

# WHEN A DEATH OCCURS 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 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 how grief can affect us, options to consider when you or others can't be physically present at a funeral, 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.

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 that you or others may be feeling:

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

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

## PRACTICAL MATTERS

### Funerals and Tangihanga

All gatherings and events – including funerals and tangihanga – are subject to the rules of the COVID-19 Alert Level your area is under.

At Level 2 and higher, numbers of people who may be present are limited.

See the government's COVID-19 website for more information.

### Urgent Travel and Quarantine

If you have friends or family wishing to urgently travel back home, you can check with Immigration New Zealand if they are able to return.

New Zealand citizens and permanent residents, as well as their partners and children, are generally able to travel here without requesting permission.

Currently, there are strict conditions around pre-departure testing and quarantining.

Returning New Zealanders can apply for an urgent passport, if required.

## FINDING WAYS TO COPE

### 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 or someone else 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](http://www.victimsupport.org.nz)

### Grief Centre

[www.griefcentre.org.nz](http://www.griefcentre.org.nz)

### Samaritans

[www.samaritans.org.nz](http://www.samaritans.org.nz)

### Lifeline

[www.lifeline.org.nz](http://www.lifeline.org.nz)

### 1737 – Support from Trained Counsellors

Call or text 1737 any time

### COVID-19 Alert Levels

[www.covid19.govt.nz](http://www.covid19.govt.nz)

### Funeral Directors Association of NZ

[www.fdanz.co.nz](http://www.fdanz.co.nz)

### Immigration New Zealand

[www.immigration.govt.nz](http://www.immigration.govt.nz)

### Urgent Passports

[www.passports.govt.nz](http://www.passports.govt.nz)

**COVID-19**  
*we are united*

 **NEW ZEALAND  
RED CROSS**  
RIPEKA WHERO AOTEAROA