMENT** will ultimately occur. Eventually you will once again find value in life and establish new routines, a new identity, and perhaps a new purpose and direction for your life. The memory of the

deceased will forever remain etched deeply within you. And throughout your life's journey you will experience moments where you grieve for your loved one. But, at this time it will be done through the lens of acceptance and with hope for the future.

PHYSICAL, MENTAL, EMOTIONAL and SPIRITUAL RESPONSES may come in waves. Some will be brief, while others will last longer and catch you off guard. You may find yourself questioning your ability to be around others due to the unexpected emotions that may surface seemingly “out of the blue.” It is completely normal to experience some or all of the following reactions:

Physically

- Tightness or lump in your throat
- Fatigue, exhaustion, or weakness
- Lack of energy to complete your normal activities
- Difficulty sleeping; waking in the night frequently; fear of sleeping; wanting to sleep all the time
- Increase or decrease in appetite
- Rapid heart-beat; chest feeling heavy
- Stomach pain or upset
- Nausea, dizziness
- Feeling numb
- Feeling like you need to “get some air.”

Mentally

- Memories of past losses or traumatic experiences may surface
- Difficulty with focusing or hearing what others are saying
- Dreams of your loved one
- Forgetfulness
- Difficulty solving problems or making decisions
- Feelings of panic
- Worrying about “going crazy”
- Sensing your loved ones presence

Emotionally

- Shock/disbelief
- Relief
- Trouble believing your loved one is gone. Might “look” for them
- Fear and anxiety and not wanting to be alone
- Anger/irritability
- Feeling guilty: “It was my fault”
- Feeling sad and crying a lot
- Not being able to talk about your loved one
- A need to share stories about your loved one
- Withdrawal
- Just “going through the motions” related to normal activities

Spiritually

- Feeling connected or disconnected to God
- Feeling abandoned or punished by God
- Feeling angry with God
- Finding hope and comfort in prayer/spiritual rituals
- Questioning your religious/spiritual beliefs
- Finding purpose in life
- Questioning a reason to go on living
- Feeling spiritually connected to the person who died
- Feeling like you don't belong
- Feeling lost and empty
- Needing to receive forgiveness





Suggestions for Healing

As with any painful experience in life, we must allow ourselves the time and space to heal. It also means that we need to recognize that some days are going to be worse than others. However, as we journey through our grief, we will soon notice that we start to have more “good” days than “bad” days. We also need to accept that there is no predictable or logical progression to these feelings. However, there are some things you can do to help yourself.

- Allow yourself to cry
- Be kind to yourself– don’t rush to “get over the loss”
- Give yourself permission to say, “No” when you need to
- Find healthy ways to express your feelings: exercise, talk with supportive people, write a letter to the deceased
- Avoid making any major decisions, if possible

