

COVID-19: When no funeral, tangi or farewell gatherings can be held



In this unprecedented national situation, not being able to have a funeral, tangi or farewell gathering for a loved one or friend is extremely distressing and painful. It seems all wrong. However, until such time as restrictions are lifted and gatherings are possible again, it's unfortunately part of the new normal in New Zealand. This lockdown time will eventually pass, but in the meantime your Funeral Director can let you know about the options available for the care of your loved one right now. They can also discuss with you options for gatherings to honour the person's life at a later date.

Although a lot is out of your control right now, there are still some things you could choose to do to honour and farewell your loved one or friend while you are in isolation. Some of the following ideas might be helpful at this time. Remember, everyone is different, and we are all isolated in different circumstances right now. Just adapt the ideas as you need to.

- **You may like to contact your cultural elder or leader, minister, priest, pastor, rabbi, muslim cleric or other religious leader to talk to about your loss.** They may have some ideas or advice to share about this stressful time and be able to give you support.
- **Spend time remembering and talking about your loved one or friend with others by phone or other technology, such as Skype or Facetime.** You could also call, email or message others who knew them to let them know of their death. Invite them to tell you about their memories of the person.

- **Family members could ask their funeral director to set up an online, digital guest book that other people can 'sign'.** This means family, whānau and friends can send messages of support or share memories and kind comments about the person who has died.
- **Your family can put a notice of the person's death in a newspaper to honour the life of your loved one.** Perhaps make it longer by saying some of the things you loved about them and asking people to take the time to remember them at a certain time e.g. *Please take the time to remember (name) and the wonderful person she/he was on Friday at 3.00pm and pray a prayer of thanksgiving /light a candle/raise a glass / have a cup of tea in her/his honour.*
- **Friends can also place a thoughtful tribute in the paper to honour someone's life.**
- **You could write a eulogy that celebrates the person's life – either yourself, or with others contributing.** When it is written, you could send it around to family, whānau and friends, or post it through social media, perhaps with a photo. Or, at a later date, you may want to have it read at a memorial gathering.
- **Light a candle in your home, in remembrance of the person.** All supermarkets stock candles and some have nice ones. You could place their photo nearby.
- **Have a special memorial time with those you are 'sharing a bubble with'.** Work out together what feels right to do. Perhaps use some music, share memories, light a candle, have a photo of the person nearby or anything that helps you to remember and honour them. Someone may like to read something or say a prayer. Focus on that person's life and it's meaning to you all.

- **Consider using technology to ‘get together’ to do something similar with a wider group of people online.** Make an agreed time to share a memorial time from wherever you all are in isolation. You could use Zoom, Skype, WhatsApp or Facetime. For those without this option, you could use a conference phone call. If someone only has a phone, they can still call in and have the person answering their call hold a phone up so they can hear the shared conversations happening on a screen. Think about what’s possible - you could share stories, a reading, someone could share a eulogy, music could be played, or songs sung, and grief honestly expressed. Prayers could be said. Cultural elements could be included. Someone could be asked to lead it, or everyone can do something. If you wish, you could talk to your funeral director to see if there might be an experienced funeral celebrant who could lead this special online time for you, after consulting about what’s wanted.
- **Consider starting a closed (private) Facebook group for those grieving the same loss.** It can be a place where information about your situation can be communicated. Members can share stories and photos and can offer each other support. Or, perhaps an email group or Messenger group could be helpful if you’d prefer not to use Facebook.
- **Make a photo board or wall featuring the person.** Use photos you have in the house or ask others to send more to you digitally. If you hold a gathering later on, you could use it then as well. Or do a digital photo board on a social media platform where you post up the photos you gather together for others to see.
- **Choose a star that you can recognise to remember the person each time you see it.** Or see this website, which offers an opportunity to name a star after the person — www.star-registration.com/nz/how-to-buy-a-star
- **Bring together a few things that remind you of your loved one or friend.** Think of things that symbolise something about them and place them somewhere special in your home.
- **Make and share a meal your loved one or friend always enjoyed.** Perhaps share the recipe with others elsewhere and you can then *all* make that meal one evening, in their memory.
- **Prepare an area of your garden at home where you can eventually plant bulbs, plants or a tree** in their memory, once lockdown is over.
- **Play music that reminds you of the person,** or watch a movie or show you know they loved.
- **Hold an item that was meaningful for them or keep it in your pocket or nearby.** Wear something the person used to wear.
- **Make, create or find something to honour the person and remind you of them.** Such as, a piece of art or craft, a cultural item, a song, a piece of music or a playlist, a digital slideshow or short movie, a sculpture, a dance, a prayer, a written story or a poem. Later it could be shared at with others.
- **Keep a memorial gratitude journal.** Each day note down any positive memories of the person’s life or personality that you are grateful for.
- **Begin to plan for a memorial service or other kind of farewell gathering at a later time, when all this is over, to celebrate their life in the way you think feels right.** It could be held on a significant date, such as their birthday, or in a particular place that was important to them.
- **Consider donating to a charity in their name.**

