



INFORMATION FOR COPING WITH A SUDDEN DEATH

HAMILTON POLICE SERVICE
VICTIM SERVICES BRANCH
www.hamiltonpolice.on.ca

VICTIM SERVICES BRANCH

Established in 1994, 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 impacted by crime and/or tragic circumstances such as homicides, suicides, sudden death, assaults, sexual assaults, motor vehicle 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 24 hour line at (905)546-4904. We are here to assist you with emotional support, information and community resources.

Additional resources are available from the Bereavement Authority of Ontario (BAO). Visit www.thebao.ca to learn more.



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 loved ones 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.
- ▶ In circumstances of suicide, or suspected suicide financial support for clean up services may be available. Please call the Victim Services Branch at (905)546-4904.
- ▶ 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 as soon as possible. Choosing a funeral home or crematory service can be done by looking online, 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

Additional points to consider:

- ▶ You can ask for a price list and written estimate to compare providers
- ▶ You can ask for and review the cemetery's by-laws

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
- ▶ Deaths occurring in any suspicious, unusual or unnatural manner

A Coroner can order an autopsy (post mortem). Post-mortems are now conducted at the Forensic Services and Coroners Complex in Toronto. Their main line is (416)314-4000. The Centre for Forensic Science also has a Hamilton Regional Supervising Coroners Office. In addition to determining the cause of death, the purpose of the autopsy may be to identify the deceased.

To request a copy of the Coroner's Report (it can take over 8 months to complete) please call the Regional Coroner's office at (905)546-8200 or email occ.hamilton@ontario.ca.



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 Special Supports Program may help pay for some of your funeral and burial expenses. To apply, call 905 546-2590. Let the funeral home provider know that you will be applying to this program.



THE ESTATE

Consulting a lawyer is a good first step. If the deceased does not have a will, the Office of the Public Guardian and Trustee may be able to assist with your inquiries. Please call 1-800-366-0335 (press option #6 for Estates).

You can also visit their website at: www.attorneygeneral.jus.gov.on.ca/english/family/pgt/



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

**For more detailed information on supporting children through grief, please see our pamphlet "Helping Children With Grief".*



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 (see resources).
- ▶ 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 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

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- ▶ Try to maintain your regular routine
 - ▶ Try to eat regularly and integrate exercise where possible.
 - ▶ 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.



RESOURCES LIST

Bereaved Families of Ontario – South Central Region

905-318-0070

<https://www.bfoscr.com/>

BFO-SCR provides free bereavement support for children, youth, adults and caregivers in both group and 1:1 settings.

Kemp Care Network – Grief Supports for Children, Families, & Adults

905-387-2448 ext. 2206 (Adults)

905-387-2448 ext. 2230 (Children & Families)

Grief Text Line: 289-278-1885

**Not 24/7

kempcarenetwork.org

Kemp Care Network offers free bereavement support for adults, as well as children and families. Support is available in both group and 1:1 settings.

Camp Keaton, Kemp Care Network

905-387-2448 ext. 2208

kempcarenetwork.org

Camp Keaton is a bereavement camp for children and teenagers ages 7-17 grieving a significant death. Camp Keaton provides a traditional, fun, and high-energy camp experience, combined with grief education and emotional support. The camp is staffed by bereavement counselors and community volunteers professionally trained by child bereavement experts.

Bereavement Ontario Network

www.bereavementontarionetwork.ca

Bereavement Ontario Network is a diverse group of organizations and individuals throughout the province that work in the field of grief, bereavement, and mourning as professionals and volunteers. There is a public directory of members throughout the province available online.

Victim Services Branch – Hamilton Police Service

905-546-4904 (24/7)

Victim Services Branch provides 24/7 assistance to victims of crime and/or tragic circumstance. Staff and specially trained volunteers provide emotional support, practical assistance and community resources.

Other assistance may be found through:

- ▶ Your Employment Assistance Program (EAP) should you have employment that includes this benefit.
- ▶ Some Funeral Homes offer grief/bereavement information, support groups, and counselling.
- ▶ Your Family Physician may have Social Workers as part of their staff who may provide support (e.g. Family Health Teams).

Special Supports:

City of Hamilton

905-546-2590

To explore financial support following a loss

Terms that may come up when discussing next steps

Casket: A container intended to hold a dead human body for funeral, cremation or interment purposes that is not a vault, burial container or grave liner.

Cremation: A process that uses incineration to reduce a body to a granular substance.

Family-led Death Care: A family member may provide funeral services, including transport, documentation including death registration, and body care, without a license and for no charge.

Grave: A place for burial of human remains, typically a hole dug in the ground and marked by a stone or mound.

Lot: An area of land in a cemetery containing, or set aside to contain, interred human remains and includes a tomb, crypt or compartment in a mausoleum and a niche or compartment in a columbarium and any other similar facility or receptacle.

Plot: Two or more lots sold as a unit.

Transfer Service: A service to the public with respect to the disposition of dead human bodies, including the transportation of dead human bodies and the filling out of necessary documentation with respect to the disposition of dead human bodies.

Urn: A container for the reduced and processed human remains resulting from cremation or alkaline hydrolysis.

Vault: A secondary container that is protective, rigid, and sometimes waterproof, and usually made of concrete, fiberglass, plastic or similar reinforced material, within which the primary casket, coffin, or urn containing human remains is placed prior to burial in the ground.

Frequently Asked Questions

Who has the legal authority to make decisions?

Generally, the person(s) appointed as the estate trustee(s) has the legal authority to make such decisions. Ontario has statutes and common law to determine who may act as the legal representative(s) when a person passes away without a valid will. The ultimate decision maker will be specific to the circumstances of each case, but will generally default to a court-appointed Estate Administrator or the deceased's next of kin.

Here is a partial list of who may act as the legal representative:

- 1) Estate Trustee, also called an executor or executrix, who is named in the will (or an administrator appointed by the court).
- 2) Spouse
- 3) Adult Children (18 and over)

Is there financial support available?

The City of Hamilton Special Supports Program may be able to assist with funeral or burial expenses. To explore eligibility, please call 905-546-2590.

What are some funeral or memorial service options?

A celebration of someone's life helps surviving family and friends grieve the loss of a loved one. You can choose a funeral, memorial, or graveside service. A service may be private (by invitation only), or public (open to anyone). Other options are to have a public or private visitation/viewing, a funeral procession, a home funeral and/or home vigil, or any other respectful social, traditional or cultural ritual.

What burial options do I have?

In Ontario, the body must be buried in a licensed cemetery. Cremated remains must be buried in a licensed cemetery, scattered or kept at home.

Transporting the Deceased

A person must be first declared dead by a doctor, nurse practitioner or coroner. You may then contact a transfer service, funeral home, or family member to transport the body from the place of death.

How do I transport out of province?

A deceased person's body may be moved outside of Ontario once a provider has obtained a certificate from a Coroner.

If a deceased person is being transported to another country, then embalming and a sealed casket or container may be required by the receiving country or the transportation company.

If you are choosing to transport human remains (including cremated remains) out of Ontario, you must follow the laws that apply in the receiving province or country.

There are many questions that can come up when navigating next steps following the death of your family member and loved one. More information can be found at: www.thebao.ca or by speaking with Victim Services at 905-546-4904.

CONTACT INFORMATION

Hamilton Police Service incident number:
Coroners name:
Coroners phone number:
CID Detective name:
CID Detective phone number:



FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:

VICTIM SERVICES BRANCH
905.546.4904 (24/7/365)

Hamilton Police Service
Central Police Station
155 King William Street
Hamilton, Ontario L8R 1A7



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