

Grief and Loss Handbook



Regional District of Central Okanagan Victim Services

1190 Richter Street
Kelowna, BC V1Y2K7
250-470-6242
Kelowna.VictimServices@rcmp-grc.gc.ca



RDCO RCMP Victim Services acknowledge our presence on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded [tṁx^wúlaʔx^w](#) (land) of the syilx / Okanagan people who have resided here since time immemorial.

We recognize, honour, and respect the syilx / Okanagan lands upon which we live, work, and play.

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Important Names and Numbers	2
RDCO RCMP Victim Services	3
Overview of The Guide	4
Next Steps	5
Acknowledging Your Emotions	6
Cultural Sensitivity and Safety	10
Next Steps Checklist	11
Technology Considerations	12
BC Coroners Service	13
Death Certificate	14
Common Questions Regarding Will and Estate	15
Whom To Notify Immediately After Loss	17
Funeral Arrangements	18
Local Funeral Homes	19
Financial Considerations	20
Financial Assistance	21
Grief Resources	23
Commonly Asked Questions	24
Mourner's Rights	25
Understanding Your Emotions	27

What Makes It Difficult	33
Coping With Challenges	38
Ten Things To Know About Grief	42
Special Days and Holidays	44
Grief After Suicide	49
Grief After Homicide	54
Grief After Substance-Related Death	56
Supporting A Loved One Through Grief	57
Things To Remember When Supporting a Grieving Person	58
Supporting Children and Teens	60
Children Aged 3 to 5	63
Children Aged 6 to 8	65
Children Aged 9 to 11	68
Young Adolescents Aged 12 to 14	71
Older Adolescents Aged 15 to 17	74
Resources	77
Crisis/Help Lines	78
One-On-One Support (Free)	80
Support/Counselling Groups	83
Online Resources	86

Layout for this resource was obtained from viewing the Surrey RCMP Victim Services Bereavement Guide.



Introduction

*“Grief is a healing journey, not
a destination.”*

- Anonymous

Important Names and Numbers

RDCO/RCMP Victim Services: 250-470-6242

RCMP Emergency: **9-1-1**

RCMP Non-emergency lines: 250-762-3300 Kelowna
250-768-2880 West Kelowna / Peachland / WFN
250-766-2288 Lake Country / Oyama

BC Coroners Service: 1 866 200-2676

NOTES:

Victim Services Caseworker:

Contact number:

Attending RCMP Officer:

Police File Number:

If you have questions or want support, please call your Victim Services Caseworker or the Victim Services Office at 250-470-6242 or email Kelowna.VictimServices@rcmp-grc.gc.ca.

Victim Services is available from 8 a.m. – 4 p.m. Monday through Friday except for statutory holidays.¹

RDCO RCMP Victim Services

- Our program is operated by the Regional District of Central Okanagan (RDCO) in partnership with the Kelowna RCMP
- Our program is funded by the RDCO, Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General and Westbank First Nation
- There is no fee to receive services
- RDCO RCMP Victim Services employs trained professionals referred to as 'caseworkers'
- Our caseworkers offer support and practical assistance to anyone impacted by crime and/or trauma¹
- Our caseworkers are accessible by phone, email and scheduled appointments

Our Services Include:

Emotional Support

- Police initiated crisis response (crisis intervention, defusing and debriefing)
- Check-in and follow-up
- Safety planning, brainstorming ways to increase safety that may reduce risk of future harm
- With permission, connecting clients with family, friends, Elders
- Information on trauma reactions and recovery, grief and loss
- Sharing and encouragement of self-care techniques post loss and trauma

Practical Assistance

- Police File:
 - Updates on file status throughout the police investigation, such as charges laid against the offender as well as liaise with RCMP to advocate for client concerns
- Financial:
 - Assistance in completing Crime Victim Assistance Program (CVAP) application where applicable
- Referral:
 - Provide information and referrals to relevant community resources
 - Facilitate support for victims of power-based crimes through community-based services, such as the Elizabeth Fry Society of Central Okanagan

Court Support

- Offer updates on the case through the court system such as status of protective order, outcome of court appearance, custodial status of the convicted offender, length of sentence and parole information
- Court orientation for witnesses who may be required to testify and court support
- Explanation of the criminal justice system specific to each case
- Guidance in completing victim impact statements
- Connect applicable victims with Victim Notification Program
- Liaise on clients behalf with justice system personnel

¹ Please note: most information you provide to us, a **Police-Based Victim Service**, is confidential except four key safety areas where information shared must be reported to police – suspected child abuse, harm to self, harm to others, and domestic abuse.

Overview of the Guide

RDCO RCMP Victim Services supports our Central Okanagan Communities including:

- District of Lake Country
- City of Kelowna
- City of West Kelowna
- Westbank First Nation
- District of Peachland
- East Electoral Area
- West Electoral Area

For assistance outside of this jurisdiction, a referral may be forwarded to the designated community service.

Victim Service Caseworkers are aware that after a loved one dies there are necessary tasks placed on the people closest to them.

After a death of a loved one, the 'next-of-kin' griever is expected to complete some immediate arrangements for the deceased, along with notification of family members/friends/employer, etc. Therefore, it is understandable to feel uncertain or overwhelmed about what to do next.

The intent of this booklet is to provide some assistance during an often very difficult time when you are expected to complete a lot of unfamiliar demands while experiencing many emotions.

No booklet fully captures all the information that may be required. However, this resource does serve as an initial guide to help you with what is typically expected. We acknowledge that not all of the information provided will be applicable to you and your loss. We hope by reading whatever may be relevant to you, some of your thoughts and feelings are acknowledged and validated at this time.

Victim Service Caseworkers are available in the days and months following your loss to offer support and assistance.

There may be some situations where legal complications arise. In these scenarios, please consider seeking legal guidance as this resource does not replace legal counsel. Finally, information in this guide is from a variety of British Columbia websites and services. At the bottom of each page, information is referenced for additional reading if you so choose.

Before you proceed any further, we are so sorry you are going through this.



Next Steps

“You don’t have to see the whole staircase, just take the first step.”

- Martin Luther King, Jr.

Acknowledging Your Emotions

Coping is a journey from your life before your loss, to life as it is today.

Ideally, before you begin working through practical matters after the death of a loved-one, it is so important to acknowledge your feelings, even if only to yourself. What you are going through is unique to you. Your emotions and reactions may vary in time, duration and intensity. Some emotions feel very unpleasant and a burden to bear. Acknowledge them for what they represent - **your grief**.

This chart outlines some common reactions people have after they are exposed to death and other traumatic experiences.

Reaction	Symptom	
Physical	<input type="checkbox"/> Sleep and appetite disturbance <input type="checkbox"/> Headaches <input type="checkbox"/> Muscle spasm <input type="checkbox"/> Tremors <input type="checkbox"/> Dry mouth <input type="checkbox"/> Aches in back/chest	<input type="checkbox"/> Nausea <input type="checkbox"/> Vomiting <input type="checkbox"/> Upset stomach <input type="checkbox"/> Sweating <input type="checkbox"/> Chest pain <input type="checkbox"/> Fatigue <input type="checkbox"/> Feeling unable to function
Behavioural	<input type="checkbox"/> Withdrawn or clingy <input type="checkbox"/> Crying spells <input type="checkbox"/> Change in eating habits <input type="checkbox"/> Easily startled	<input type="checkbox"/> Risk of self-destructive behaviours <input type="checkbox"/> Avoidance or isolating behaviours <input type="checkbox"/> Overly possessive or protective <input type="checkbox"/> Hyper alert
Emotional	<input type="checkbox"/> Fear <input type="checkbox"/> Anxiety/panic attacks <input type="checkbox"/> Shock <input type="checkbox"/> Numb <input type="checkbox"/> Anger <input type="checkbox"/> Irritability <input type="checkbox"/> Feeling lost <input type="checkbox"/> Disconnected from body <input type="checkbox"/> Relief <input type="checkbox"/> Understanding (≠acceptance)	<input type="checkbox"/> Abandoned <input type="checkbox"/> Overwhelmed <input type="checkbox"/> Sadness/Depression <input type="checkbox"/> Shame <input type="checkbox"/> Vulnerability <input type="checkbox"/> Grief <input type="checkbox"/> Guilt <input type="checkbox"/> Denial <input type="checkbox"/> Worrying about burdening others
Cognitive	<input type="checkbox"/> Hindsight thinking <input type="checkbox"/> Poor concentration <input type="checkbox"/> Confusion <input type="checkbox"/> Time distortion	<input type="checkbox"/> Nightmares <input type="checkbox"/> Dreams loved one is still with you <input type="checkbox"/> Impaired memory <input type="checkbox"/> Lowered attention span <input type="checkbox"/> Replaying an event in your mind
Spiritual	<input type="checkbox"/> Questioning the meaning of life <input type="checkbox"/> Hopelessness <input type="checkbox"/> Anger towards a higher being	<input type="checkbox"/> Self-doubt <input type="checkbox"/> Powerlessness <input type="checkbox"/> Feeling disconnected from the world

Healthy Coping and Self-Care in Managing Trauma/Grief

Self-care techniques are activities, routines or boundaries we set to limit stress, control our emotions and attend to our physical and mental health. Self-care often looks very different at the beginning of your grief than later on as individuals learn to adjust and live with grief.

Our bodies use a lot of energy when grieving.

Initially your grief may limit your ability to concentrate and complete everyday tasks.

Self-care for the first while simply means eating, drinking and sleeping when possible. Sleep when you need to or want to rather than when you should. Some find it helpful to create “to-do lists” of the most needed tasks. It is important to keep the lists small and realistic. In the early days, it is important for you to set your own pace for manageable activities and please accept help.

Self-care involves all of you: Below are some ideas based on physical, behavioural and emotional strategies that you may find helpful at the beginning of this journey.

Do:

- Attend to basic physical needs such as sleeping, eating, and engaging in physical activity.
- Maintain social contact with friends and family.
- Continue to complete your regular schedule as much as possible.

Think:

- Acknowledge that the loss/incident/event will bother you.
- Set aside time in a safe environment to think.
- Engage in positive self-talk, rather than blaming.

Feel:

- Be kind to yourself. Give yourself permission to be upset and time to recover.
- Surround yourself with emotional support.
- Allow time for your body to relax - engage in mindfulness.

Once you have progressed past the few days, look at the below list of things and decide what else you may find helpful.¹

- Exercising
- Eating healthy
- Journaling
- Utilizing social supports
- Engage in alone time
- Setting healthy boundaries
- Hiking
- Engaging in a hobby you enjoy
- Trying a new hobby
- Therapy or counseling
- Spending time with animals
- Talking with an Elder
- (Re)connecting with your culture

¹ If you feel as if you are not coping, please reach out to others and/or seek professional help.

Post Traumatic Growth...offering hope for the future

You care. Therefore, you grieve.

Finding meaning after a traumatic loss is very important for some people and at times it involves digging deeply to uncover.

Post-traumatic growth is:

- A positive change that comes from a traumatic experience in one's life
- An opportunity to become stronger and more resilient as a person post-trauma

It is okay not to see this 'opportunity' in the beginning when grief is forced upon you. Nobody wants to grieve or suffer loss. This idea is not about 'what happened' to you, but rather, how you respond to what happened.

If you are not remotely ready to think about this, please skip ahead to the next page.

Over time as you experience living differently, you may be able to see **YOUR** strength and how capable **YOU** are living with grief.

None of us get through life without some suffering. Thankfully it's true that our personal resilience and strength may further evolve through the most unexpected routes.

Post-traumatic growth will take time. It is best achieved with:

- Positive coping strategies
- Self-care
- (Re)connecting with your culture

This guide focuses on how to manage all three.

Acknowledge what happened was not your preference or choice. As time passes after loss and adversity, most sufferers do adjust to living with grief and a different life than what was anticipated.

Over time some people claim:

- Greater appreciation of life
- Greater appreciation and strengthening of close relationships
- Increased compassion and unselfishness
- Identification of new possibilities or a purpose in life
- Greater awareness and use of personal strengths
- Enhanced spiritual development
- Creative growth

This may be an area you explore with your Victim Service Caseworker in the future.

Cultural Sensitivity and Safety

Grief looks different for everyone.

Often the way we respond to death is influenced by our culture and way of life.

Through grief, it is possible to start feeling more connected to your culture or you may feel the complete opposite, a disconnection from your culture. Both reactions are normal.

It is also normal to go through periods of intense connection followed by moments of hatred and anger towards your spiritual or cultural beliefs. Sometimes, it is possible to feel this anger because of how incomprehensible it is that something so devastating could happen.

Following the death of a loved one, you may feel powerless or defeated. Again, these are normal initial reactions. Although you cannot change this unwanted reality, and that is not easy to come to terms with, you still have the power to control how you respond and what you do after loss. Some people find comfort in knowing they honoured their loved one's culture, beliefs or religion at the end of their life.

Rituals specific to our beliefs may be helpful because they provide an opportunity to express our emotions. They can also add normalcy to a loss that may leave us with feelings of chaos and lack of control.

Victim Service caseworkers recognize that nobody knows your culture better than you. We strive to offer a safe space to speak about your wishes. We will do our best to assist you in arranging what is consistent with your beliefs¹.

Beyond Victim Services, some people also find it helpful to connect with individuals within their cultural community. These trusted supporters can remind you of specific rituals that you may find important or comforting. Additionally, consider taking time to connect with Elders or other spiritual leaders who may walk alongside you through this journey.

Some rituals and customs specific to grief include:

- Who should be called after a death
- What is done with a person's body and how they are honoured
- Determining if grieving should be done privately, with family or publicly
- How should family members dress and behave while grieving
- How the deceased is remembered for years following their death
- New roles that the family may have to take on

¹ Victim Services Caseworkers acknowledge ourselves as learners when it comes to understanding your culture and experience.

Next Steps Checklist

Within the first 24 hours [if possible]:

- Notify loved ones. Let important people know, including family or friends.
- Contact the executor of the deceased's will (if applicable).
- If the coroner is involved, speak with the coroner to obtain information on when your loved one can be released to a funeral home.
- If the coroner is not involved, select and contact a funeral home to make initial arrangements for your person.

Within the first few days:

- Attempt to locate a will. You may be able to locate one on vitalcertificates.ca.
- If there is a will, find out if the will needs to be probated. More information on [page 14](#).
- Apply for financial assistance if needed. More information can be found on [page 21](#). (If possible, this should be done before connecting with the funeral home).
- Decide on the type of service (memorial, a celebration of life, funeral). Connect with local funeral homes to arrange for them to gain possession of your loved one once they are released from the hospital, if the hospital is involved.
- Notify the employer or landlord.
- Register the death. A licensed funeral home may do this on your behalf.
- Obtain a death certificate from the funeral home.
- Determine the number of death certificates needed. They will be needed for banks, insurance policies, Canadian Pension Plan (CPP), etc. Some places may accept a notarized copy rather than an original.
- Call the deceased's lawyer (if applicable).
- If desired, begin to write an obituary. Determine where you would like to post the obituary (ie. newspaper, online, etc.).

Within the first month:

- Locate all important documents including:
 - Shared policies
 - Marriage and birth certificates
 - Social Insurance (SIN) card
 - Passports (should be returned to Passport Canada)
 - Income tax returns (recent copies for the last 3 years)
- Notify key places of the death. Note: an original or copy of death certificate may be required.
 - Government of Canada: 1-800-622-6232
 - Banks where accounts were held (including credit cards)
 - Canada Revenue Agency (CRA): 1-800-959-8281. Settle any outstanding taxes.
 - Health Insurance (Medical Service Plan): 1-800-663-7100
 - ICBC driver license or BC identification card
 - Automobile registration/insurance. Change vehicle ownership. Information on handling a deceased's car, with or without a will, can be found at icbc.com/vehicle-registration/sell-vehicle.
 - Canadian pension plans (if applicable): 1-800-277-9914
 - RCMP Canada Firearms program (if applicable): 1-800-731-4000

- Arrange for storage/clearing out of belongings
- Consider online accounts that may need to be notified (Facebook, Instagram, etc)
- Begin to consider what you would like to sell or keep

Technology Considerations

Cell Phones

A cell phone contract can be canceled or transferred by calling the phone provider's customer support number. There is generally not a fee to do this. The balance due on the account will need to be paid when the contract is canceled.

In some instances, you may want to unlock your loved one's phone so that you can get pictures and phone numbers. The cell phone provider will not have access to do this. For use of a phone, you could factory reset it to gain access (existing information and data will be lost).

Memorializing Facebook

Memorialized accounts are a way for people on Facebook to remember those who have passed away. Once an account is memorialized, it will say "Remembering" next to the person's name. Depending on their privacy settings, friends will still be able to share memories on their timeline and content that they shared will stay visible. Once an account is memorialized, no one can log into it or access messages.

To complete a memorialization request visit [facebook.com](https://www.facebook.com) and search in the help center 'Memorialization Request'. You will need to provide a scan or photo of the document proving that the person is deceased.

