

OVERSEAS BEREAVEMENT DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The loss of a loved one is always a difficult time. When it happens during a pandemic that has severely impacted international travel and the ability for people to come together and grieve as they would under normal circumstances, it can cause even more distress.

While there are no easy answers to this situation, it can be helpful to know more about what to expect after an overseas bereavement, options to consider when you can't be physically present, and where you can find support.

WHAT YOU MIGHT BE FEELING

Grief affects us in a variety of ways – not just emotionally. It is a completely normal, natural reaction to loss.

Give yourself permission to grieve and adjust to what has happened. Be patient with yourself and prioritise your own wellbeing.

Below are just some of the ways you might find you react at this time.

- **Physical** – Tearful, tight-chested, sensitive, weak, tense muscles
- **Mental** – Difficulty concentrating, forgetful, slow reactions
- **Emotional** – Disbelieving, numb, guilty, regretful, negative thoughts
- **Spiritual** – Questioning why?, changed priorities, looking for meaning
- **Behavioural** – Irritable, avoiding emotions, using more alcohol or drugs

In the COVID-19 environment, with its limitations around travel and gatherings, it is also completely understandable if you find yourself with feelings such as:

- helpless or powerless at being so far away;
- vulnerable, despairing, or isolated;
- desperately wanting more information.

PRACTICAL MATTERS

If you want advice or information about a person who has died overseas, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade can help you with:

- official processes required in the country the person died in;
- available local burial or cremation options;
- contact details for funeral directors; and
- how to bring back the person's body or ashes to New Zealand.



Urgent travel (if possible)

You can check if you are able to fly to the country where the person has died on the government's Safe Travel website.

An urgent passport can be obtained, if required.

Connect with friends and whānau however you can

While you may not be able to physically be together due to travel restrictions and Alert Level rules, you can still support and help each other using phones and digital communication. Don't lose touch with the people who care about you.

Looking after yourself and others

- It is important to keep up routines.
- Eat healthy food, make sure you are drinking enough water and do some simple exercise.
- If you find keeping busy is helpful, find useful tasks to do.
- Talking about your grief or loss may be helpful but remember to go at your own pace.
- Draw on any cultural or spiritual beliefs you may have.

Avoid

- Using alcohol or drugs to escape the grief
- Making big decisions when you aren't thinking clearly
- Setting unrealistic expectations of bouncing back quickly – there will be good days and bad days for some time after your loss

If you are feeling overwhelmed, always seek help.

HAVE YOU CONSIDERED

- If you can't attend the funeral service, there are many other options available to commemorate your loved one.
- Many funeral homes and churches now offer a live stream video service for those who can't be present
- It is often possible to record a video message to be played at the funeral, or write a message or poem that can be read out by someone at the service
- Think of your own rituals that may be meaningful for the memorial of the passing of your loved one
- You can plant a flower or a tree in their memory, light a candle, or put together a scrapbook of your happy times together .

SUPPORT SERVICES AND RESOURCES

Victim Support

www.victimsupport.org.nz

Grief Centre

www.griefcentre.org.nz

Samaritans

www.samaritans.org.nz

Lifeline

www.lifeline.org.nz

1737 – Support from Trained Counsellors

Call or text 1737 any time

Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade

www.mfat.govt.nz

Safe Travel Information

www.safetravel.govt.nz

COVID-19 Alert Levels

www.covid19.govt.nz

Funeral Directors Association of NZ

www.fdanz.co.nz

Urgent Passports

www.passports.govt.nz

COVID-19
we are united

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