

# ▶▶ SILICOSIS RESOURCES GRIEF/LOSS



LOS ANGELES COUNTY  
DEPARTMENT OF  
MENTAL HEALTH  
hope. recovery. wellbeing.

## Mental Health Support for Families Impacted by Silicosis

Silicosis is an occupational lung disease caused by inhaling [crystalline silica dust](#), generally over a long period of time. RCS is commonly referred to as silica dust. Inhaling silica dust causes lung inflammation, stiffening, and scarring. Over time, RCS exposure can lead to difficulty breathing and/or severe lung diseases.

Los Angeles County medical centers have seen a significant increase in workers presenting with silicosis. Many of those affected are Latino immigrant men with the majority being between 40-49 years old, with some as young as their late 20s.

The disease generally takes 10 to 30 years to develop but could likely result in the loss of a loved one. Due to the nature of silicosis, it contains unique challenges, such as:

- Difficulty seeing your loved ones slowly deteriorate physically and mentally while their quality of life suffers.
- Facing life challenges and dread for the future: job losses, overdue rents, and mortgages, medical bills, lost health insurance, and reduced retirement funds. For many families, these additional challenges in your life can intensify the sadness, grief, and loss that come with the death of a loved one and can make everything feel worse.

## Coping With Your Loss

Losing a loved one is challenging. Many people feel shocked or in disbelief, “lost,” sad, isolated, or depressed. Others may have trouble concentrating, feeling confused, having trouble thinking clearly, or making decisions. Sometimes people experience physical reactions, such as difficulty sleeping, an upset stomach, or changes in eating habits. Here are some tips for coping with loss:

- **Practice self-care** – Caring for yourself is very important. Even basic things like eating regularly and getting enough rest are critical. Maintain your usual daily routine if possible.
- **Give yourself time** – Grieving the loss of someone you love is hard work. Do not try to “return to normal” right away. Give yourself time to accept the loss. As you are able, do focus on the love and savor the good memories you shared with the person who died.
- **Reach out for support** – It is important to maintain emotional connections with your friends and family. Come together on the phone or virtually to share memories and grieve. Seek support from friends, family, your faith/spiritual community, support groups, and your doctor or mental health professionals.
- **Explore healthy coping strategies** – Focus on your strengths. Maintain comforting spiritual practices, such as prayer and meditation. Avoid using alcohol or drugs. Take time to remember your loved one, their accomplishments, and their love and care.

## Helping A Child Cope with Their Loss

Sometimes these experiences are different for children. They may have a loss of developmental milestones, sleep difficulties, fears about being separated from caregivers, and concerns about other family members becoming sick or dying. Here's how to help a child cope with loss:

- **Be honest but age-appropriate** – Remain calm and comforting. Answer their questions honestly, using explanations that are right for the child's age. Even very young children can be told that someone they loved and who loved them got very sick and died.
- **Let the child ask questions** – Encourage them to ask questions. Share information that is right for their age. Help children find words for the emotions they are experiencing.
- **Maintain normal routines** – Maintain regular routines, such as mealtime, bedtime, school time, and playtime. This helps kids cope better with the loss of a loved one.
- **Be sensitive to any worries or fears** – Watch for signs of distress (e.g., sleeplessness, lack of appetite, disinterest in play, withdrawal, or acting out). Invite the child to talk. Express love and reassurance. Do not be afraid to share your emotions. If a child's distress is long-lasting, ask for guidance from your child's doctor, school counselor, or a mental health professional.

## Strategies To Support Someone Who Has Been Impacted by Silicosis

- **Reach out** – Reach out to your loved ones by phone, social media, or stop over at their house. Be present and offer hope and optimism.
- **Listen** – Take the time to listen to others. It reminds people that they are not alone.
- **Engage in shared activities** – Doing a shared activity helps people remain connected to others. This also helps support healthy coping at a time when a loved one is grieving.
- **Offer specific help** – Such as dropping off groceries or offering to help make calls to let friends know about the death is more useful than a general offer of help.

## Support And Help Available to You and Your Loved Ones

Call 211 or visit [211LA.org](https://211LA.org) to support groups, supportive services, and other resources.

Additional mental health resources are also available through:

- [LACDMH's 24/7 Help Line](#) at (800) 854-7771
- The [iPrevail online well-being platform](#)
- Calling/texting [988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline](#)
- Olive View Mental Health Center, (818) 485-0888  
14238 Saranac Lane, Sylmar, CA 91342
- [Baila Network](#)
- [Chinatown Service Center](#), (213) 808-1700  
767 N. Hill Street, Los Angeles, CA 90012