Other Online Accounts to Consider

Beyond Facebook, your loved one may have had other accounts that will eventually need to be cancelled or notified.

First, look at bill payments to find monthly or yearly subscriptions to cancel. Once you have done this, you can begin cancelling social media accounts if applicable. Current popular accounts include YouTube, Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, and LinkedIn to name a few.

RCMP officers will attend most local deaths and, depending on the situation, the BC Coroners Service may be involved.

Coroners Role

The role of the BC Coroners Service is to confirm the identity of the deceased and investigate the circumstances of the death – the how, when, where and by what means. The coroner does not address fault or blame. The goal of the coroner is to recognize risk factors to prevent future deaths. Following an investigation, the coroner will characterize the death as natural, accidental, suicide, homicide or undetermined.

Determining Cause of Death

The coroner has the authority to collect information, conduct interviews, inspect and seize documents, secure the scene of death and take possessions. The coroner also has the authority to authorize the removal of a deceased person's body to the morgue. If the coroner reveals the death as a natural death, they will contact the doctor of the deceased. If the death is not obviously a natural death, the coroner can order an autopsy by a qualified pathologist.

Autopsy

An autopsy is generally completed within 48 hours by a qualified pathologist. Autopsies are beneficial because they may provide an opportunity for the family to receive some answers regarding their loved one's death, as well as potentially learn about unknown hereditary diseases.

Once an autopsy is completed, the coroner will provide the next-of-kin with consent to release the deceased's body to a funeral home to continue on with the next steps. Cost of the coroners requested autopsy is paid for by the Coroners Service.

An autopsy may be requested if not considered necessary by a doctor or coroner. In this situation no costs are covered; all transport, autopsy and related fees are billed to the family/friend of the deceased who requested and arranged the autopsy. The result of the coroners investigation is released in a public document, however, the report itself is confidential and released only in certain situations.¹

¹ Information taken from BC Coroner Service.

Death Certificate

A death certificate is necessary to formally notify most institutions of your loved ones passing. This is provided by the funeral home once they receive the Medical Certificate of Death from your loved ones doctor or coroner involved. Funeral homes are “Registrars” of Vital Statistics and can produce a Death Certificate for the first 3 months. After this time, Death Certificates can be obtained from Vital Statistics office in Victoria.

Not all institutions will require an official copy of the death certificate. As a cost-efficient option, you may wish to order two originals, then have additional “certified true copies” prepared by a notary public or a lawyer.

Anyone may order and receive a Death Certificate for a person who has died in British Columbia. The release of a Death Certificate is not limited to the immediate family.¹

To obtain copies you can visit gov.bc.ca/gov/content/life-events/death/death-certificates.

Within B.C.:

1-888-876-1633

In Victoria and outside B.C.: 250-952-2681

¹ Information obtained from gov.bc.ca/gov/content/life-events/death.

Common Questions Regarding Will and Estate

Dying with a will

The will should name an executor, or administrator, who is responsible for carrying out the instructions in the will. Usually, it is a friend, relative or trusted person. It is up to this person to complete the basic duties and ensure the outlined wishes are being respected. If you are named an executor, you are not obligated to accept this responsibility.

A will generally needs to go through probate, which is a process that ensures the will is real and was left by the deceased. If you are unsure if the will must be probated, you may wish to seek legal advice.

Probating a will: Probating a will is a process of verifying that the document is valid. Agencies and financial institutions that hold assets in an estate sometimes require that a will be probated. For more information visit gov.bc.ca/gov/content/life-events/death/wills-estates/probating-a-will.

In some instances, banks require a representation grant which is a document that says you have been legally proven to be an executor named in the will. An application for a representation grant may be made in any Supreme Court Registry – based in Kelowna for Central Okanagan at 1355 Water Street, (250) 470-6900.

Dying without a will

If you cannot find a will, but believe that one exists, you could complete a search of wills notice by sending an application to Vital Statistics. Wills are only registered in the Province or Territory that they were completed. Therefore, this search does not search all of Canada. Information applying can be found at gov.bc.ca/gov/content/life-events/death/wills-registry.

If it is determined that no will was left by the deceased, the Estate Administration Act establishes the people who have a right to administer the estate. In order of priority they are:

1. Spouse (including common law)
2. Children, grandchild (or a guardian on their behalf)
3. Parents
4. Siblings and children of predeceased siblings
5. Nieces and nephews

One of the above individuals is eligible to apply for a Grant of Administration in order to handle the estate. Once appointed, that person is legally allowed to distribute the estate. Before applying, consider the tasks associated with administering an estate. These include making funeral arrangements, identifying, securing and dealing with assets, identifying and paying valid debts, filing tax returns, dealing with any legal issues and distributing the balance of the estate to beneficiaries.

A Grant of Administration is also used when there is a will in cases where no executor is named, the named executor is no longer alive or the executor denies their title.

When applying to the court, a lawyer may be helpful but not required. If a lawyer is hired, their fees may be paid out of the estate.

No administrator

When the executor, intestate successor, beneficiary or other eligible person is not able or willing to administer the estate, the Public Guardian and Trustee (PGT) takes over. The PGT will not administer the estate if the estimated gross value of the estate's assets is not enough to pay funeral costs and PGT fees. If you are thinking about referring an estate to PGT, contact their office directly.

PGT Interior Region:

250-712-7576

1345 St. Paul Street, Kelowna BC. V1Y 2E2

Whom to Notify Immediately After Loss

After you or another had contacted 9-1-1 or someone notified you about the death of a loved one, it is now important to begin informing close family and friends you believe should know as soon as possible.

Information surrounding the death of your loved one may rapidly spread (either through news, social media or word of mouth) so it is important to alert family as quickly as you are able if you prefer they do not find out through other means.

If immediately retelling the details of your loss is further traumatizing for you, please ask someone you trust to reach out to others. If it is helpful to talk about it immediately, only you will know. You choose your next steps. At this point, just focus on telling the main people in your and this person's life.

Do not spend too much energy trying to remember all the people who should be told. Through an obituary, you will be able to reach acquaintances. It's okay if initially someone important to you or your person is missed or they heard through other means before you were able to contact them.

If you are not the next-of-kin, the RCMP will generally assist in ensuring they are notified. If the next-of-kin is in another town, they may send an officer to provide the news in person. If there is a will, and you know who the executor is, it is important to notify them as they will have to begin plans. If there is no executor, the next-of-kin has the right to control what happens to the body.

Once key family members have been notified, you can connect with a chosen funeral home to begin arrangements. The executor or the administrator is responsible for making funeral arrangements and paying for them from the deceased person's estate.¹

Throughout the coming months, many people and institutions will need to be notified. Tasks may include contacting the federal government about pensions and the land registry about the property that your family member owned. In most cases, these tasks are not urgent. They can be left to the executor or administrator to handle. Specifics regarding who to contact can be found above on [page 11](#).

¹ Information obtained from "A Death in your Family" by People Law School.



Funeral Arrangements

*“Grief is in two parts. The first is loss.
The second is the remaking of life.”*

- Anne Roiphe

Local Funeral Homes

Prices for funerals vary greatly. It is helpful to seek quotes before agreeing to any service. All funeral providers must display a current price list of the services and products offered.

Kelowna

Everden Rust Funeral Services and Crematorium

1910 Windsor Rd, Kelowna B.C.

everdenrust.com

250-860-6440

First Memorial Funeral Services

1221 Sutherland Ave, Kelowna B.C.

dignitymemorial.ca

250-762-2299

Springfield Funeral Home Ltd

2020 Springfield Rd, Kelowna B.C.

springfieldfuneralhome.com

250-860-7077

Today's Choice Alternative Funeral Services Ltd

1930 Kirschner Road, Kelowna, B.C.

todayschoicecremation.com

250-860-1644

Valleyview Funeral Home

165 Valleyview Rd, Kelowna B.C.

dignitymemorial.ca

250-765-3147

West Kelowna

Everden Rust Funeral Services and Crematorium

3500 Carrington Road, West Kelowna B.C.

everdenrust.com

250-768-8925

Hansons Arbor Funeral Chapels & Cremation

2541 Churchill Road, West Kelowna B.C.

hansonsfuneral.ca

250-768-3702

Financial Considerations

Paying Funeral Cost¹

If you decide to pay the funeral home directly, you must wait until after the estate is settled to receive reimbursement. If you ask the funeral home for an invoice, you can take it to the bank where they will pay the funeral home directly from your deceased family member's account.

If you are planning to apply for Ministry assistance ([See page 22](#)), most funeral homes will need to verify that you have applied and/or have been accepted before making any arrangements. Speak with your funeral home regarding this situation prior to any planning.

Joint vs. Split Accounts

If you had a joint account with the deceased, you can withdraw the money from the account at any point. The account can then be transferred to your name once you have a death certificate.

If the accounts were in the deceased's name you must notify the bank. It is possible the bank may release a small amount of money at their discretion. You may not be able to access the account until the death certificate is provided and the estate is settled.

Pensions

In situations where your spouse was receiving government or private pension, you may still be eligible to receive the pension. Please contact the Pension Plan provider directly to receive more information or inquire with your person's employer for contact information.

¹ Information obtained from: "Death in your Family" by People's Law School.

Financial Assistance

Death Benefit

The Canadian Pension Plan (CPP) death benefit is a one-time, lump-sum payment on behalf of a deceased CPP contributory.

If an estate exists, the executor named in the will or the administrator named by the Court can apply for the death benefit. The executor should apply for the benefit within 60 days of the date of the death. When there is no estate, or if the executor has not applied for the death benefit, payment can be made to other persons who apply for the benefit.

To be eligible, the deceased must have made contributions to the CPP for at least:

- One-third of the calendar years in their contributory period for base CPP (no less than three calendar years).
- 10 calendar years

The amount of the death benefit for all eligible contributors is \$2,500.

More information and form to apply can be obtained at: canada.ca/en/services/benefits/publicpensions/cpp/cpp-death-benefit

Government Assistance with Funeral Costs

When a loved one dies and there are no resources available to pay for funeral expenses through the individual's estate or family unit, the Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction may assist with these costs. This service is available to all eligible citizens of British Columbia.

To determine eligibility, you will need to provide the Ministry with:

- Name and address of the deceased
- Name of the next of kin
- Deceased's income and assets
- A request to the ministry to cover funeral costs

If you are determined eligible for assistance, you can begin making funeral arrangements.

Ministry supplement paid to assist with funeral costs is a debt to the government and may be recovered.

To apply call: 1-866-866-0800 or go to www.gov.bc.ca/spdr.

Crime Victim Assistance Program (CVAP)

Immediate family members to a victim of crime who is deceased from a death included on their (limited) list of criminal offences (Crime Victim Assistance Act) may potentially access financial assistance for funeral and other associated costs.

The application must be received within one year from the date the crime took place.

You do not have to wait for charges to be laid or for the offender to be convicted before applying.

Please contact a Victim Services Caseworker for more information or search “Crime Victim Assistance Program” on gov.bc.ca.

Allowance for the Survivor

The allowance for the survivor benefit is available to:

- People aged 60 to 64 who have a low income,
- Living in Canada, and
- Individual whose spouse or common-law partner has died.

A person must apply in writing for this benefit. More information can be found at canada.ca/en/services/benefits/publicpensions/cpp/old-age-security/guaranteed-income-supplement/allowance-survivor.html

Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada

Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) provides services to help families manage the legal and financial affairs of Indigenous people who usually live on reserve and have died, or who are minors or dependent adults. More information can be found at: canada.ca/en/indigenous-northern-affairs.html

Your loved one may qualify for one or more of the noted services.¹

¹ It is possible to apply for multiple financial assistance option, however, you may be required to pay back funding if you receive money elsewhere. Ensure you inquire about this when you receive funding.



Grief Resources

“We grieve intensely, because we loved intensely.”

- anonymous

Commonly Asked Questions

Listed below are common questions Victim Service Caseworkers have been asked while supporting people who are grieving.

Seeking support from friends and family as well as your Victim Service Caseworker may be helpful in moving you through difficult thoughts.¹

Why aren't I going through the stages of grief?

A Swiss-American Psychiatrist named Elisabeth Kübler-Ross suggested we go through 'stages' during our grief journey. These stages are; denial/isolation, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. Some people thought she meant we MUST go through these stages. Although it is normal to feel some or all of these emotions, it is not expected that you will go through them in any particular order or smoothly. It is likely that you will jump between these emotions regularly. It may take a long time, if ever, for you to reach acceptance. The grief journey is not linear, as shown in the following picture.

How we **WANT**
grief to work



How grief
ACTUALLY works



Grief is messy. Grief is very personal, meaning there may be emotions you experience that others around you do not. When a loved one dies, we grieve our relationship to them. Therefore, you grieve your person very differently than someone else because you knew them differently. No two people have exactly the same connection.

There is nothing wrong with you if you are not grieving the same way others around you express their grief. You grieve in our own way that is uniquely yours.

Why do I keep replaying or explaining the event?

When we are exposed to trauma, our brain can sometimes struggle to process what we heard or saw. As a result, 'what happened' begins to live within the brain. When we are unable to process the event and move it to the storage part of our brain, it may get stuck in the emotional center of our brain. Retelling the event can be helpful for reprocessing the details and slowly beginning to store the details. Additionally, sleeping is very

¹ Questions answered with experiential knowledge as well as MADD "Trauma, Loss and Bereavement" guide.

important in this step. When we sleep, we allow our brain an opportunity to digest and process what happened. Although you may not want to, try to give your body the time to rest.

What do I do next?

Although it is common for our minds to think very far in the future, it is important to think about your grief one day at a time. When we first find out that a loved one has died, we are in shock and may find it difficult to concentrate or make decisions. Writing out your most important tasks may help you prioritize what needs to be done first and help determine what you can do.

Will I ever forget my loved one?

Memories last when people remember someone who died. If people think of the deceased, they are not forgotten. Your relationship with your person continues well beyond their passing. During grieving, we slowly find a way to move forward with the memories of our loved one. One of the goals of grief is to remember the deceased with more love than pain. So no, you will not forget your loved one. Yes, it is possible that your love will continue to grow and your memories may become more vivid over time.

Does the grief ever end?

The goal of grief is not to get over the incident, it is to get through it. This means that the grief journey never ends. We will eventually go back to our lives and continue living, but we will never be the same. Grief is not constant, there will be times where we feel it strongly, and other times where we feel relatively almost the same as before it happened. Some events or situations may provoke more emotions such as anniversaries, holidays or special locations. These strong emotions do not restart the grieving process. Information on coping through special events can be found on [page 46](#). In some cases, we may feel that we are stronger and more resilient after having gone through the grief journey.

Will I ever be my old self-again?

The truth is that you will be forever changed after a loved one dies. Through grief, we not only mourn the loss of a person, but also the loss of that relationship and future memories. It is possible to find meaning in life again, it just may be in a different way.

Am I bothering people by asking for help?

Some people find it difficult to know what to say or do to help. They may be very present at the beginning but slowly return to their life. Asking for help allows your support people to feel wanted and helpful. Please check in with them periodically to ensure they are available to help. Often, you will find that they are relieved to feel like they are assisting in some way.

Mourner's Rights

- I have the right to experience my own unique grief my own unique way.
- I have the right to feel what I am feeling, regardless of how those feelings shift from moment to moment.
- I have the right to feel angry.
- I have the right to be treated as a capable person.
- I have the right to say NO.
- I have the right to privacy.
- I have the right to ask for help.
- I have the right to be listened to.
- I have the right to be treated with respect.
- I have the right to socialize when ready.
- I have the right to cry – or not.
- I have the right to express my feelings.
- I have the right to be upset.
- I have the right to be supported.
- I have the right to express my needs.
- I have the right to talk about my grief.
- I have the right to experience joy.
- I have the right to be tolerant of my physical and emotional limits.
- I have the right to experience unexpected bursts of grief.
- I have the right to make use of healing rituals, including the funeral.
- I have the right to have fun!
- I have the right to be disappointed.
- I have the right to search for meaning in life and death.
- I have the right to treasure my memories.
- I have the right to be alone.
- I have the right to be given time for the healing process.¹

I have the right to _____

I have the right to _____

I have the right to _____

I have the right to _____

I have the right to _____

¹ Obtained from Whole Person Associates "The GriefWork Companion – Activities for Healing."

Understanding Your Emotions

Some common feelings people report after a loved one dies include grief, sorrow, hopelessness, despair, guilt, blame, anger, fear and anxiety.

Below focuses on these key emotions to help you better understand them.

The Feelings of Grief

When someone close to you dies, you grieve.

Grief is the road you travel from how things were to how things will be.

You may have different or stronger feelings than you've had before. You may wonder if what you are feeling is normal and your feelings may surprise, frighten or embarrass you, showing up at times or in ways that you don't expect.

You may find yourself crying more – or less – than you expected. You may have deep feelings that you can't or don't want to show.