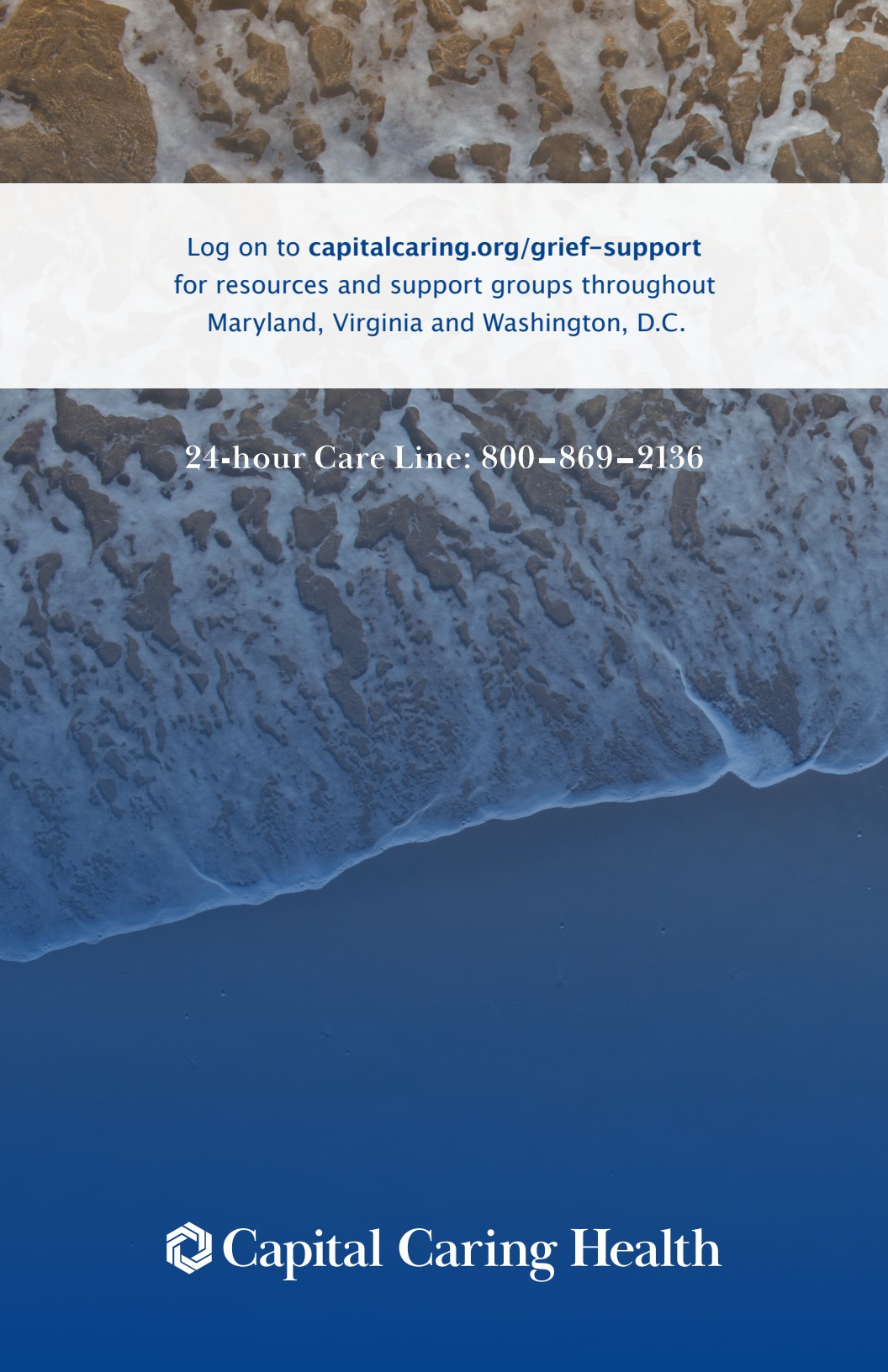
- Know that well-meaning people will say awkward and sometimes unhelpful things. Forgive them, for they do care!
- Use a journal to express those thoughts and feelings that you feel uncomfortable sharing with others
- Take care of yourself– get plenty of rest, stay hydrated, and eat healthy foods
- Avoid the desire to “numb” your pain with alcohol or other substances, as it is critical to fully experience your feelings
- Remember, it is ok to laugh and enjoy all that life offers

Our counseling service is FREE to all who live in DC, MD, and VA and there is no time limit.
For as long as a family needs it, we are there for them.

Contact a Capital Caring Health Grief Counselor
for individual time together to process your feelings
and assist you in coping with your loss.

Capital Caring Health Grief Support Groups
and one-on-one counseling for adults and children
are held throughout Virginia, Maryland
and Washington, D.C.

Learn more at **capitalcaring.org/grief-support**



Log on to **capitalcaring.org/grief-support**
for resources and support groups throughout
Maryland, Virginia and Washington, D.C.

24-hour Care Line: 800-869-2136

 **Capital Caring Health**