Care for yourself as you grieve

Grief can be very full on, even in normal circumstances. It's a healthy and normal process after loss. It helps us to work through what's happened, gradually adjust to it, slowly get back into balance and be able to slowly move forward. Go with it. Your reactions may be strong and up and down for a while. That's okay. If you need to cry, cry. If you can't, that's okay too. Everyone's different. It may be that the Covid-19 crisis is so dominating that you feel like you can't really process your loss right now. If so, just let grief take the time it will need to take when it does come.

- **Ask your funeral director for a copy of the booklet “*The First Days and Weeks of Grief*”** to help you process some of your thoughts and feelings during this time.
- **Reach out to family, whānau and friends for support.** Find ways to message each other and check in regularly. Physical distancing doesn't need to mean becoming socially isolated.
- **If your loved one's or friend's death was particularly traumatic, such as by suicide or homicide, you can call Victim Support on 0800 842 846 for support.** See also www.afterasuicide.nz for suicide bereavement information. Your Funeral Director can also advise you of any other local organisations that you might contact.
- **Take regular walks and spend time outside each day.** Eat healthy food, drink water each day, and try to get some good rest and sleep. Don't push yourself too hard. Grief can be exhausting. Take plenty of slow, deep belly breaths through each day, for a few minutes at a time. Don't rush it. Sit or lie down comfortably as you breathe. Slow, deep breathing is an age old stress strategy that is very powerful, but simple.

- **If you realise you need to see your GP, call your medical practice and arrange a phone appointment with the doctor.** For example, if you are finding sleep very difficult or if your anxiety is at a very high level.
- **Consider keeping a grief notebook or journal.** Each day, or every now and then, write about what you're thinking, feeling and experiencing as you grieve. Or keep a grief art journal. These can help you express your grief, which can often bring some relief.
- **For those of any faith, many churches and faith centres are live-streaming weekly services, times of regular prayer and meditation sessions.** Regular groups are also meeting online in many cases. Call your local centre, or see their website, if linking in could be helpful.

If you are feeling overwhelmed by your grief

Grief is never easy and the pain of not being able to farewell a person the way you (or they) would want makes things much harder. Grief's intensity will ease up gradually, but when it's overwhelming it can help a lot to talk to someone.

- **If you could do with a friendly voice, call a trusted friend or family member, or phone the free helpline 1737 any time,** day or night, for some compassionate support. Or use any of the helplines available in your community. There are some for children and youth also. See a listing at www.mentalhealth.org.nz/get-help/in-crisis/helplines/
- **Contact The Grief Centre** about phone support services, during weekday hours, on **09 4181457** or **0800 331 333.** www.griefcentre.org.nz

Some useful links for coping with grief and loss

If you are also supporting grieving children or teens at this time:

- www.dougy.org/docs/Grief_during_COVID-19.pdf
 - www.fdanz.co.nz/grieving/supporting-grieving-children-and-teenagers/
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Websites:

- www.mentalhealth.org.nz/get-help/a-z/resource/41/grief-and-loss - NZ - helpful info
 - www.griefcentre.org.nz – NZ - or call them 09 4181457 or 0800 331 333, during weekday hours, for support, resources and counselling
 - https://www.leva.co.nz/uploads/files/resources/LeVa%20GriefFactsheet_v2.pdf Le Va (NZ) When You're Grieving
 - <https://whatsyourgrief.com> - USA - offers a wide range of info, resources, links, and coping ideas
 - www.helpguide.org/articles/grief/coping-with-grief-and-loss.htm - USA - Coping with Grief and Loss tips
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Podcasts:

- Death: A podcast about love, grief & hope, developed by NZ's Newshub, is about the journey people go on after losing someone. <https://podcasts.apple.com/nz/podcast/death-love-grief-and-hope/id1466192622>
 - See a range of grief related podcast options listed here:
 - <https://goodgriefbristol.com/good-grief-10-best-podcasts-on-grief/>
 - <https://whatsyourgrief.com/grief-podcast/>
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Facebook Groups:

- There is a wide range of online Facebook groups available for support. Search 'grief' or 'bereavement'. Be wise as you use them and keep safe. Netsafe NZ has a lot of advice for using social media wisely. www.netsafe.org.nz



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