These feelings can be uncomfortable but they are not harmful. Remember that feelings are neither good nor bad, right nor wrong – they are just feelings. They are a normal and necessary part of grief. Instead of trying to stop them, trust that just as each one comes, it will also go.

Whatever your feelings, they are tied to the particular relationship or connection that you had with your person.

In the following sections, some common emotions are noted along with suggestions to help you accommodate these feelings.

If you are experiencing other feelings, you may still find some of this information useful. If you are continuing to struggle with your feelings, consider meeting with a bereavement counsellor to help find new ways of coping with grief.

Sorrow – also known as sadness, emptiness, or loneliness

The pain of sorrow is heartache. You may feel that your heart is broken or injured. You may feel as though you are no longer a whole person. You may express your sorrow outwardly through weeping, crying, sobbing, or wailing, or you may pour your sorrow less visibly into activities that may be ordinary or special to you.

You may long for the person who has died to be with you again. You may miss the sharing of day-to-day life or the sense of closeness that comes from loving and being loved by someone. You may miss being able to provide and receive care. There may be times when a person's absence seems overpowering. You may feel as though there is an enormous hole in your life or that you simply don't belong anywhere now.

Honour your sadness.

Accept that it is a natural and unavoidable part of having loved someone and sadness is part of your life right now.

Share your experiences.

You may want to share your sadness with friends, family or members of a grief support group. You may prefer to use the internet or take up a project or activity that allows you to maintain a greater sense of privacy.

Express your sorrow.

It's important to find ways that meet your needs and match your personality. You may need a regular time and place to feel sad and to cry, such as in your morning shower or at the grave; or you may need time to quietly meditate or reflect while walking in nature. Express strong emotions help yet avoid doing so close to bedtime since this may disturb your sleep.

Create ways of remembering.

Find ways that help you to remember and honour the person who died. Talk or write to them, celebrate their birthday, put up a Christmas stocking, display photographs or talk about them.

Hopelessness and Despair

As you face changes resulting from your loss, it may seem that your world has changed so much that you barely recognize it. You may feel that all you held most dear has been lost. Some people describe their feelings as 'being lost' or 'in a dark place.' Other people feel tired and unmotivated. Things that once mattered may now seem pointless. You may feel as if your world is falling apart and you'll never feel happy again.

Dealing with your grief may be harder than you expected and it may be difficult to put your feelings into words. You may feel depressed and have trouble keeping up your normal routines. You may feel that life no longer holds any purpose for you and wonder how long you can go on this way. You may even hope to die or have thoughts of ending your life.

If your mood is low, dark, or numb most or all of the time, you may be depressed (as well as grieving). Most often these empty, hopeless feelings lessen as people begin to "see light in the tunnel" and re-engage with the world.

What May Help:

Accept and honour your feelings.

Although it may not be apparent to you, you are in the midst of an important transition. This can be a time to reflect on the past and how it can help you to create your future.

Let others know and help.

Spend time with others who have been through a similar experience and survived it. This could include family members or friends, or you may want to join a bereavement support group. Even characters in movies or books can fill this role.

Do what's right for you.

It's important to give thought and time to whatever is good for you. Identify what you need. It might be rest or quiet time or it might be physical or social activity. Staying in touch with the rhythms of the natural world and the cycle of life can be restorative and inspiring. You may also want to record your thoughts, observations and progress in some way.

Talk to your family doctor.

If your mood is often down or you are having thoughts of ending your life, seek help as soon as possible from your family doctor or hospital emergency department. Crisis lines can also provide telephone support:

- **Local Crisis Line:** 1-888-353-2273 (toll-free)
- **Provincial Suicide Intervention Line:** 1- 800-784-2433 (toll-free)
- **B.C. Bereavement Helpline:** 1-877-779-2223
- **Mental Health/Substance Use Services (IH):** 250-469-7070
- **Westbank First Nation (Community/Health Services):** 250-768-0227
- KCR.ca for additional resources

Guilt and Blame

While grieving, it is natural to keep re-examining what has happened, including your part in it. You may have many 'what if' or 'why' questions. You may be wondering about 'if only.' You may have regrets about things done and not done or said and not said.

If you are feeling angry with others, you may be trying to understand what happened. What exactly was the cause of death? Were any warning signs missed or not taken seriously enough?

Feelings of guilt or blame often come from a belief that everything in life happens for a reason. Something life-changing has happened and you are trying to understand how and why. You may blame yourself or others, even though you know there isn't any one thing or person to blame. If you are someone who likes to always get things right, feelings of guilt or blame may be especially hard for you.

Feelings of guilt and blame about the death may also come up if you don't feel good about who you are or what you have to offer others. If your relationship with the person who died was difficult, you may feel guilty about times when you wished them dead.

Feelings of guilt and blame are often tied to ideas about how you or other people should be. Perhaps you are telling yourself you should feel sadder or less angry, or that you shouldn't be grieving in this way or for so long. Often these 'shoulds' are the echoes of what you've been hearing from family and friends.

It's also possible that your feelings of guilt are grounded in reality: As a caregiver, you may have been tired and said something hurtful or not listened to a complaint. Perhaps you did or didn't do something that contributed to someone's pain, illness or death.

Examine your guilt.

Pay attention to what you say to yourself and about yourself. Describe what you feel guilty about and examine it. Look at what you are guilty of – the real part – and decide what you need to do about this.

Forgive yourself or others.

Feelings of guilt or blame can keep you stuck in your grief. Ask yourself if these feelings are helping you to be the person you want to be. If not, find ways to forgive. When guilt or blame surface, practice letting go, as you are ready.

Do a reality check.

Ask trusted friends and family if they have ever experienced something similar and find out how they handled the situation. Talk to other people who were involved and find out if anyone sees things differently than you do. Recall not only the times when you or someone else failed, but also those times when you or they did or said what was needed.

Take action.

Once you have carefully examined your feelings, you may still feel there is good reason for your guilt. In this situation you may want to find ways to make amends, for example, by volunteering with, making a donation to or learning more about a cause that mattered to the person who died. You might also decide to make a change in your lifestyle or behaviour based on what you've learned.

Anger

Anger can be a natural and common response to loss. It is a normal reaction at times when you feel powerless, frustrated or wronged in some way. Even so, it may be difficult for you and others to accept or tolerate the expression of angry feelings.

Your anger may be directed at a certain person, agency or policy. There may (or may not) be valid reasons for this. You may feel that someone should be accountable for actions taken or not taken, such as medical treatment or other decisions. You may feel disillusioned or let down by the care provided to the person who died by a physician or other service provider.

You may feel angry with the person who died for not taking better care of themselves. You may feel angry with family members for what they did or didn't do or say. You may feel angry with yourself, thinking that there was something you should or shouldn't have done or said. You may feel angry with a spiritual higher power.

It's also possible that you may feel angry and not know (or not want to know) who you're angry with or what you're angry about. For example, you may simply be angry that the person died and you can't see or speak or talk with them anymore. In these instances, you may try to tell yourself that you shouldn't feel angry; but when anger isn't understood or expressed, it can become more intense and unpredictable. You may find yourself exploding in situations where normally you wouldn't.

Anger can protect or distract you from other, painful feelings, such as sadness, loneliness or despair. If you're not yet ready to feel these other emotions, anger can be a way to hold them back. This isn't wrong – it's just a way of coping. Some other words that might describe your anger are irritation, frustration, resentment, upset, tiredness or disappointment.

Defuse your anger.

Find ways to safely let the steam off. Physical activities that use big muscle groups are great. Try racket sports, running, yoga or aerobics. If your physical health isn't strong, you might try gentler activities such as walking, stretching or swimming. Repetitive actions are good: Hammering, chopping, digging and kneading can help to release some of the energy that builds up with anger.

Be safe.

Take steps to prevent your anger from hurting you or other people. Learn about what you can do with these feelings when they surface, such as going for a walk or spending time in a soothing environment. Stop activities such as driving. Take a few slow breaths. Try writing or journaling about whatever is on your mind. You might need to take a 'time out' by putting some distance between you and someone else. Tell the other person you need time out and when you will return, then walk away.

Express yourself.

Tell the whole story. Be specific about all of your thoughts and feelings. Tell the story until you are clear about your anger. What and who is it about? Try doing this through letter writing, journaling, art projects or conversation with a counsellor or trusted friend. This may help you to see the situation more clearly and to decide if you need or want to do anything about it.

Take constructive action.

Once you've found clarity about your anger and what you want to do, identify the specific steps you need to take. You might send a letter to someone or you might work towards creating a change in education, policy or procedure. This may also be a time for forgiveness, letting go or acceptance of what can't be changed.

Fear, Worry and Anxiety

Fear is a powerful emotion. When you feel afraid, you may have strong physical reactions such as a racing or pounding heart, rapid breathing, sweaty hands or upset stomach. You may also feel nervous, anxious, prickly or tearful.

Fear usually alerts you to a danger but when you're grieving, you may feel afraid even though there seems to be no danger present. You may feel anxious about leaving your home, going to new places or being around people. You may also be afraid of the intensity of your own emotions and wonder if you're going crazy. You may worry about losing control, thinking that if you let your feelings out you won't be able to stop them.

You may feel scared by certain thoughts or memories of the person who died, their illness or their death. You may worry that these memories are all you have left of the person. You may also worry about illnesses or risks that normally wouldn't concern you, or you may have thoughts that you or another person in your life will die. These worries and fears are a natural response to your experience with someone else's death and will gradually lessen over time.

Name your fear.

Anytime you feel fearful or worried, stop what you are doing and simply notice. Breathe slowly and deeply, and ask yourself, "What is going on with me right now?" If you think you are having anxiety or panic attacks, ask your doctor or a counsellor for help and advice.

Ask questions and take action.

Ask yourself questions such as: "Am I doing or not doing anything to cause myself to feel scared or worried? What do I need right now? Is there anything I can do at this time to dispel or lessen my fear? Is there anywhere I can go?"

Who can help and what can they do? What other kinds of help are available to me?" Using these questions, order your thoughts and then take small, focused steps to lessen your fears or worries. As you begin to take action, you may find that your feelings change.

Identify what helps you.

Pay attention to what helps you feel better or worse. Does it feel better to be alone or with other people? Does it help to tell yourself that you are safe, that there is no danger, that you are OK? Is there a person you can call or some physical activity you can do, such as going for a walk or cleaning the house? Would it help to hold on to someone or something for comfort such as a partner, pillow, teddy bear or pet? Would a bath or massage help? Is prayer, music or meditation a comfort.

Learn breathing and relaxation techniques.

For example, throughout the day, take time to breathe slowly and deeply. Take a big breath in through your nose and let it out through your mouth with a sigh. Repeat until you feel more relaxed.

BC Anxiety: anxietybc.com

Mental Health/Substance Use Services (IH): 250-469-7070

Westbank First Nation (Community/Health Services): 250-768-0227

Making Room for Your Feelings

Whatever feelings you may have, remember, they are feelings that will come and go.

One thing you can count on is that your feelings will change. You won't always feel the way you do right now. Eventually, the strong emotions that are so difficult now will ease their hold on you as you adjust to living with loss, making life itself a little easier to manage again.

What makes it difficult

What's "difficult" about grief?

Grief is rarely easy. Sometimes grief can feel very complicated, overwhelming or long-lasting. You may feel unable to cope; you may feel stuck or you may wonder if it will ever end. You may feel that you no longer know who you are or that your world has changed. This can happen soon after a death or it may happen later.

Even "normal" grief can sometimes seem difficult. Why is this? There are many reasons, such as the following:

- Circumstances or nature of the death
- Lack of support or understanding by those around you
- Competing demands and responsibilities
- Multiple losses
- History of depression, anxiety, trauma, abuse or addiction

Any of these can make your grieving process more difficult. The information provided here is intended to help you to understand your grief and create ways to cope with it. Not all of this information will be relevant to your situation. Look for what seems useful to you right now.

Here are some general tips for dealing with "difficult" grief:

- Seek and accept offers of practical and emotional support (e.g., prepared meals, transportation, nonjudgmental listening).
- Look for ways to honour your memory of the person who has died.
- Find people and places where you can freely and safely express your feelings, or record your thoughts and feelings privately through journaling or audio recording.
- As much as you can, be patient with and kind to yourself. Remind yourself that you are in a difficult situation and that you're doing the best that you can.
- Remind yourself that you are the best expert about your grief. Your grief is what you say it is because you are the one experiencing it.

Circumstances or nature of the death

Certain kinds of death, by their very nature, are generally more difficult to grieve than others. You may feel strong emotions, or you may feel numb or have difficulty believing that the death is real. Examples of these kinds of death include:

- Intentional traumatic deaths, such as suicide or homicide – These deaths are usually disturbing because of the suffering involved. If you're grieving a death by murder or suicide, you may have questions that can't be fully answered. You may ask, "Why?" and wonder if there is something more you could or should have done.
- Accidental deaths, such as motor vehicle accidents, drownings or plane crashes – Again, these deaths often leave a grieving person with upsetting images and unanswered questions.
- Untimely deaths, such as the death of a child – Most parents do not expect to outlive their children. The death of a child upsets a sense of natural order, which can lead you to question your beliefs or shake your trust in life.

- Ambiguous deaths, such as when the person’s body is not found – Putting a body to rest is often the last chance to say goodbye to someone. When there is no body, you may feel that you don’t have closure.
- Sudden, unexpected deaths—such as those caused by heart attacks, aneurysms, medical failures, or accidents—can be especially difficult. When you’ve had no time to prepare or say goodbye, you may experience additional longing, regret, guilt, or anger.

What may help

- Understand that it may take more time to accept this reality.
- Having detailed information about the death and what happened may help you to accept that the death has happened.
- Remind yourself that some degree of “denial,” numbness or disbelief can be a healthy way to cope.
- If you find that you’re blaming yourself for the death, talk with a trusted friend or professional who will hear you out while offering support and reassurance.
- If you feel overwhelmed by the number of calls or inquiries from people, ask someone you trust to keep others informed of your needs and wishes and to receive messages on your behalf.

Lack of support or understanding by those around you

No matter how the death happened, most grieving people need and hope for emotional and practical support. Unfortunately, it isn’t always offered. Below are some reasons why this might happen:

- In general, our culture is fast-paced and used to “quick fixes.” If your grief lasts longer than other people think it should, you may begin to feel left behind and alone. You may also wonder if there is something wrong with you.
- If your usual support people are also grieving, they may be unable to give you the support you need. Because everyone grieves in their own way, family or friends may not understand or be able to respond to your needs at this time.
- You may find that people who have had no personal experience with loss and grief are unsure or unaware of how to help you.
- If your relationship with the person who died was secret or met with disapproval by friends and family, you may feel that you are silenced in your grief – that there is no place for it. (This is sometimes called “disenfranchised grief.”)

What may help

- Remind yourself that grief is not something to be hurried or “fixed.” No one else can set a timeline for your grief.
- Be understanding of other people who are grieving this same death. If they are unable to support you, find other people who can.
- If you are feeling alone in your grief, reach out to trusted friends, family, professionals or a support group.
- Remember that what others say about grief and loss may be true for them, but that doesn’t necessarily make it right for you.

Competing demands and responsibilities

Life goes on in spite of grief. This is a time when you need to do some re-balancing. Grief may take energy that will no longer be available for other work. At the same time, you may have duties, obligations or responsibilities that won't go away, in which case you may need to put some of your grieving "on hold."

- You may feel pressured to return to work or school before you are ready.
- You may have caregiving responsibilities – for example, children or aging parents.
- You may have additional responsibilities as a result of the death, such as running a business, selling property or settling an estate.

What may help

- If taking a leave of absence is not possible, consider other ways to reduce your workload. Are there other tasks that you could give up, even temporarily? Could friends or family take over some of your work for a while (e.g. cooking or cleaning)?
- Give thought to which caregiving responsibilities you absolutely must do and which you could let go of for now. Is there anyone else who could take on some of these or help with them for a short while?
- Remind yourself that some tasks are short-lived and must be completed immediately, while others can wait. Set priorities and try to pace yourself.
- You may need to put parts of your grief "on hold" while you complete a task. If this happens, make sure that there is time for your grief later.

Multiple losses

You may have experienced other losses and other deaths recently or long ago. Although each of these will have been different, you may find that this latest death has had a much bigger impact on you than you expected. You may feel numb or you may feel overwhelmed by emotions that link one loss to another. Some of the other losses that may now be affecting you may be responsibilities that won't go away, in which case you may need to put some of your grieving "on hold."

Other types of losses:

- Non-death losses – such as a divorce or separation, job loss, a move or retirement.
- Unresolved bereavements – such as an earlier death that you may not have been able to grieve.
- Cumulative grief – such as another significant death or a number of deaths or losses that happened recently or close together.
- Secondary losses – such as a loss of a role, home, income, friendships or faith.

