



After a death

Guidance for family and friends



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After a death

Losing a loved one is a traumatic experience. This booklet is for those who have lost someone close to them and need to address various practical issues that arise.

We hope to help people who have suffered bereavement by setting out the first steps to be taken after a death, and the importance of help and support during the grieving process.

Support from family and friends

The support of family and friends is vitally important for the bereaved immediately following a death. Their presence, listening, care and nurturing will give the bereaved some space to safeguard their own well-being and health.

First steps

- › Ask a family member or close friend to visit you to provide assistance and support.
- › Select a funeral provider.
- › It is helpful to have assistance in notifying family and friends of the death.
- › Notify school administrators and/or employers of the death.

Before the funeral

- › Ask a family member or friend to help you plan the funeral.
- › Report the death to the District Commissioner (Sýslumaður), see section on death certificates and death notification.
- › Check whether the deceased's trade union offers a funeral grant.
- › If the cost of the funeral is unmanageable, seek advice from the social services of the relevant municipality.

Further practical information regarding funerals can be found on sorgarmidstod.is/en/ and island.is/en.

Funeral provider

Family members select a funeral provider, which will transfer the deceased from the mortuary to the funeral home. Funeral directors are found all over the country, and their services are open to all, regardless of beliefs.

Funeral directors and their staff provide guidance and can handle all aspects of the funeral in consultation with the relatives. Funeral providers can be contacted at any time of the day or night. For a list of licensed funeral services, go to: island.is/listi-yfir-gild-utfararthjonustuleyfi.

Death certificate and death notification

When a doctor has issued a death certificate, the district commissioner (Sýslumaður) automatically receives an electronic copy. The certificate specifies the next of kin of the deceased. The electronic death certificate is **not** the same as a notification of death to the district commissioner. Please note that a funeral cannot take place until the district commissioner has confirmed the death certificate.

Next of kin must notify the district commissioner of the death. There are two options for this:

1. Report the death electronically.

- a) Go to island.is/andlatstilkynning/en/notification-of-death.
- b) The specified next of kin will receive a message in their mailbox on island.is where a link to the electronic death notification can be found.

2. Notify the death in person at the district commissioner's office.

Once the district commissioner has received notification of death, the next of kin will be sent a **certificate of notification of death**, to their mailbox on island.is, which should then be passed on to the priest or other officiant handling the funeral ceremony.



Death not in an institutional setting

If a death occurs in a place other than a hospital or other institutional setting, the police and a doctor will always attend the scene, and in some cases paramedics. If desired, a priest or other spiritual advisor may also attend. Death is pronounced by a doctor.

The police, in collaboration with the chosen funeral director, transport the deceased to the mortuary.

Post-mortem/autopsy

In cases of unexplained death, and in certain other circumstances, a post-mortem examination (autopsy) is required by law. Autopsies are carried out at the request of the police, who must first obtain authorisation, either by consent of the next of kin or by court order. The police are also responsible for notifying relatives when the autopsy findings are available. Relatives will have the opportunity to review the autopsy report with the police if they wish, but the report remains in police custody and no copies are provided.

It may take some weeks, or even months, for an autopsy report to be issued, and the wait can be challenging for friends and relatives. In some cases, the outcome is not decisive, leaving many questions unanswered. This uncertainty can be difficult for those involved, but whatever the findings of the autopsy, it is an essential element for moving forward.

Rights and financial matters

The Social Insurance Administration (*Tryggingastofnun*) provides information on general rights in the event of a death, see more at island.is/en/o/social-insurance-administration/estates-and-death-benefits.

The bereaved should seek information on their entitlement to bereavement leave or bereavement grant. The Directorate of Labour (*Vinnumálastofnun*) website provides information on arrangements, time frame and applications: island.is/en/o/directorate-of-labour/forms-and-applications.

Most trade unions pay grants to the spouse and/or children upon a member's death. Most of them also allow applications for a funeral grant.

Pension funds pay spousal pensions and children's pensions for children of deceased fund members.

Some insurance companies will cover costs of trauma counselling under their standard insurance packages. It is important to contact your insurance company as soon as possible for information about time frames and arrangements.

