

Resources & Supports for Managing Death in DMHAS Housing & Homelessness Programs

EXCERPTED FROM TRAINING ON WORKING WITH OLDER ADULTS

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Death and Dying



- Death and Dying are a part of life but often a painful part
- People need support through this process
- Often the support falls on program staff
- Detailing the concrete connections can allow us to focus on the people
- It is important not to forget ourselves as cannot serve unless we all have the support we need
- What we can do differently is an important learning but of more importance is what we did that was effective and kind

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Supports – Dealing with Grief and Loss

Kubler-Ross The Five Stages of Grief

- Denial
- Anger
- Bargaining
- Depression
- Acceptance
- <https://www.hdsa.org/images/content/1/3/13080.pdf>



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When a Tenant Dies

- If a tenant dies in their home:
 - There is an attended death and an unattended death
- If a tenant dies in an institution (hospital, hospice, jail)
- If a tenant dies in the community
- If a tenant dies through a criminal act

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Home



- Attended: Notify the police and the primary physician
- Unattended: Notify the police
- If you suspect a person is dead in the unit do not enter alone. Notify your supervisor. Do not touch anything in the unit
- Gather as much information as possible (medical and contacts)
- EMS will arrive and if possible try to revive the person
 - They will try usually even if there is an advanced directive
- Get all names and badge numbers. Get a case number if possible
 - Talk with the other tenants and the landlord giving as much info as possible.
 - Ask the landlord to plug the door (police will seal it)

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Reporting



- If a death occurs in the community the police are primary
- If a death occurs in an institution the institution is primary
- Reporting remains the same: **see funding guidelines**
- DMHAS requires reporting staff and client COVID positive test results and COVID related deaths via the Critical Incident reporting process ([instructions](#))
- Always ensure that your supervisor is in the loop
- Keep a list of times of calls, who was in the room, who you talked to, badge numbers and contact info and timelines
- Do not enter a unit by yourself: we always want a witness in case of a property dispute or concern about how a situation was handled
- Be prepared to wait with a police officer until they can take the body

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Support - Immediate



- Worker: as soon as possible participate in a de-brief with QA, supervisor or designated person
 - Spend some time talking about your experience – ask for help/support from supervisors when needed
 - Review chart notes to give detailed account
- Designate someone to follow up with family and/or emergency contacts
- Talk to your team as the client grapevine is strong and people will be upset
- Let services and supports know what happened and if they can be helpful
- Talk to the landlord: offering debrief, concrete assistance and support

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Process

- Review chart notes and work with supervisor to complete critical incident form
 - Update as you have more information
 - Keep funders in the loop
- Once the investigation / autopsy is complete get a copy
- Get a copy of the death certificate from the State Vital Records
- Contact SSA, Banks, or any interested parties to stop payments and protect assets

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Support – Memorial

- Planning a memorial: no one wants to be forgotten. Arranging a service or memorial to mark someone's life is important to all those left behind (even those who do not attend)
- If the person has made plans we try to honor them
- Look at the persons, family and friends faith tradition
- Celebrate the successes in each persons life and the mark they made
- Include family and friends in the celebration
- Some memorials are within the program community some for larger community
- Help people to participate as is most comfortable



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Burial

SSI: limited availability: <http://www.ssa.gov/ssi/spotlights/spot-burial-funds.htm>

CONNECTICUT DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

<http://www.ct.gov/dss/cwp/view.asp?a=2353&q=305152>

DSS will pay up to \$1400, less any assets in the deceased's estate, toward burial or cremation expenses of any individual with very limited means in Connecticut. There is no restriction; however, assets may offset all or part of the benefit.

VETERANS ADMINISTRATION

For information on who is eligible, how much the VA pays, and how to apply. visit:

<https://www.benefits.va.gov/compensation/claims-special-burial.asp>

Get a funeral home contact: <http://www.us-funerals.com/funeral-homes-by-state/new-york-funeral-directors-newyork.html>

Better to negotiate before there is a death

Develop contacts in the faith community

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Support – On-going



The need for support increases after the memorial. Some strategies include:

- Worker support group or individual counselling
- Honoring the person with an event or gift
- Being aware that this will raise people's anxiety about their own death; offering support and opportunities to talk
- Trust may be affected as may the faith in the program
- Making resources for support and comfort is primary
- Reactions emerge over time, everyone is on a different schedule

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Resources for Landlords



- Landlords are responsible for the unit and the contents
- They need help negotiating probate, contacting next of kin and contact information
- The unit is released by the police when the investigation is concluded
- HUD Guidelines for reporting and subsidy:
https://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/documents/huddoc?id=21390_pih2010-50.pdf

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