What may help

- Learn to balance time for grieving with time for resting, distraction or activity.
- Identify other losses. Look for themes: How are these losses linked together? How are they similar? How are they different?
- Re-visit earlier deaths and allow yourself to grieve what you lost.
- Make room for healing and rebuilding. Take time for what you need.
- Seek support or solitude according to your needs and coping style.

History of depression, anxiety, trauma, abuse or addiction

Grief can leave you vulnerable to setbacks if you have – or have had – difficulties with depression, anxiety, trauma, abuse or addiction. It can be hard to know what your grief is and what is, for example, a return to depression.

- Some people experience a degree of depression and/or anxiety while grieving. Usually, this is not severe or long-lasting.
- Memories of traumatic or abusive experiences may resurface when you're grieving. You may have strong or confusing feelings related to those experiences.
- Addictive patterns may return or intensify while you're grieving. Addictions are often an attempt to cope, so while grieving you may find yourself drawn to an old – or new – addiction.

What may help

- Many people manage depression and anxiety through self-talk, meditation, physical activity or relaxation exercises. However, if you find your daily functioning is negatively affected or if you feel that you are at risk of a relapse, make an appointment with your doctor. Even short-term use of medications can sometimes be helpful.
- You may need time and assistance to sort out how old losses from past trauma or abuse are affecting you in the present. Particularly where the person who has died was abusive towards you, your feelings may change unpredictably. For example, you may feel anger at one moment and intense sadness the next.
- Remind yourself of all that you have learned about your addiction and how this coping mechanism has not been helpful to you. Use the tools you have learned to help you cope and stay healthy. Reach out to supports that have been there for you in the past.

Intense relationship with the person who died

Death brings an end to a life, but not necessarily to the relationship you had with the person who died. If you had either a particularly close or an especially troubled relationship with the person who died, you may experience difficulties when grieving. For example, you may feel guilty about going on with your life without that person, or you may feel angry that you never received an apology from someone who hurt you.

- You may feel you have “unfinished business” – that your person died before you had a chance to say or do something that was important to you.
- You may struggle with unexpected feelings or thoughts, such as relief that the person is dead or surprise that you're still angry with them.
- You may not have the support of other family members who had a different relationship with the person who has died.

What may help

- Identify and explore any unresolved issues between you and the person who died.
- Make room for all of your feelings, whatever they may be.
- Identify resources, supports and options that may help you.
- Remember that your relationship with the person who died is unique and no one else can tell you what your grief “should” be.

“Getting Stuck”

At some point, many grieving people feel that they are “stuck.” To you or others in your life, it may seem that nothing has changed or you may feel disappointed that you are not “better.” Even though this can be part of the normal grieving process, it can be confusing. Remind yourself that there is often more going on “under the surface” and that you are moving at a pace that is right for you.

If you are feeling really concerned or frustrated about your grief, this may be a time when it would help to talk with a counselor.

What may help

- Be patient and remain open to change. This may be a time to rest or slow down.
- Find ways to control upsetting thoughts and emotions and to pace your grieving. Seek help with this if you need it.
- Learn to conserve your energy and reduce stress by setting realistic goals and priorities.
- Pursue new interests. Explore physical and creative activities that may help to discharge or re-direct powerful emotions.
- Look carefully for signs that your grief has changed.
- Seek out supportive individuals or groups who can help you see that your grief is normal and that you are not going crazy.

Trust yourself

As much as possible and as difficult as it might be, it’s important to listen to and learn from your own heart. You may find that in the midst of your suffering and confusion, there is an inner wisdom that you can – and should – trust. This doesn’t mean that you should ignore what others say, but it’s important to weigh their opinions and advice against what you know about yourself.

Coping With Challenges

The death of someone important to you brings many changes in your life. As you are adjusting to these changes, there may also be challenges. Some of these will be practical in nature, others will be emotional.

Decision-making

It can be difficult to make decisions – even small ones – when you are grieving. This may be especially true when it is your partner who has died and you do not have the usual person there to discuss plans, consider options and share decisions. Your memory, concentration, and thinking may be affected by grief, leaving you feeling less sure of yourself than usual.

What may help

If possible, delay major decisions until you feel comfortable and confident about making them. If you can't wait to make a decision, the following guidelines may help you:

- Talk about the decision with a person you trust. This might be a professional, family member or friend.
- Explain the problem and your goal as clearly as possible.
- Make a list of as many solutions as you can think of. Note the pros and cons and all the steps needed for each solution.
- Review all the information and look for anything you may have missed.
- Choose the best option from your list.
- Follow through step by step.

Financial matters

Settling an estate is difficult for most grieving people. You may feel worried that you don't have the knowledge you need to deal with these financial and legal matters. You may need or want help as you pay bills, make decisions about money, real estate or plan for your future.

What may help

The following guidelines may help you to make good decisions and avoid later regrets:

- Take your time and be cautious when making decisions.
- Ask a reputable lawyer, accountant or financial advisor for help.
- Ask your bank or credit union for help.
- Ask trusted friends for recommendations, but use your own good judgment as well.
- If you can't get a recommendation for a particular professional, ask for references and professional affiliations.
- Before making any final decisions, review your plans with a trusted professional.

Personal belongings

You may experience powerful memories and emotions while going through the personal belongings of someone who has died, making the task seem overwhelming. You may not have the energy or you may feel unable to decide what to do with them. You may feel comforted by some of these items and find the idea of “getting rid of” them to be very painful.

Sometimes, other family members will have different thoughts about this task than you do. It’s important to talk about these differences openly, keeping in mind that compromise might be necessary.

What may help

There is no particular time when you must take on this task, so it’s OK to wait to do it when you feel more ready.

- Take your time. Do what feels right to you.
- You may find it easier to do this task a bit at a time; or you may want to set aside some time to do it all at once.
- Sort things into groups: things to keep, things for family and friends, things for sale or charity, things to decide about later.
- Ask friends or family members to help you.

Memories and reminders

You may find yourself thinking over and over about past events. This is natural and can help you to come to terms with what has happened. You may also find it difficult to spend time in certain places that carry memories for you.

Over time, this will likely become easier as the intensity of your feelings and painful memories lessen.

What may help

Allow yourself to go over memories unless this begins to seriously interfere with your everyday life. Know that visiting familiar places may be difficult and do what you can to make this easier.

- Share your memories with others who will just listen – friends, family or members of a bereavement support group.
- If you have questions about the care received by the person who died, about their illness or final hours, contact a health care provider who can talk about this with you.
- If you are troubled by thoughts about what you or others did or didn’t do, talk to a trusted friend, a bereavement volunteer or a bereavement counsellor.
- As you are adjusting to life without the person who died, you may want to change your routines or schedules. For example, you could sleep or eat in different rooms than you did before. You may also find it helpful to re-arrange some of your furniture or temporarily put away sentimental objects.
- It’s OK for you to avoid certain places for a while.
- If you need to re-visit a place that holds painful memories for you, ask someone you trust to go with you.

Changes in relationships

After someone dies, other relationships may also change. You may notice that some people behave differently around you. You may be surprised or disappointed by things they say and do, or don't say and do. Perhaps some people you were counting on haven't been there for you, while other people have unexpectedly come forward to offer their support. It's also possible that you may not want to visit with people while you're grieving, especially if you worry that your true feelings will be a burden to others.

What may help

It's important that you pay attention to your changing needs and responses. Take steps to find the support you need.

- Seek and spend time with welcoming people who are welcoming with your grief.
- Let people know what is—and is not—helpful to you.
- Tell supportive friends about the things you find difficult and ask for their help. (For example, if you feel you can't make plans too far in advance, ask if you can have the option to change your mind later or leave early.)
- Say no to people or plans that you don't feel ready for.
- Think about joining a grief support group.

Dreams and visitations

You may have dreams that seem real or sense the presence of the person who has died. This may be a comfort to you or you may find it upsetting. It is also possible that you may long for a dream or visit from the person who died but not have it.

What may help

Remind yourself that these experiences – or lack of them – are normal.

- If you often wake up in distress after a dream about the person, please consider learning meditation or relaxation techniques.
- If you are troubled during the day by images or feelings, do some physical exercise: Walk, run, swim or paddle, go to the gym.
- If you are curious about your experiences and want to know more about them, write them down in a journal and make time to think about them.
- If you wonder whether your experiences are normal but feel hesitant about speaking to someone about them, seek out a trusted friend, counsellor or another grieving person.

Looking after your health

While you are grieving, you may not have the energy to look after yourself, but it's important that you try to do so. You are at greater risk of illness and accident due to stress, fatigue and distraction. You may not be eating or sleeping as you normally would. As much as possible, it's important to eat and sleep regularly.

What may help

Take time to notice how connected your body, thoughts, feelings and beliefs are.

General

- Visit your family doctor and inform them that you are grieving.
- Your energy level will go up and down. Pace yourself.
- Exercise regularly. Choose something you can stick with and enjoy.
- This might be a time when you are tempted to use alcohol or drugs to escape the pain of your grief. Be careful in your use of medications, alcohol and other drugs since these can interfere with the natural grieving process.
- Avoid unhelpful or harmful coping patterns or people.

Sleep

If you have trouble falling or staying asleep –

- Avoid alcohol, caffeine, watching television and engaging in physical exercise in the evening.
- Try natural remedies such as herbal teas, warm milk, soothing baths, quiet music or relaxation exercises.
- You may also find it helpful to change your sleeping habits for a while (e.g. sleep in a different room or on the other side of the bed, go to bed later, sleep with an extra pillow or a stuffed animal for comfort).
- Read something light and easy such as a magazine or recall a favourite scene or trip in as much detail as possible. You might also try “daydreaming” by planning a trip or plotting a novel. Just be sure to avoid any activity that is stimulating.
- If you don’t fall asleep after 30 minutes, get up and do something pleasant and relaxing for a few minutes.
- If you can’t get or return to sleep, let go of any intention to sleep and allow yourself to simply rest.
- Prescription medicines can help temporarily or on occasion.

If you are sleeping more than usual –

- Remind yourself that this can be normal for a grieving person and that it is temporary.
- As much as possible, limit your activities and responsibilities to conserve your energy.
- Notice when or where you feel most sleepy.
- As much as possible, give yourself time for extra sleep. Try to nap or rest as needed.

Eating

- Even if you don’t feel hungry, eat small amounts of healthy foods to give you energy. You may also want to add a vitamin or nutritional drink.
- If you feel more hungry than usual, eat healthy snacks and meals such as fruits, nuts, and vegetables. Avoid snacking on ‘junk food.’
- If making meals is difficult for you, try some ready-made, healthy meals from a grocery store or food catering service.
- If eating alone is difficult, eat in a different room or sit at a different spot at the table. Accept meal invitations from supportive friends or invite them in for take-out meals. You might consider letting trusted friends know about your difficulties and asking them to help out in any way they can. Think about setting a regular lunch or dinner date with family or friends. For example, this could be once a month or once a week.
- If you have never prepared meals before, contact Kelowna Community Resources (kcr.ca), your local recreational or Seniors’ Centre to ask about cooking classes or sharing kitchens.

Ten Things to Know About Grief

When you are grieving, it helps to know what to expect. Although your grief is unique to your relationship with the person who has died, there are some common themes.

Victoria Hospice staff, volunteers and bereaved people identified the ten things discussed below as important in understanding your grief that Victim Services thought may be helpful pass along to you.

1. Global effect of loss

The death of someone very close to you can be a life-transforming event that affects all aspects of yourself and your life. It can feel as if your world has been shattered. The grief process is the journey between how things were and how they will be. It is an interior journey, like a labyrinth, moving toward central issues of meaning.

2. Grief is a natural process

The grief you feel at the death of someone important to you is the consequence of living and loving, of your meaningful connections with others. Grief is a normal part of life and a natural response to loss. Information about the phases of grief can help you to understand the responses that you experience.

3. Individual differences in grieving styles

Although grief has some definable outlines, how you grieve is a unique result of your personality, your past history of loss and the relationship that you had with the person who died. Each person in your family will grieve in their own way and with their own timetable. To cope with their grief, some people will openly express the emotions that they experience while others will control their thoughts and emotions. Neither of these styles is right or wrong; each can be an effective way through grief.

4. Children and grief

Children look to the important adults in their lives to learn how to grieve. They are sensitive to the moods and behaviour of the adults around them and will not talk about their thoughts and feelings of loss unless the adults do. Children are frightened by what they do not know or understand, so simple information about death and grief is helpful to them.

5. Social connections and support

When you are grieving, you want and need support from others now more than ever. Due to awkwardness or their own feelings of grief, some people may not be able to provide the understanding and caring that you expected from them. Because all of the relationships in your life will be altered in some way after a major loss, it is normal to look at, change or potentially end certain relationships. You may find that the company of other bereaved people is particularly comforting.

6. Experiences you might have in grief

When you are actively grieving, you can feel very different from your usual self as your emotions, your mind and your reactions seem unreliable. It is possible that you are feeling intense pain and emotions that you have never felt before. You are not going crazy, this is a natural part of grief. Responses such as fatigue, forgetfulness and irritability result from your attention and energy being directed toward your grief. This is part of the natural adjustment to loss.

7. Fluctuations in the grief process

As you journey along the path of grief, you will find that your feelings and responses vary at different times and phases of the process. There will be unpredictable ups and downs that may be felt like waves of grief or as good days and bad days. It is important to understand and value the good days as breaks or rests in your particular journey.

8. Self-care and what helps

There are things that you can do to help yourself during this challenging time. Getting information about grief can help you to understand your responses and your journey. Be gentle and patient with yourself as you grieve. Do what you can to keep some normal routine for health and social contact. Support may come from a variety of sources: family, friends, bereavement groups, chat rooms, etc. If you are concerned about yourself and your grief, seek professional counselling help.

9. Time for grief

Despite what you may hear about 'getting over it' or 'the first year', there are no timelines for grief. It takes as long as it takes. Often your grief journey is longer than you or other people expected and you may feel pressure to be better than you are by now, whenever this is. It is certain that this loss will continue to be part of your life and that you will always have times when you think about, miss and grieve for the person who died.

10. Grief is a spiritual journey of healing

The death of someone significant in your life brings change that puts you on a different life path. Nothing will ever be the same, yet you must somehow go on and find meaning in the new path before you. As the journey continues, you may experience healing and personal growth as a result of the suffering you have endured and the lessons that you have learned about what you truly value.

Special Days and Holidays

After someone dies, you may find that your grief surfaces again and again. Often this seems to happen ‘out of the blue’ and it may feel like an unwelcome intrusion. You may have been enjoying yourself one moment and then be in tears the next. You may also notice that certain days, holidays or public events are more likely than others to cause your grief to increase or return.

If feelings of grief return or increase – perhaps even years later – you may feel surprised or concerned. It may help to know that the experience of heightened feelings at particular times is a common and normal aspect of the grieving process. It’s also possible that your grief will seem strangely missing on one or more of these occasions. You may wonder why you aren’t feeling something and become concerned that this is not normal. At these times, the absence of your grief may leave you feeling guilty, confused, or distressed.

If your feelings on a special day aren’t what you or other people expect, don’t be alarmed. Grief has a timing of its own, sometimes appearing – or disappearing – when we least expect it. This ebb and flow of feelings is very natural and is a sign of healthy coping.

Some of these ‘special’ days are personal or family events, such as birthdays, anniversaries, graduations, reunions or funerals. Other special days may include public holidays or celebrations, such as Christmas, Mother’s Day, Father’s Day or Valentine’s Day. In addition, there may be other public events, such as a celebrity’s funeral or a tragic accident, that tap into your own grief.

When we are grieving, it is natural to deeply feel the absence of the person who has died. At special times during the year, this felt absence is often intensified. Remember, there is no “right” or “wrong” when it comes to mourning – there is only what works for you and figuring this out takes practice.

Here are some of the feelings you may notice on special days:

- Confusion
- Sadness
- Longing
- Irritability
- Worry
- Frustration

For a period of time you may also experience:

- Loss of appetite
- Difficulty sleeping
- Upset stomach
- Repeating thoughts or memories
- Frequent sighing or need to catch your breath
- Disinterest in usual activities

Personal and Family Events

- Birthday, weddings, funerals, christenings
- Reunions, graduations
- Other anniversaries – Religious, Cultural

You may find yourself especially bereft or lonely on special occasions when the person who died would have accompanied you. You may feel at a loss when considering invitations to other people's celebrations or get-togethers. Whether or not you choose to attend, consider reaching out to a supportive friend or family member who will respect your choices and be there for you.

There may be special days when you most keenly miss the person who has died because they were the only other person who shared or celebrated an event with you (such as a first date or a shared trip). The anniversary of the person's death is also likely to be a significant day for you. Although these days can be trying, you may find them easier if you make plans ahead of time. How might you spend the day? Are there people you would like to ask to spend time with you? Is there a particular place you'd like to be – or avoid?

Symbolic gestures allow us to acknowledge how loved ones remain a part of our lives even in their absence. They can enrich our celebrations with those who live and survive with us.