Children's rights after the death of a parent

Under the law (Act no. 50, 18 June 2019), the doctor who issues the death certificate must notify the parent's death to the healthcare centre that provides care to the child. A healthcare worker must offer the child and their caregiver(s) a meeting as soon as possible. During this session, they will discuss available support from the Social Affairs Committee of the municipality where the child legally resides, and collaboration with the child's preschool, primary or secondary school.

Grief

Grief is a natural response to loss and trauma. Individual response to bereavement varies from person to person. The circumstances of death can also vary considerably one person may die after a long and painful illness, while another death may occur without any warning. Family and friends are often left with countless unanswered questions.

It may prove difficult to discuss the cause of death, which in some instances may be unclear. It is considered helpful to discuss the death frankly, whatever the cause, for instance in cases of suicide, accident, or drug-related death.

The experience of grief varies greatly from person to person, and there is no one “right” way to deal with grief. Many people describe it as an emotional and physical roller-coaster, during which a range of symptoms may be experienced: see the heart diagram on the following page. The list is not exhaustive, nor does it portray a linear experience of grief. For that reason, the image of the roller-coaster can be helpful in discussing grief.

The bereaved may have difficulty with sleep and nutrition. If these problems persist, it is important to seek medical advice as symptoms may also arise from unrelated medical issues.

Children and grief

When children suffer a bereavement, it is always best to tell them the truth, in terms appropriate to their age and development. It is important that a person who has the child's trust should speak to them, in secure surroundings. Try not to conceal the facts of the death and speak in clear terms. Do not hesitate to seek advice about discussing the death with children.

Further information on the *Sorgarmiðstöðin* website:
sorgarmidstod.is/en/children-in-grief/.



Numbness Anxiety
Denial • **Fatigue** • Feeling of unreality
Helplessness • Emptiness • Anger • **Accusation**
Incapacity • **Loneliness** • Irritability • **Short temper**
Guilt • Stress • Forgetfulness • Rejection • **Sadness**
Hopelessness • **Yearning** • Rejection • *Lack of concentration*
Lack of stamina • Irregular heartbeat • *Chest pain*
Difficulty breathing • **Chest tightness** • Indigestion
Loss of appetite • Headache • Crying spells
Dry mouth • Muscle tension • Difficulty
sleeping • **Restlessness** • **Uneasiness**
• Lack of concentration
• Lack of energy •
Sensitivity to
stimuli

Professional support

Support from a professional such as a priest or other spiritual advisor, a psychiatric nurse, psychiatrist, psychologist, social worker or family therapist, can be helpful during the grieving process. You can contact your spiritual advisor and your local healthcare centre or social services to seek assistance.

If you need urgent help, call:

- › **Emergency line 112**
- › **Health Care Information Centre 1700**
- › **Red Cross helpline 1717**
- › **Emergency department, Landspítali Hospital 543 1000**
- › **Emergency department of the psychiatric ward, Akureyri Hospital 463 0802**

Support from NGOs

The *Sorgarmiðstöðin* grief centre offers support to mourners of all ages and provides information and services of various kinds, regardless of the circumstances of death. See overview of the Grief Centre's services at sorgarmidstod.is/en/.

Various other organisations offer beneficial peer support for the bereaved. A list of NGOs that offer support after the loss of a loved one can be found on sorgarmidstod.is/en/.

Points to remember

- ☐ Ask family member or friends for help.
- ☐ Notify school administrators and/or employers of the death.
- ☐ Inform the District Commissioner (*Sýslumaður*) of the death.
- ☐ Find out whether the deceased person had any special preferences for their funeral ceremony.
- ☐ Ask for assistance in planning the funeral.
- ☐ Select a funeral provider.
- ☐ If possible, apply for a grant for funeral expenses from trade union.
- ☐ Seek an interview with the municipality's social services if the cost of the funeral is unmanageable.
- ☐ Safeguard children's rights, seek support from a healthcare centre.
- ☐ Seek help to assist children in processing grief.
- ☐ Verify eligibility for bereavement leave and bereavement grants at the Directorate of Labour (*Vinnumálastofnun*).

Grief demands more energy and time than one might expect. It is important to prioritise self-care by ensuring adequate sleep and proper nutrition, and to seek professional help if necessary.

Notes

[illegible]



SORGAR
MIDSTÖÐ



Embætti landlæknis