Tips for Coping with Personal and Family Events

- Make plans that can be changed.
- Tell friends and family what you need and ask for their support.
- Include the person in your thoughts, prayers or meditation.
- Celebrate a special day by taking time to do something in memory of the person who died.
- Remind yourself that it's okay to laugh as well as cry.
- Look for ways to honour the person who died. Light a special candle, make a memorial planting in a garden, create a memorial space or scrapbook with photos and mementos, sponsor a memorial award or scholarship, make a donation to a meaningful charity.

Public Holidays and Celebrations

- Easter, Thanksgiving, Halloween
- Mother's Day, Father's Day, Valentine's Day
- Christmas and the winter holiday season

Whether you are in the midst of celebrating your own traditions with family and friends or surrounded by the festivities of others, your grief may reappear as you are reminded of the person and how deeply the loss of that relationship has impacted you. This may be true for you even if the relationship was difficult or troublesome.

If ever there was a time to treat yourself like a cherished friend, this is it! You may need to lower your own expectations as well as talk to others about what you need. If you cry, let that be okay. Allow yourself to experience any sadness that may come. Make room for your feelings, whatever they may be.

Tips for Coping with Special Days and Holidays

- Ask friends and family to support you in making plans that you can change according to your needs. You may need to accept or decline invitations on a 'last-minute' basis.
- Continue traditions that you enjoy and leave out those that you don't.
- If you have a faith community, use rituals that support you in your grief.
- Give yourself (or someone else) flowers or another treat.
- Talk with other bereaved people, or with friends and family members who've experienced losses to find out how they get through these special days and holidays.

Christmas and the Winter Holiday Season

For many people, December is the most difficult time of the year. Memories of past celebrations with family members or friends who are no longer here can magnify feelings of loss, and you may want to avoid reminders of celebration and togetherness. As the holidays approach, it can be helpful to share your concerns, feelings and apprehensions with someone. Let people know what is difficult for you, and accept offers of help.

Tips for Coping with the Holiday Season

- Think about how you will respond to others when they offer holiday good wishes. You can simply say "Thank you" or "Best wishes to you".
- Consider cutting back on your holiday traditions by not sending cards, or enlist the help of other people with meals and decorating.
- If you find Christmas shopping upsetting, it may help to shop early, to shop by telephone, the Internet or catalogue, or to take along an understanding friend. Family members may be willing to shop for you if they realize how difficult this is for you. You may also decide to go "shopless" this year and make a charitable donation in the name of the person who has died.
- Consider alternatives such as developing new traditions, going away, eating at restaurants or buying gift cards.
- Create a special decoration and give it a place of honour.
- Remember that you can always do things differently next year.

The New Year

Whether you are facing the start of a new calendar year or the beginning of your second year of bereavement, the "New Year" may bring unexpected feelings. You might have been looking forward, anticipating the relief, 'healing' and improved well-being you were going to feel at having made it through the difficult times. Sometimes the New Year doesn't live up to expectations, and you may find yourself feeling anxious, apprehensive or let down.

Remind yourself that grief does not suddenly disappear. It is a journey with its own timeline. It takes time and energy, and it can be hard to see just where you are at times. You may wonder if you are getting anywhere at all. Try to let go of any expectations that you or anyone else has and instead trust in yourself and the process.

Let yourself be supported by people who allow you to be who and where you are.

Tips for the New Year

- Review the past year – the ups, downs, accomplishments, challenges and ‘gifts’. Consider new approaches if old ones aren’t working.
- Don’t compare your grief to that of others. Treat yourself with patience and kindness.
- Purchase a gift for yourself that your loved one might have bought for you.
- If you feel that friends and family are now less willing or able to support you, consider joining a bereavement support group.
- Give yourself permission to not be your ‘usual self’ or to take ‘time off’. Allow yourself to do things differently – or not at all. Acknowledge that you are doing the best you can.
- Allow a place in your life for your grief. Amidst the activities and demands of everyday life, plan restorative time alone or with supportive others.

Grieving Families

Special occasions can be particularly stressful for grieving family members. Although your family members may be grieving the same person’s death, each of you had a unique relationship with the person who died and so your experiences of grief may be quite different. In addition, everyone grieves in their own way and at their own pace. Some people openly share and express grief while others do not.

Differences may also be seen in how people cope with special days and holidays. When coming together for special days and events, it may help to be flexible and work toward compromise.

Consider meeting with your family members prior to special days and holidays so that you can prepare and strategize ahead of time. Good communication and patience will help to reduce family tensions.

Tips for Talking with Family Members

- Make room for differences. Talk honestly about needs and wishes.
- Acknowledge difficulties. Discuss how you want to handle the changes to family duties, routines and roles.
- Adjust your expectations. Family members may not be able to support one another as they have in the past.
- Try to find a balance between who and what is missing and what remains.
- When planning family gatherings, explore whether or how to include memories of the person who has died.

Children and youth may also experience changes in their grief during special days and holidays – but your child may not have difficulty with the same days that you do and may not share your reactions or feelings. Ask about their thoughts and feelings. Find out what is most important and remember to include your child when making any plans.

Tips for Talking with Children and Youth – Questions to Ask

- What part of this day/event is most important to you?
- What about this day/event do you think might be hard for you?
- How would you like to remember the person who died on this occasion?
- Is there any part of this day that you don’t want to participate in?

Understand that this may be a time of heightened emotions and low energy for you and your family. Aim to be kind and patient with yourself and each other. Remind yourself that these special days will be different now, and that your family is just beginning to learn how to cope with those differences.

Caring for Yourself

Holidays are usually times filled with memories and you may feel especially tender and vulnerable. Consider making time for yourself and your memories as a part of new holiday traditions.

Caring for yourself can be another way of honouring the person who died. Many times, the more we need to take care of ourselves, the less we do it. You may notice that you have been ignoring your own health or don't care very much about yourself; or you may believe that you don't deserve self-care.

If you have a physical problem brought on by stress or an emotional reaction, try to pay attention to it. Grief at any time is tiring and challenging. When special days and holidays approach, you may need to pay more attention to yourself and ask, "What do I most need now?"

Tips from Other Bereaved People

- Exercise. Stretch. Breathe deeply.
- Rest. Slow down or stop. Grieving requires a lot of energy.
- Balance time alone and time with others.
- Eat foods and drink fluids that are healthy.
- Trust yourself. Be guided by your own instincts.
- Spend time in nature or take a walk around the block.
- Connect with a new or old friend for lunch, a movie or a walk.
- Simplify daily life and responsibilities whenever and wherever you can.
- See your doctor for a complete physical and be sure to let them know that someone important to you has died.
- Be gentle, patient and tolerant with yourself. Take it one step at a time.

Expect your feelings to change, perhaps without much warning.

There may be times when you feel sad, angry or frustrated.

You may feel loneliness or longing for the person who has died. At other times, you may experience joy and laughter or enjoy yourself for a few moments – and then feel guilty.

Remind yourself that this is part of the healing process.

Try to make room for your feelings, whatever they may be.

Grief After Suicide

Your grief after suicide may feel quite different than the grief you have felt after other kinds of losses. Usually, the death of someone from suicide has a much more intense and long-lasting impact. When someone you know dies by suicide you may struggle with complex social, emotional and cultural issues that can make your grief overwhelming and isolating. You may experience changes and challenges in your personal relationships, your spiritual beliefs, your concentration and your memory. Your emotions and general health may also become unsettled and fragile. Grief may affect all realms of your life.

Things to Know About Suicide

No one thing, person or event leads a person to choose suicide. In your grief, you will search desperately for a reason why your loved one died. It is important that you understand that this act was the result of many factors in this person's life and not one particular event or discussion. People who die by suicide often feel completely hopeless about themselves and their lives. Suicide can be seen as the only release from their pain.

Sometimes the person who choose suicide has withdrawn from friends and family. Once a decision about suicide has been made the person seems preoccupied, remote or even really happy. In the days before their death, you may have felt out of touch with this person or had trouble reaching them, either in person or by phone.

A suicide note only reflects the person's state of mind at the time that it was written. Suicide notes are generally left to identify or explain the person's level of despair, accuse or blame someone else, give away personal belongings, alleviate any responsibility that others might assume or say goodbye. If there was a suicide note, you may hope that it will explain why this happened. However, the person's frame of mind when they composed the note doesn't necessarily reflect their frame of mind when they developed a plan for suicide and followed through with it.

People who die from suicide are not necessarily mentally ill or from abusive families. Although the person's mental and social stability is something that friends and family may question intensely, it is important not to assume that because the person chose suicide, they were unloved or 'crazy'. People who die from suicide are more likely to be perfectionists who are highly critical of themselves and have low self-esteem. They often fear that they will not be able to cope with a major life change or feel that they cannot live up to their own, or others' expectations.

Things to Know about Grief after Suicide

Your Feelings

You may experience intense anger.

This may be directed at people whom you perceive to have been negligent: such as counsellors, friends, doctors and yourself. Survivors of suicide often feel in hindsight that they missed or ignored some earlier calls for help or warning signals. It is common to feel angry with the person who died. It seems now that they did not value their life and your relationship as you did. You may feel angry they just gave up or that they didn't consider how devastating this loss would be for the people who cared about them.

You may feel tremendous guilt and blame.

You may feel that something you did or didn't do contributed to the despair that they felt when they chose suicide. If your relationship with the person who died was conflicted, you may accuse yourself of being the cause of their unhappiness. You may have been aware of this person's history of mental illness or risky behaviour, such as previous suicide attempts, drug or alcohol abuse, but given up trying to help them for reasons of your own health or happiness.

You may feel ashamed or judged by others.

Many people think that people who die from suicide must have been mentally ill or from dysfunctional families. Although this isn't generally true, some people may still be critical of you and your family. Others, who genuinely care about you, may stay away because they don't know what to say or how to be helpful.

You may fear that other friends or family will choose suicide.

When someone you care about makes a choice to die in this way, you may worry that other people in distress will follow suit. 'Copycat' suicides have been a concern in schools and other close communities.

You may feel betrayed or abandoned by the person who died.

You may have thought that they were living a normal and reasonably happy life. Now, you wonder whether your entire relationship was based on false beliefs and lies. You may feel hurt and wonder why they didn't share their troubles with you.

You will experience deep sadness.

The feeling that someone you cared about felt hopeless and desperate enough to believe that suicide was their only option will magnify your sadness.

You may feel relief.

If your relationship with them was difficult and draining, part of you may be relieved that they will no longer be causing you distress.

You may feel peace or acceptance.

If they had been suffering for some time and it seemed as though nothing would ever improve, you may understand their desperation and their decision.

Your Thoughts

You may make up false stories about what happened.

You may want to say that the person had a heart attack or was in an accident. This dishonesty may be because of feelings of shame, discomfort or fear about the reactions of other people. Rather than protecting yourself and others, this denial keeps everyone silent and isolated. Family and friends may have some intuition or suspicion that the death was a suicide, or they will hear rumours. Telling a false story will only make your grief, and that of others, more conflicted and prolonged.

You may be flooded with WHY? questions.

You may have an insatiable need to examine every possible reason why your loved caused their death. You may be trying to answer unanswerable questions, trying to understand how they have chosen this final way to solve their problems. You may find that the why questions replay over and over in your head so that you are unable to focus on anything else.

You may be haunted by thoughts about the death.

Whether you witnessed the death or not, you may find that your mind keeps replaying the moments before, during and after it took place. You may be thinking about the things that you saw, smelled or heard, or you could be imagining these details. You may even want to go to the place of death and try to 'act out' the series of events that occurred. Horrible as this process is, it is normal and purposeful. Your mind is trying to understand, accept and desensitize you to what happened. You may also be trying to find a way to feel connected with the person who died or to say goodbye.

Your Relationships

You may find it difficult to be with other people for a number of reasons.

Your friends and family may be uncomfortable with your grief and so they either stay away or try to cheer you up. You may think that they couldn't possibly understand what you feel and you are finding it very difficult to talk about this loss. The absence of the friends or family, who can be with you, may feel like another loss.

Your grief may be so intense that you are distracted by it. It may be impossible for you to focus on anything other than this death. When you are with others you may find that thoughts, feelings and sensations about the death invade most of your interactions with others.

You may find it difficult to be with other people because you think or detect that they blame you or your family. Some people may unjustly blame you out of ignorance or their own suffering. They may be trying to make sense of the death and wanting to deflect the blame from themselves. It may have been easier to make you the scapegoat than face their own feelings of guilt. Also, if you are blaming yourself, you may wrongly assume that other people are too.

You may find it difficult to be with other people because you doubt your ability to see relationships as they really are. When someone close to you dies from suicide, you may suffer from low self-esteem and a lack of confidence in your own judgment. You may fear that you will experience more hurt if you continue to love and care about people.

Your Spiritual or Religious Beliefs

You may fear that suicide may be unforgivable in the eyes of a spiritual higher power.

Consequently, you may worry about their salvation and fear that your religious or spiritual community will also reject or condemn you because of how they died.

You may find yourself wondering what, if anything, you believe.

Any spiritual beliefs or values that you previously had may no longer feel true. Anger and disbelief may make it difficult for you to find comfort in the spiritual or religious values that you once held. You may be troubled by the lack of solace you find in the words of a spiritual higher power.

You may have questions about the value and meaning of life.

When someone you know dies by suicide, your confidence in your own perceptions and ideas can be deeply shattered. You may wonder what your purpose in this life really is and doubt your ability to meet future challenges.

You may consider suicide.

The intensity and suffering of your present grief may drive you to question whether your own life is worth living. You may question how you could endure so many struggles when it seems these feelings will always be there. If you are feeling suicidal, it is important that you get help immediately. Help is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week by calling the BC Crisis Center at 1-800-784-2433.

Your Body

You may experience physical pain or discomfort related to how the person died.

You also may experience physical symptoms that are characteristic of normal grief. This may include nausea, headache, stomach ache, chest pains, shortness of breath or general weakness and fatigue.

Strategies for Living with Grief after Suicide

Gather the facts as soon as you are ready.

Because it is likely that you will go over and over the suicide in your mind, it is important that you have as much concrete information as possible. It may be necessary to talk with emergency response personnel, the police or the coroner. You may want to ask a friend to be with you when you hear this information.

Be honest about what happened.

Explore what you believe to be true about your relationship with the person who died and the reasons for their death.

Identify people with whom you are able to be honest and vulnerable.

Usually these are people who won't grill you for details or overload you with their own opinions or 'quick fixes'. You may find that friends who can share in the questions rather than give you their answers are most helpful now.

Talk with others who have experienced a suicide loss.

Sometimes others who have been there or are working through similar tragedies are able to relate to your sorrow. It can be meaningful to connect with other people who have experienced loss due to suicide and a relief to be able to talk about suicide with people who 'get it'. A support group can provide a sense of connection—a safe place where everyone can share their experiences and support each other. Check out whether there is a support group for suicide griever in your area. You may also search the Internet for relevant discussions groups.

Go over and over the why questions, the suicide note and anything else, as often as you need to.

Sometimes writing these questions and the answers that you discover in a journal is helpful. You will come to a time when the partial answers are enough.

You may want to see a counsellor.

Sometimes talking things through with an experienced professional helps. Grief counseling provides bereaved people with an avenue to discuss their feelings and emotions. Although no one can take away the pain of your loss, a counsellor can give you a safe place to talk, identify ways to honor your loved one who has died and develop coping skills to care for yourself while grieving.

Accept your feelings.

Accepting means that you allow your feelings to be what they are without judging them or trying to change them. It involves being aware of your emotions and accepting that these feelings exist without trying to suppress or push them away. Discover helpful ways for you to express them.

Understand that your grief will be intense and sustained.

You are struggling to come to terms with a devastating death and its impact on your life. There is no 'quick fix' that will lessen or speed up your grief journey.

It is important that you 'get real' about guilt and blame.

When someone dies in this way you will struggle with issues of responsibility, guilt and blame. It might be helpful to make three lists: one about what the person who died is responsible for, another about what you are responsible for and another about what others are responsible for. You may want to share these lists with a friend who is able to be more objective. The part that you feel responsible for is the only part that you can do anything about.

Find a way to atone for mistakes that you made.

Even if you cannot undo the mistakes that you've made, you can change your behaviour and ask for forgiveness. You may find it helpful to pray or talk with a spiritual or religious leader in your community. You may also want to ask the person who died for forgiveness by writing a letter or doing something that you believe they would accept as a symbol of your regret or remorse about what you've done.

When you are ready, forgive yourself.

If you did make mistakes, you must ask yourself how long and hard you deserve to be punished. Is this self-inflicted punishment serving any useful purpose or does it only keep you stuck in painful patterns? It may be helpful to create a ritual of self-forgiveness that helps you to let go of your guilt.

Grief After Homicide

The grief process is very different when a death is the result of a homicide. After a homicide, it is normal to feel sorrow and the added powerlessness of not having the ability to protect, rescue, or comfort the person.

Additionally, following a homicide, the Criminal Justice System can take multiple years to complete or sometimes there is no arrest at all.

This complicates the grieving process.

The information below offers an overview of some unique emotions associated with homicide as well as present ideas on how to manage in this devastating time.

Things to know about grief after homicide

Individuals respond differently when losing a loved one to homicide. Each person has a unique relationship with the victim. In addition, if the family member has trauma history this may significantly impact how the death is experienced.

No two people grieve the same way, with the same intensity, for the same duration.

Common emotions unique to grieving a homicide death are: shock, anger, disbelief, intense grief, despair, numbness, guilt and emotional outbursts.

We have a natural tendency, especially in early grief, to attempt to avoid or ignore the reality of the event, which interrupts the process of grieving. This is a normal grief coping mechanism. Our body is protecting ourselves because we are not ready for the entirety of the truth at the current moment.

Others may find that they begin to fixate on the details regarding the event. This is another normal grief coping mechanism. Our brain is attempting to make sense of what happened.

Using avoidance or fixation has the potential to absorb thoughts and interfere with the grieving process if stuck in this thinking for a long period of time. If you believe this may be negatively impacting you, you are welcome to discuss your thoughts further with a Victim Service Caseworker.

Following a homicide, you may experience strong feelings of disconnect from the rest of the world or feel that the world is unsafe. If this is what you are thinking, it may be helpful to simply acknowledge what is fact and what is imagination. When bad things happen to those we love, we naturally take the exception and make it the reality. We begin to think it may happen to us as well.

Remind yourself: The entire world is not dangerous, even if it feels that way right now. You have suffered enough without feeling the exhaustion of being on constant alert.

There will be no sequential emotional path you follow when coping with traumatic death. Emotions come and go in no order. Sometimes they come all at once. You may be crying one moment and then enthralled with rage the next. When you are experiencing these emotions, be patient and kind to yourself. You are likely experiencing your worst nightmare and it is expected that you will feel conflicting thoughts and emotions throughout the process. You can begin to manage your grief with assistance from friends, family, Victim Services Caseworkers or support groups.

Starting the Grieving Process

Although there is no one way to grieve, Canadian Parents of Murdered Children¹ provided the following suggestions:

- Be honest about your feelings
- Find a safe way to release your anger
- Admit that you may need help
- Allow yourself to cry
- Allow yourself time to recover
- Do not compare your grief with that of others, as everyone is unique
- Surround yourself with supportive people
- Do not blame yourself
- Treasure your memories and share them with others
- Write down your feeling if that helps
- Be patient and tolerant with yourself – recovery is not an overnight phenomenon

Media Considerations

It is likely the media will attempt to report on a homicide, often providing inaccurate or sensitive information. The media may also not capture who your loved one was, which may be upsetting to you. Additionally, in some situations, the RCMP may speak about the incident. When they do this, they strive to respect the family's privacy.

Some find it helpful to avoid looking at the media, especially at the beginning. Others choose to speak with the media. If you decide to do this, please consider how it may impact the police investigation or trial. It is encouraged you consult with RCMP/Victim Services if you are unsure. Some of the benefits associated with speaking to the media are outlined in "If the Media Calls: A Guide for Crime Victims and Survivors²." For example, benefits include: an opportunity to tell your side (speak for the victim), create awareness and increase your feeling of support. At no point are you required to speak with the media. If you wish, your Victim Service Caseworker can assist you in avoiding media before or after court.

¹ Information obtained from Canadian Parents of Murdered Children website canadianpomc.ca²

Grief After Substance-Related Death

Losing a loved one to a fatal overdose or other harms associated with substance use is devastating and tragic. Some complicated emotions may arise, especially if you think the situation was avoidable. You are not alone in this experience.

Remember:

Regardless of what you think happened you did not cause this
and you are not to blame for what happened.

Common Emotions

Common emotions expressed when a loved one dies as a result of substance use are anger, guilt and isolation.¹

Anger is a very common reaction. You could feel angry at the world, angry at the substance, angry at the person who provided the substance or even angry at your loved one. It is important to acknowledge this emotion and find safe ways to express it. Sometimes anger can be the surface level emotion for a more complicated emotion. Once we begin to focus on our anger, we make room to uncover the deeper emotions that may be affecting us the most.

Guilt may arise as a result of many things. You may feel like you could have gotten the person help, or perhaps feel like you and/or your genetics influenced your loved one's substance use. You may also feel guilt if a part of you is relieved after struggling to support this person with their addiction for months and/or years.

Due to the stigma associated with substance use, you may feel isolated and unsupported by those around you. No one death is less significant than another. Remember that what you are experiencing is tragic and as deserving as any other means of death. When you are ready, it may be helpful to join a support group to interact with others who have gone through a similar experience.

Considerations

If your loved one had struggled with substance use, you are not only grieving their loss but also the journey you went through with them towards recovery. If this is the case, please focus on what you did do and how your actions potentially allowed them to live longer or increase their quality of life. No one person should (or does) have control over the actions of another human being.

There is much more to your person, and your relationship with them, than their [or your] actions before their death.

¹ Information obtained from BC Centre of Substance Use Handbook



Supporting a Loved One Through Grief

*“No one is useless in this world, who
lightens the burdens of another.”*

- Charles Dickens

Things to Remember When Supporting a Grieving Person

Be genuine by being yourself.

Your connection with the bereaved person should be a continuation of your usual relationship with them. If you are a close friend, they will want and expect caring contact from you. A bereaved person will not want anyone to assume an unfamiliar intimacy now. Your sensitivity and dependability can make a difference to how understood and supported they feel.

Acknowledge the loss as soon as you can after you get the news.

Send a sympathy card with a note of personal condolence. Don't let fear that you won't say or do the right thing hold you back from talking with the bereaved person. Simply say that you are sorry to hear of the death, mention the person by name, and be willing to listen to what the bereaved person may say. Ask how you can be helpful and offer some assistance in a way that feels comfortable for you.

Get good information about grief so that you understand the normal responses and phases of grief.

Grief is a natural and necessary process that helps the bereaved person to adjust to life without the person who died.

Be willing to open the subject and to mention the name of the person who died.

Rather than filling conversation with other topics, let the bereaved person talk with you about the death and their feelings. If there are silences, let these be shared moments of quiet without rushing into the gap.

Listen to the bereaved person.

Allowing them to talk and to repeat their story will help them to process their thoughts and feelings. Sharing memories of times spent with the person who died can be very comforting for you and the bereaved person.

Accept that you cannot take the pain away.

The death of someone important is painful. Trying to 'cheer up' a bereaved person denies the significance and depth of their grief. You can help by allowing the expression of feelings - guilt, sorrow, anger, sadness - without judgment. These feelings are healthy and normal aspects of grief.

Reach out to offer support.

Be there by making regular contact over time. Many bereaved people find it hard to reach out or are concerned about being a burden on friends and family. Your initiative in keeping in touch will be appreciated.

Be patient.

Mourning takes a lot of time and grief never entirely goes away. The bereaved person will have ups and downs as they move through their grief. Be flexible in how you offer support as the needs of the bereaved person will change with the grief process.

Understand that everyone grieves in their own way and at their own pace.

How a person grieves is a result of their personality, their past history of loss and the relationship that they had with the person who died. Accept the bereaved person's evaluation of the significance of the loss and the depth of their feelings.

Remember that there is no right way to grieve.

Avoid criticizing how someone is grieving; you cannot know what is best for them. Most often a person's strengths, coping mechanisms and network of family, friends and acquaintances are sufficient to sustain them through their grief. However, if you are concerned, encourage them to take care of themselves by getting help also from their minister, doctor or a counsellor.

Expect that your own grief may be triggered.

These feelings may be related to this loss or to a loss that happened in your own past. You may want to share things that have been helpful to you when you were grieving. Be sensitive in how and when you share suggestions or your own feelings. Ask yourself: Does the bereaved person want to know, will it feel helpful to them now?

Offer practical help

In the days after the death has occurred:

- Help with answering the phone
- Bring a meal
- Make lists of what needs to be done
- Offer to give a ride to appointments
- Do errands and shopping
- Take care of the children

In the months following the death:

- Bring and share a meal
- Spend time to listen
- Help with garden chores or household maintenance
- Offer some holiday baking
- Share a regular walk or outing
- Offer expertise you may have
- Remember anniversaries, birthdays and special holidays

When the bereaved person is ready:

- Help them build a bridge to the future
- Include them in social gatherings with new people
- Accompany them to new activities
- Encourage their growing independence
- Welcome their new friends in your social circle
- Continue to remember the person who died and talk about them

Supporting Children and Teens

Children will grieve in ways that reflect their individual personality, developmental understanding, previous experience with loss, education level and access to support.

Your child's understanding and needs may not fit within their chronological age group. You may find it helpful to read information about children in other age groups to find information that is the best fit for them.

If your children are old enough to love, then they are old enough to grieve. After the death of a family member or friend, children and teens need to know what to expect and how to deal with any troubling thoughts and feelings that may surface. It is important for you to be as open as possible with whatever emotions and questions come up.

As a parent or caregiver, you may be faced with the challenges of coping with your own grief at the same time your children will need support with theirs. There may be times when you find it hard to listen to their anger or sadness because it brings out your own deep emotions. Try to remember that your children are learning from you, and may benefit from being included in your grieving process.

Within families, everyone grieves in their own way and in their own time. This can present challenges and may require extra patience, understanding and compromise.

Just like adults, children and teens have a 'grieving style', which may lean towards a task-oriented or an emotion-oriented approach.¹ Neither one is the 'right way' to grieve and most people's grieving style is a combination of both.

Children and teens who are more task-oriented may need to return to old routines or may focus on activities, such as artwork, play or sports. They may benefit from opportunities to remember the person who has died in concrete ways, such as creating a memory book or special object.

Children and teens who are more emotion-oriented tend to talk more about their feelings. Feelings such as sorrow, anger or fear can sometimes explode in loud or 'big' outbursts. It is important that there are opportunities for children to share these feelings and to receive comfort and support from you. If you feel unable to provide this, is there another adult who may be able to do so? This could be a family member, friend, volunteer or counsellor.

¹ Adapted from Terry L. Martin Kenneth J. Doka. Men Don't Cry...Women Do – Transcending Gender Stereotypes of Grief.

The Grief Journey

Social	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoidance of peers or social situations • Increased dependence on parents or caregivers
Physical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dizziness, restlessness, and weakness • Diarrhea, constipation, vomiting or stomach ache • Changes in appetite and sleep patterns
Emotional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Withdrawal or explosive temper tantrums • Numb or flat expression • Feeling alone or scared
Mental	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confusion and disbelief • Poor concentration and forgetfulness • Focused on the topic of death or the person who died
Spiritual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Blaming a spiritual higher power, parent, or self • Wishing to die or be with the person who died • No belief in the future (more common in teens)

Adjusting to loss

Social	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wanting (but not asking for) the attention of parents and other important adults • Self-consciousness with friends about the loss
Physical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuation of earlier responses • Low energy • May have symptoms of the illness that the person died from
Emotional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unexpected mood swings • Feeling hopeless, sad, guilty, fearful or angry • Acute sense of missing the person and yearning for the person to come back to life
Mental	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Daydreaming, forgetfulness and confusion • Doubt or denial about the cause of death or its permanence
Spiritual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continued blaming of a spiritual higher power, parent or self • May seek comfort in thoughts and questions about Heaven or saying prayers

Important Reminder:

Recognize and support your child's unique style and pace through grief.

Mending the Heart

Social	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Restored desire for independence• Interest in new activities and friendships
Physical	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reduction of previous physical responses• Renewed energy for activity• Return to usual sleep and eating patterns
Emotional	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Emotions settle down and become less intense• More happiness and self confidence• Less guilt, fear and anger
Mental	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Improved concentration and understanding• Less focus on the death and the person who died• Increased maturity
Spiritual	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reorganization of personal beliefs• Able to forgive self, parents, and others

Important Reminder:

Expect periodic returns to grieving at significant transitions in your child's life.

Children Aged 3 to 5

Developmental Information

At this age, children think in magical, self-centered, physical and connected ways.

Children of this age will see themselves as the centre of most things they experience. They believe that their thoughts and behaviours are the cause of events, and that things that happen at or close to the same time are related. For example, if in a fit of anger, your child wished you dead and then you became sick, they may believe that they 'caused' your illness to happen. Unfortunately, when a child of this age gets such an idea as this it can be very difficult for them to revise their thinking. If you sense that this has happened, you will need to help your child understand that nothing they said, did or felt caused the illness or death. Often it is necessary to reassure your child more than once that they are not to blame for what has happened.

In terms of how children aged 3 to 5 feel, there are two things to remember: they are anxious when separated from parents or primary caregivers and, they are distressed by expressions of powerful emotion from adults.

At this age children will feel scared and responsible when they see a parent or other significant adult in distress (e.g., prolonged tears, loud sobbing or slamming of doors). For example, you might be driving with your children and unexpectedly be overcome with the rage and sadness that you feel about your father's sudden death. These strong feelings might affect your interactions with your children, and you might find yourself crying and yelling at them about something minor. If this sort of thing happens, it is important that your children see you recover from your emotion and that you carefully and calmly explain to them what you were feeling and why.

Children of this age tend to have little contact with systems outside the family.

Relatives and perhaps daycare or preschool staff are often the child's only contact with the world outside your family. When someone in the family is ill, this often means that your child will visit a number of new places (hospitals) and meet new people such as doctors and nurses. There are books and toys that you can use to help your child become familiar with these new situations.

When Someone is Very Ill

Tell your child about changes in the person who is ill, and that they are caused by the disease and its treatments.

Use clear, simple words and go over this as often as new changes happen. Children of this age benefit from clear, honest information given on a regular basis that can help them to understand what they are seeing and hearing as their family member changes. For example, on your next visit to the hospital, you might show them a wheelchair or an electric bed and demonstrate when they are used and how. When you talk about the sick person or the illness with your child, focus on the things that they will actually see (e.g., medicines, weight loss, hair loss, equipment) and hear (e.g., breathing changes, crying, common words, such as chemo or cancer).

Respect that your child cannot witness intense feelings for more than a brief time.

If your child sees that you are very upset, they may think that they are the cause of your grief, so careful, frequent explanations are necessary. It is common for adults to want to protect children from intense displays of emotion. However, sometimes this expectation is unrealistic. For example, you may need to tell your child that their parent is going to die, but can't even think about it without being overcome by tears. If this is your situation, you may ask a trusted friend or hospice counselor to explain this to them with you present. Talk together ahead of time so that this person understands your needs and what you would like your child to know.

Talk with the person who is ill about the length and frequency of visits with your child. Sometimes the excitement and energy of a young child may be tiring or overwhelming. Plan for your child to have something they find interesting to do during the visit. It is a good idea to take quiet toys or other simple activities that they can play with or show to the person that you're visiting. For example, they might draw pictures or make a card for the person while you're there. Don't visit during regular nap times. Often a visit over your child's favourite take-out lunch or dinner is a comfortable way to spend time together. Be prepared to leave when they show you, through their mood or behaviour, that they are ready to go. If you would like to stay longer than your child can manage, arrange to have a favourite person come and take them home.

Make a regular time and place when your child can ask questions and share their feelings and thoughts about what's happening.

When someone that you love is seriously ill, it can be difficult to find time to talk about it with your children. Many adults hope that if their children aren't showing any emotions, they are okay. However, even though children of this age are very aware of what is going on with you, they often do not have the words needed to let adults know about their feelings and questions. You will need to make time for these conversations with your child. For example, you might find that bedtime, when you can snuggle up together, is a good time to check out how they are doing, or you might choose mealtimes or car rides for these talks.

When Someone has Died

Use concrete, specific details to explain to your child that the person has died. It is helpful to clarify that when someone dies their heart doesn't beat, their ears don't hear, their body doesn't move and that the person cannot feel anything anymore. The characters and heroes of cartoons and movies aimed at children of this age often magically come back to life and this unfortunately reinforces their false and magical beliefs about death. Consequently, it may be difficult for your children to understand the permanence of death. You will likely need to explain and affirm frequently that the person who died will not be coming back to life. It may be helpful to recall a past loss that your child will remember, such as the death of a pet or another person to demonstrate that dead people don't come back. If you are able to remain calm, you might allow them to see the person after death because it may help them to understand in a very concrete way that when someone dies, their body stops working completely.

Prepare your child for any rituals that will take place after the death. Before attending the funeral or memorial service, explain to your child what will happen, who will be there, how people will act and what role, if any, they will have. Remember that children need concrete information and will be frightened by intense emotion. For example, if you and your child will be attending the funeral of a much loved uncle, you might tell them that many of their uncle's friends will be there and that some people, including yourself, will probably be crying because they are sad that they have died. If it is an open coffin service, you might explain that their uncle's body will be there so that people can say goodbye to him and that the coffin is used to bury the body in the ground. Ensure that you or another person will be free to take your child home if they wish and be sure that they know who that person will be.

Provide your child with frequent opportunities to think and talk about the person who died. When there has been a death in the family, children will need to talk about what happened long after the death and initial grieving period. Children look to parents and caregivers for guidance about how to grieve and if you don't talk about your loss, it is unlikely that your child will. If you continue to talk about the person who died and how you are both coping, it will help your child to understand and accept the loss. For example, if you both openly talk about the person who died, sharing memories and feelings, they will know that they are not responsible for the sadness that you both feel.

Give your child access to objects that foster an ongoing sense of connection to the person who died. Children at this age will long for the person who died and want them to come back. Resist the impulse to put away all the pictures and other reminders of the person who died. Keep objects or photographs of the person who died accessible to your child, as these are often a source of comfort and pleasure. For example, if your child's beloved grandparent died, they may want to keep a special picture of them in their room and wear their slippers. It might also be especially important on birthdays or special holidays to find a way to remember their grandparent. Find out what helps your child feel connected to the person they grieve for.

Remember that your child's grieving process will differ radically from your own. Children of this age live in the moment. They don't realize the full extent of the loss and will be uncomfortable with long intense displays of emotion. They will grieve sporadically with intense brief bursts over many years. For example, your child may be inconsolable about their parents death one moment and happily playing the next. When this happens, accept that this is normal and that they will have feelings and questions about this loss throughout their lifetime.

Children Aged 6 to 8

Developmental Information

Between 6 and 8 years of age, children are changing in the ways that they think. Some children of this age are able to understand cause and effect. Most will still think in the egocentric and magical ways of younger children. When someone in the family has died there is often tension, conflict, sadness and anger in other family members. Young children naturally will detect these feelings, even if you think that you are hiding them. When you don't explain to your child that these normal feelings are about the loss, they may think that they are the reason for the family's distress. If this happens, it is important that you talk to your child immediately about what you felt and why. At this age, drawings, short stories and play may be ways to help your child understand why the illness or death has occurred. Use simple honest language. Avoid terms that your child may not clearly understand, such as 'terminally ill' or 'passed on'.

Children of this age usually feel free to express their emotions.

Unlike younger children, 6 to 8 year olds may remain fixated on the illness or death of a family member and can be easily overwhelmed by their own emotions. The sadness, anger, anxiety or guilt that they may feel about a family member's illness usually shows up as a change or increase in their normal behaviour. For example, you might notice that your generally confident child is now anxious and resistant, with tears and tummy aches, when you take them to school each day. If this happens, talk to their teacher and principal about helping your child to express their feelings and feel safe when you are not available. It is common for children of this age to feel rejected and unloved when you take time and energy away from them to care for an ill family member. Since this may be unavoidable, it is important that at some point each day your child can have special time alone with you and that you regularly explain why you are leaving them.

Although children of this age usually have made connections with school and other children, they are not self-sufficient and still need reassurance from parents and other significant adults about their importance and safety in the world.

When parents are distracted by caring for others or grieving, a child's basic needs for nurturing and encouragement can be overlooked, and this may result in the child feeling rejected or frightened. During these times, the continuation of your child's usual routines and the company of other caring adults may be helpful.

When Someone is Very Ill

Tell your child about the disease, including its symptoms, treatment and what is likely to happen.

When you talk about this with your child, it is important that you use the correct name of the disease and that you clearly explain what causes it and how it affects the person who is ill. Talk about the things that your child might see (weight loss, changes in the person's skin colour, hair loss) or hear (coughing, confusion, people awake at night) and whether the person will get well or not. It will be necessary for you to go over this information again as things change and to be honest with your child about what the changes mean. For example, you might say to your child that their aunt has cancer and the doctors aren't able to make it go away. You could tell them that the cancer is growing too big for them to get better and that this means that they will die. You might also explain to them that before they die, they may stop eating and be too tired to stay awake when they visit with them. Since many children of this age will avoid asking questions out of fear of upsetting others or making the situation worse, it is important that you start and continue these frank discussions throughout the illness.

Demonstrate to your child that you love them and that you will be there for them.

At this age children look to their parents for their self-worth and safety. When you are not often free to play with your child and most of your times with them are affected by your own feelings (such as despair and exhaustion about a family member's terminal condition), your child may become insecure and resentful. Often these feelings show up as withdrawn, angry or babyish behaviour. For example, your child might stop speaking to you for a while or get into fights at school with their peers. If this happens, it will be important that you respond with love and understanding, as well as giving and following through with reasonable consequences.

Find one or two other caregivers who are trust-worthy and can regularly take care of your child when you must be elsewhere.

When you are looking for alternate caregivers, think about who your child feels happiest and most comfortable with. It is important that these people are honest and open with them about your family member's illness in the same way that you are. If the people that you choose are uncomfortable discussing the illness with your child, you could provide them with information that you have found particularly helpful. Also, if a counsellor has been working with your family, they might meet with you and the caregivers to suggest ways that you might all work together to support your child through their grief process.

Talk to teachers and other significant adults, such as coaches and group leaders.

These adults are part of your child's social world, and their care and understanding will help your child to manage the awkward moments, impossible questions and intense emotions that may lie ahead. Let these people know that there may be a temporary drop or change in your child's performance, enthusiasm or concentration. Let them know that this kind of change is normal and provide them with resources, such as brochures, books or videos that may help them support your child during this difficult time.

When Someone has Died

Tell your child promptly about the death.

If your child was not present at the time of death, tell them what has happened as soon as possible afterwards. When you tell them that this person has died, explain that the person's bodily functions have all stopped (e.g. heartbeat, breathing, movement) and that they can no longer see, hear, eat or feel. State clearly to your child that the person will not come back to life and avoid using phrases such as 'gone to a better place' or 'with the angels' and comparisons that associate death with sleep. These common euphemisms and comparisons confuse the magical and concrete thinking of children at this age. Your child may misunderstand what you mean and become fearful. For example, instead of telling your child that their grandparent has passed away, you would say that they have died and that you knew they had died because they stopped breathing.

Encourage and prepare your child to attend family rituals that will happen after the death.

If there is to be any funeral or memorial service, begin to prepare them for what to expect when they are there. Be sure that they know what will happen, who will be there, what they will be doing at the service and if the body of the person who died will be there. If you think your child may need support that you may be unable to provide, ask a favourite person to be available. If your child has a close relationship with other adults, such as a teacher or coach, it can be helpful if those people can attend the service. Whether your child attends the funeral or not, they may want to place a letter or drawing in the coffin as their personal goodbye to the person who has died.

Anticipate that your child may be concerned about their health and the health of the significant adults in their life after a death.

After a death in the family, children often become quite curious and concerned about death. Your child may be constantly asking questions about whether or when different people in their life will die. They will likely also be concerned about the possibility of their own and your death. Often this kind of fear shows up in your child's body. For example, they may complain of having similar symptoms to the person who died, such as headaches or tummy aches. If your child complains in this way, they need your loving attention, patience and understanding. Reassure them that you both are healthy by explaining in simple ways that you and they do not have what the person who died had. If this is a hereditary illness that either you or they may get, it will be important to clearly explain this possibility, although now may not be the right time.

Expect that your child may become concerned about what would happen to them if their surviving parent(s) became ill and died.

When a significant adult dies, your child will likely become more concerned that you may die. It is important that you explain to your child what would happen to them if you were to become ill and die. For example, you need to talk to them about whom you have named as their guardians and what those guardians would do for them in the event of your illness or death.

Understand that it is normal for your child to express grief in brief bursts quickly followed by happier activities.

Your child's grief will likely happen in sudden outbursts of sadness, anger, guilt or fear. When this happens, allow your child to feel their feelings and help them to find reasonable or safe ways to express them. For example, if they are showing a lot of anger, you and they might play soccer or tag together. If they are sad, you might spend some time talking about the person who died or looking at photographs together. These moments may be especially difficult for you to get through because your own grief will be triggered. Be sure that you are allowing yourself the time and space to grieve so that you can support your child as they grieve. You will also need to find ways to express and share your emotions and questions with adults who can understand your pain.

Ask for the support of key adults in the child's life, such as a teacher, principal, coach or group leader.

Children of this age are beginning to look to other adults as well as parents to provide them with a sense of well-being, self-esteem and security. Be sure that these key people understand grief and are comfortable with it so that they can help your child deal with the awkwardness and curiosity of other children and adults.

Children Aged 9 to 11

Developmental Information

At this age, children are becoming more capable of concrete operational thinking.

This means that children of this age are on a quest to gain knowledge and understand events, so they have many questions (often 'why' questions) and a need for detailed information about terminal illness and death. They use logic in their thinking and are sometimes able to modify inaccurate conclusions that they have previously formed. For example, your child may start out by wishing that a dead loved one would 'come back to life' (which is like a younger child's more 'magical' thinking); but as things are explained, they may be able to change this thinking, to understand that coming back to life is not possible.

Although children of this age definitely have feelings about a loved one being ill, they don't easily talk about these feelings or express them to others.

Children are now beginning to rely on their new ability for logic and to think through their feelings as well as feel them. This helps to contain powerful emotions that may seem overwhelming. For example, if your child has been told that someone is going to die and they are feeling sad or fearful about it, they may ask you questions such as "does it hurt", "what does it look like", or "when will it happen", as well as expressing their sadness or fear. It is important to remember that children who have been excluded from earlier discussions about the illness may not feel comfortable talking about their concerns now. It is common for children who have not been given enough information to feel anger, anxiety and mistrust. Find ways to speak with your child often, openly, and plainly about illness, dying, death and grief.

At this age, children are increasingly involved in activities and relationships outside of their homes and families.

Classmates, teammates and friends now take on new importance. Your children likely spend a significant amount of time with friends, sharing common interests and social experiences. However, they don't tend to talk about or look to one another for support about things like illness or death. For example, your child is unlikely to turn to a friend for answers to their questions about dying. However, doing things with friends is a major part of how children cope with stress, illness and death. It provides your child with a non-threatening and natural outlet for pent-up emotions that gives them a sense of control and competence.

When Someone is Ill

Give your child information when the disease is diagnosed and let them know about each new change in the illness.

The information should include the name of the disease, any known causes and treatments. Your child will be more comfortable when they are included. Explain any changes in the sick person's behaviour or the family's routines as a result of the disease or its treatment. For example, if the sick person will lose their hair and throw up a lot from chemotherapy, it would be helpful to explain ahead of time to your child that these are normal side effects. Give basic information regularly (as it is known) to help them identify and express their feelings and thoughts before the shock of imminent death.

Explore your child's interest in visiting and helping the person who is ill.

Your child may have a natural curiosity about the person who is ill, wanting (and fearing) to know what the ill person looks like and what's happening with them. Your child might like to visit and even help the sick person. Once you are sure that your child wants to visit, consider whether they would like to do anything for the person when you are visiting. Although a child should not be left alone to take care of an ill person, they could feel included by helping to prepare a meal or making a playlist of the person's favourite music. Be sensible and creative when thinking about things that are reasonable for a child of their age to do. When they visit, be sure that they understand that their visit might be shorter than they hope because the dying person may be too tired or unwell.

Be aware of any alliances or conflicts that your child has with the person who is dying.

It is important to think carefully about how both your child and the person who is dying feel about each other. Are they best friends? Does your child go to them whenever something is hurting or needs fixing? Is their relationship difficult? Do they argue often? Does your child relate to the dying person because they are alike or different? Thinking about these questions will help you to understand what will be lost and where the gaps will be for your child after this person dies. It is important to acknowledge the uniqueness of their relationship and be willing to identify any negative aspects of it that your child may struggle with.

Allow your child to remain involved in regular after-school activities, sports and visits with friends.

Remember that your child is at an age when these activities are vitally important. Developing activities, interests and friendships outside of the home and family help the child to build healthy self-esteem and an extended support network. Try to maintain usual after-school routines and make play time with friends a priority.

Educate and update the significant adults in the child's life.

Since children of this age may be unlikely to initiate discussions with adults about the disease or its progression, you might encourage other adults to bring it up. For example, you might provide them with information that you have found helpful and give them permission to raise the topic if it feels appropriate. Also, your child may be encouraged to know if these adults have lived through losses and to hear what they felt or learned.

When Someone has Died

Encourage your child to participate in family rituals after the death.

Explain the purpose of these rituals and invite them to take part in any planning or preparation. Talk with them about the possible duties they might wish to have, such as helping to write the obituary or helping to seat guests at the funeral. You might consider whether they'd like to contribute their thoughts or feelings to a speech given at the service or other gathering. For example, they might like to make a list of their favourite memories or the things they liked most about the person who died. Find out if they would like any friends to be at the ceremony and help them to extend these invitations.

Return to the family's former routines and prepare your child for any necessary changes in these routines.

After a death, family life is different. Usual eating, sleeping and living routines will be in disorder for a while and some may be permanently changed. This state of confusion will be difficult for your child so it is important for you to continue the routines that help them to feel secure and looked after. For example, continue with normal bed and meal times, and getting your child to school, even though you and they may not feel like it. Family meetings can provide you with a chance to bring out and talk about any upcoming changes or brewing issues. (If your family doesn't presently have family meetings, now may be a good time to begin.)

Be aware that your child may not know how to grieve.

This may be your child's first experience of a death and they will look to you for guidance about what to do with the many reactions, feelings and questions that surface as part of their grief. This doesn't mean you need to be the perfect model of grief, but how you grieve will strongly influence how your child grieves. For example, if you leave the room whenever you cry, your child will learn that they must not cry in front of other people. Even though most children this age can stand only brief displays of emotion (whether their own or another person's) it is important that the adults around them model healthy ways to express common emotions. Spontaneous but controlled moments of crying will help your child to see that expressing and sharing emotions is normal. To help your child express their grief, it may be helpful to look at family photograph albums or visit the cemetery together.

When a parent has died, expect changes in your child's behaviour.

A child whose parent has died will be full of emotions, particularly fear, guilt and sadness. One way your child copes with these intense feelings is to act them out. A grieving child may become unmanageable and demanding. For example, this can show up as frequent sulking, clinging or misbehaviour. Be aware that these difficult behaviours tend to be most extreme at home and directed at you as the remaining parent or caregiver. If the parent who died was the main disciplinarian, it will be important that you quickly develop your own way of maintaining order and respect in the family. If you are at a loss about how to do this, ask other parents that you respect, or teachers, coaches or school counsellors for help. Also, there are agencies in most communities that offer parenting support or information classes.

Young Adolescents Aged 12 to 14

Developmental Information

Young adolescents are entering into the cognitive stage known as formal operational thought.

This means that they are beginning to understand more fully the realities of dying and death. This growing comprehension means that teens will go through the death of someone they love with insight, compassion and conflict. As a defense against the reality of death, they will often refuse to accept that someone is dying and may insist that the person will get better or that family and doctors not 'give up'. For example, when you tell your teen that their mother is expected to die, they may react with outrage at your lack of hope and demand that you get the doctors to do something more. At this age, hope and denial work together to help them cope with the intensity of their emotional responses to the devastating news. Although your teen will think they know all that there is to know, it is important that you find ways to talk to each other.

Since young teens are beginning to understand how much will be lost or changed when someone dies, they experience powerful feelings of sadness, anger, guilt, fear and fierce hope.

Typically, teens are overwhelmed, threatened and embarrassed by their own and other people's strong feelings and will prefer to be alone to express them. For example, when a young teen is told that their best friend has died they may erupt with intense anger, storm out of the room, refuse to come out of their bedroom and not talk to anyone for several hours. Allow your teenager the time and space they need to take in important information. Be respectful of their need for privacy but continue to check in with them about their needs for comfort, support, or information.

Although young teens must begin to push for their independence and freedom with parents, they will often feel rejected and abandoned if they believe that their parents are withdrawing.

Even though your teens may not want to be at home or with you, they will need a lot of reassurance that you still love and care about them. For example, when someone is ill you may spend a lot of time away from home or keep things to yourself. Perhaps you assume that since your teen is not around, they don't need you or aren't interested. However, it is possible that they will think your absence means that you don't care about them or the goings on of their life. It is important that you are very clear about your expectations. Identify what isn't negotiable and be clear about the choices that they do have. Find ways to share time with your teen that help them to feel secure about your love and interest in them.

Give your teen information in a formal detailed way.

Even though you are likely to meet resistance, it is important that you give your teen correct, up-to-date information. Since family is not always a priority for teens, it is important that you give them enough information to make choices about when and how they want to spend their time. Because a teen of this age may want to avoid emotional discussions, it is important that they understand why they need to hear what you have to say and that you keep calm as you say it. If, for example, you know that you are too upset to speak calmly and clearly, you might ask the doctor or a friend to explain things to them. Remember that teens of this age will not

seek out information about illness and dying. They may not know what is happening even when they lead you to think that they do.

Help your teen to decide when and if they want to visit the person who is dying.

Let your teen know when death is expected and be as specific as possible about the changes that you are seeing. For example, describe how the person has changed since their last visit, what they might notice this time, and – if you know – whether death is hours, days or minutes away. Anticipation of a final visit may trigger intense emotion that may be very upsetting for a young teen, and they may choose not to visit but to remember the dying person as they were before the illness. Once your teen has made their decision, be supportive. For example, if they decide not to go, you might suggest that they could write a note instead and you could read it to the person when you visit. It will be important to let them know that even though they didn't visit, the dying person accepts their choice, feels their love and that you both accept their reasons for not going. If possible, give them a way to change their mind.

Talk with your teen and ask about their feelings and concerns.

They may fear rejection by their friends if they speak about their upcoming loss and be holding their true feelings inside. Don't be misled by your teen's apparent lack of concern and think that they are unaffected by the situation. For example, you might think that since they are keeping up their grades and not sad at home that they are all right. However, it is more likely that they find that schoolwork provides them with relief from the intensity of their feelings and family life. If you sense that this may be happening, let them know that you are interested in how they are managing. If you don't feel comfortable doing this or they refuse to talk with you, you might ask them if there is someone else that they would be comfortable talking with. Teen support groups (in person or on-line), mentors and counsellors, rather than friends and parents, may be your teen's preferred source of support.

Accept that your teen may be sensitive and explosive and do not get into unnecessary arguments.

It is common for teens of this age to take out their stresses on parents and caregivers. Understand that the challenging behaviour that you are dealing with is a part of normal conflict made worse by the illness of a beloved family member. Remember that your teen may not yet have the skills to communicate more sensitively. Try to be compassionate and calm in these moments. For example, you might let them know that you understand their frustration, fear or anger and also that you have difficulty with it. Explain that, although their behaviour is not okay, you do realize their struggle and will help them find more reasonable ways of expressing themselves.

Limit the number of new chores and caregiving tasks that you give to your teen.

Although your teen may seem old enough or sensible enough to take care of the person who is ill, they aren't prepared emotionally for this kind of responsibility. Your teen needs to spend time with friends and in extracurricular activities. These interests help them to grow as a person. Although it may be tempting to give various household duties to them while you are caregiving, be sure that these responsibilities don't mean they cannot do the things that are most important to them.

When Someone has Died

Prepare your teen for family rituals such as the funeral.

If this will be the first funeral or memorial service that your teen has attended, ensure that they understand what will happen and what may be expected of them. They may want to play more of a central role than your young children in the final remembrance activities. For example, this may involve reading the eulogy, gathering and arranging family photographs for display or helping you to plan how the event will unfold. Remember that it is often important to young teens that their friends, friends' parents and other important adults attend the memorial service. Be sure that they know the time, place and date of the service and offer to help them invite these key people.

Let your teen choose special mementos from the belongings of the person who died.

Even though sorting through these items may be very difficult for you, allow your teen time to choose things that have meaning for them. Remember that there is no particular time at which this task must be done, so choose a time and pace that feels comfortable for you both. It is not uncommon for a teen whose parent has died to choose to keep and wear some of the parent's clothing. Clothing is full of memories and sometimes even the smell of the person who died. Such memories can serve as a direct link with the person who has died while your teen is adjusting to life without them.

Normalize the grief process.

The intense and unexpected waves of feeling that are part of grief can be particularly distressing for adolescents who are trying to control their powerful emotions. Help your teen understand what they may experience while grieving. Explain to them that it is common to want to talk to the person who died, or to have visitations or dreams of them. Let your teen know that it is also common to temporarily forget that the person has died and to imagine that they see them somewhere. Help your teen to understand that feelings of numbness, relief or anger with the person who has died are all normal aspects of grief. Also, assure them that while they may never forget the person who died, the sadness and anger should ease over time.

Set limits to prevent destructive behaviour and encourage continued growth and independence.

This is a time when your teen's need to separate from you and establish themselves with peers usually leads to increased family conflict. When grief is added, your teen may be involved in more serious acts of rebellion, such as vandalism, theft or skipping school. Pay attention to alcohol or drug use, big changes in your teen's circle of friends or interests, and uphold reasonable standards, curfews and consequences. If discipline is a new role for you, get advice from teachers, other parents and counsellors that you respect. It is also possible that your teen may be inclined to stay close to home out of concern for you or their own feelings of insecurity after the death. Although it may feel good to have your teen's company, it is important for them to continue to develop interests and close relationships outside of your family. If your teen no longer wants to see their friends, find out their reasons. For example, if it's because they cry all the time, encourage them to risk being honest about that with their closest friends or help them to find ways to safely express emotion.

Help your teen to identify positive outcomes.

Encourage your teen to use a journal, write stories or talk to other kids about their experience. In time they could explore what they have learned about themselves, the family, the person who died or grief. Teens of this age often find focusing school projects or assignments on their loss experience helps them not only keep up with schoolwork, but also work through their feelings and questions about it. Some teens may begin to recognize in themselves certain qualities or characteristics of the person who died and may choose to build on them as they mature. For example, if the person who died was really easy to talk to, your teen may strive to be a helpful listener to their friends.

Older Adolescents Aged 15 to 17

Developmental Information

At this age, teens can think ahead about a death and also to imagine how the death might affect them now and over time.

Your older teen will begin to grieve before the person dies, anticipating the absence of that person at important times in the future. For example, a teen who shared their dreams of becoming an architect with the terminally ill person may feel sadness, anger or disappointment that they will not be there to see the teen graduate and go on to become an architect. Teens of this age are usually able to understand what changes in the ill person's condition mean and to be flexible with family and personal routines. You can expect that your teen may have concerns about genetic or gender-related aspects of the disease. For example, if a person had multiple family members that died of a certain type of cancer, they may have fears that they will be diagnosed with and die from the same disease.

Teens are moving away from the self-centeredness of their younger years.

They begin to see and understand the effect that a loss will have on others as well as themselves. However, this ability comes and goes. At times, they may clearly sympathize with the dying person and other family members for the losses that they face. At other times, a teen's only concern will be their own needs, suffering or sorrow. They are usually able to express and discuss their emotions with others, including both friends and caring adults. As they tend to be closest with friends, these teens will talk with each other for support. They are likely to worry about how people will cope with this illness and death, and how it will shape their future.

The world of 15- to 17-year-olds includes current systems such as family, friends and school as well as important systems that lie ahead.

College or university ambitions, travel plans and work arrangements will impact how your teen responds to this loss. You can expect that how they deal with the loss may influence the decisions they make about their future. For example, your teen may decide that working and travelling for a year or two after the death is more important than going to college right away.

When Someone is Very Ill

Give your teen information about the person's illness and what to expect as soon as possible.

Adolescents of this age will use information about the present situation to think ahead and plan for events in the future. For example, when they are told that their grandmother will not recover from a recent stroke and has a certain amount of time to live, your teen will begin to feel the sadness of grief and start to think about and prepare for their life without that person. To support them in this process, you could suggest that they might want to write or talk about the things that their grandmother taught them.

Help your teen to find ways of helping the person who is ill, using present interests or skills.

At this age, teens often want to be helpful but may not know exactly what to do or how to offer. For example, if your teen is known for their tidiness, you might suggest that they help their dying father organize their office space or workshop.

Consider the number of stresses for your teen and their effect on school or other performance.

At this age, it is difficult for teens to set aside major worries even for important projects or responsibilities. Because of this, grades at school or athletic activities may be affected. This can be a major concern for teens who are applying to get into university or college. It might be helpful to offer to help your teen study for upcoming exams or to proofread their assignments. This is an age when relationships and the future are very important. At this time, you might ask if they are able to talk with friends about what's happening and explore whether they have any concerns or questions about how this person's illness and death will affect their future.

Be alert to your teen's fears about their (and your) mortality.

Although this is a concern for young people of any age, when someone in the family is ill, older teens are able to understand that some people may be prone to certain diseases because of lifestyle and genetic factors. For example, if your teen's father has or had heart disease, talk openly with your teen about their chances of developing it and what they can do to prevent it. Be willing to hear their concerns about your lifestyle and what they fear could happen to you.

When Someone has Died

Prepare your teen for family rituals.

At this age, teens may want to play a central role in the planning of participation in the funeral or other rituals. Your teen may want to take responsibility for particular aspects of the event that tie in with their own needs or strengths. For example, if they have an interest in creative and artistic projects, they may want to make a memory book for the event. Or they may want to help by interviewing close family members or friends for stories that could be included in the service.

Recognize your teen’s need to identify with the person who died and to be able to name positive and negative parts of their relationship.

Teens may have a strong need to be like the person who died. You may notice that your teen is taking on one or more characteristics or interests of that person. Understand that this behaviour comes from a normal need to continue to feel connected to that person. Be ready to be honest about the similarities and differences between your teen and the person who died. If the relationship that your teen had with the person who died was difficult or abusive, it will be important to be realistic about both the strengths and the struggles of the relationship. For example, the child of a transient parent who died after a drug overdose might be deeply sad and grieving their loss of hope that someday they’d have a healthy relationship, and at the same time, full of anger and hatred toward them because they may feel as if they didn’t love them enough to stop abusing drugs.

Describe the grieving process and what to expect.

At this age, your teen’s grief may be much like your own. For example, in addition to death of this person, your teen may be dealing with other related issues like others’ sadness, the questions that arise in the face of death, or the way that lives are forever altered by death. It may be helpful to direct them to pamphlets or books that explain the grief process in a straightforward way. You might talk about your own past and present experiences with loss.

Make sure that the school knows about the death.

At this age it is very important that your teen’s friends, teachers and school staff acknowledge the death and offer their condolences. This kind of support can be very comforting. Encourage your teen to contact the school principal and/or a teacher to inform them of the death and talk with them about how they would like this information to be shared. It may be helpful to invite classmates and teachers to the funeral. Teachers might help to organize classmates to find a creative way to express their sympathy and to help your teen keep up with schoolwork.

Support your teen to be independent.

This does not mean that you show no interest or become distant, but that you encourage them in activities that may take them away from or outside of the family. This may be especially difficult as grieving tends to pull people inward and home. However, it is a priority for teens of this age to start to find a way for themselves outside the family.



Resources

*“Courage starts with showing up
and allowing ourselves to be seen.”*

- Brené Brown

Resources

Crisis/Help Lines

BC Bereavement Helpline

Category: Helpline

About: Volunteer-based program that supports those grieving by helping them find support.

Hours: Mon – Fri 9:00am-5:00pm.

Phone: 604-738-9950 or toll-free at 1-877-779-2223

Website: bcbh.ca

Crisis Intervention and Suicide Prevention Centre of BC

Category: Crisis Line

About: Provides free, confidential, non-judgmental, emotional support to youth, adults and seniors. Translation services are available.

Price: Free

Hours: 24/7

BC Distress Line: 1-800-SUICIDE (1-800-784-2433)

Text: 45645 (4pm-12am)

BC Mental Health Support: 310-6789

Website: crisiscentre.bc.ca

Interior Crisis Line

Category: Crisis Line

About: Offers phone-lined staffed by trained volunteers who provide emotional support, resources, referrals and crisis intervention.

Price: Free

Hours: 24/7

Phone: 1-888-353-2273 (1-888-353-CARE)

Website: interiorcrisisline.com

Kid's Help Line

Category: Helpline

About: Access to professional counsellors

Price: Free

Hours: 24/7

Phone: 1-800-668-6868

Crisis/Help Lines - continued

KUU-US Crisis Line Society

Category: Aboriginal Crisis Line

About: 24-hour provincial aboriginal crisis line for adults, Elders, children and youth. The goal is to establish a non-judgmental approach to listening and problem-solving. A support system is put into place where the caller is brought back to the pre-crisis state.

Price: Free

Hours: 24/7

Phone: Adult/Elder: 250-723-4050 or Child/Youth: 250-723-2040

Métis Family Services

Category: Crisis Line

About: Provides free, confidential, non-judgmental, emotional support to youth, adults and seniors.

Price: Free

Hours: 24/7

Phone: 1-833-METIS-BC (1-833-638-4722)

Website: metisfamilyservices.ca

The Seniors' Distress Line

Category: Helpline

About: Confidential support for seniors, their caregivers or anyone concerned about a senior.

Price: Free

Hours: 24/7

Phone: 604-872-1234

Website: crisiscentre.bc.ca/get-help

Online Chat Service for Youth

Category: Helpline

About: Connects youth with support, information and resources via chat.

Hours: 12pm – 1am

Chat Link: youthinbc.com

Online Chat Service for Adults

Category: Helpline

About: Connects adults with support, information and resources via chat.

Hours: 12pm – 1am

Chat Link: crisiscentreatchat.ca

One-on-one Support Free

Central Okanagan Hospice Association Counselling

Category: All grief, All ages

About: Provide individual short-term counseling, specific to grief and loss, due to the death of a loved one. Call to start the referral process.

Phone: 250-763-5511

Website: hospicecoha.org

Address: #200 - 1890 Cooper Road Kelowna, BC

Child and Youth Mental Health

Category: All topics, Age 6-19

About: Provides direct and contracted community-based mental health services to children, youth and their families.

Hours: Walk-in intake Tues & Thurs 9:00 am-11:00 am

Phone: 778-699-2272

Address: 1340 Ellis St Kelowna, BC

Community Response Team

Category: Mental Health Crisis, All ages

About: An Interior Health team that serves individuals experiencing a mental health crisis or who may be at imminent risk to harm themselves or others. They provide support, recommendations, brief follow-up in the community or referral to community supports. You can access by a referral from a community agency or calling on behalf of yourself or friend/family.

Hours: Mon – Sun 11:30am-9:00pm

Phone: 250-212-8533

Elizabeth Fry Society of Central Okanagan

Category: Power Based Crimes, All ages

About: Organization that is dedicated to advancing the safety, legal rights and economic security of women and children. They strive to stop violence against women and children, move low-income women and children out of poverty, and promote the legal rights, justice and services for women and children.

Offers community-based Victim Services.

Hours: Mon – Fri 8:30am-4:30pm

Phone: 250-763-4613

Address: 649 Leon Avenue, Kelowna BC

Website: efryokanagan.com

One-on-one Support Free

Foundry Kelowna

Category: All topics, Age 12-24

About: Hosted by the Canadian Mental Health Association Kelowna, Foundry Kelowna unites 25 partner organizations that help address the health care needs of youth. Services include:

- Walk-in counseling and Walk-in Medical Clinic
- Youth and family navigation and peer support
- Substance use programs
- Social services (housing, income assistance, employment support)

Centre Hours: Mon – Fri 9:00am-5:00pm

Drop-in Hours: Mon – Fri 2:00pm-5:00pm

Walk-in Clinic Hours: Mon/Tue/Thu 1:00pm-5:00pm and Fri 9:00am-12:00pm

Phone: 236-420-2803

Address: 1815 Kirschner Rd Kelowna, BC

Website: foundrybc.ca/kelowna

Kelowna Mental Health and Substance Use

Category: Addiction, Age 19+

About: Counselling and support for adults suffering from substance use concerns.

Hours: Mon – Fri 8:00am-4:30pm.

Phone: 250-469-7070

Address: 505 Doyle Avenue, Kelowna BC

RDCO RCMP Victim Services

Category: Crime & Trauma, All ages

About: Provides emotional support and practical assistance to those who have been exposed to traumatic events. More information on [page 4](#).

Hours: Mon – Fri 8:00am-4:00pm

Phone: 250-470-6242

Address: 1190 Richter Street, Kelowna BC

One-on-one Support Free

Okanagan Nation Response Team (ORNT)

Category: Indigenous, crisis, youth

About: ORNT is called in when a crisis occurs in an Okanagan community that affects youth. It can be incidents involving violence, traumatic accidents, attempted or completed suicides. To contact, a community member can call Band office link them with an ORNT lead to discuss the crisis and if the situation requires a Team response.

Phone: 250-707-0095

Address: #101, 3535 Old Okanagan Hwy Westbank BC

Westbank First Nation Counselling Services

Category: All topics, All ages

About: Provides counseling services to individuals, couples and families in areas such as trauma, anxiety, depression, stress and other wellness concerns.

Hours: Mon – Fri 8:30am-4:30pm.

Phone: 250-768-0227

Website: wfn.ca/programs-services/health-wellness.htm

Address: 1900 Quail Lane, Westbank (WFN Health and Wellness Building)

Support/Counselling Groups

BC Victims of Homicide

Category: Homicide Grief, All ages

About: Offers support groups for people who have lost a loved one to homicide. Aims to provide a safe, non-judgmental and compassionate environment.

Hours: Call for hours and location.

Phone: 1-877-779-2223

The Bridge Youth and Family Services – Family Counselling

Category: Parenting

About: Strives to help families gain skills in coping with life transitions, understanding family dynamics and other categories. Offers supportive, educational and goal-oriented services.

General Information: 250-763-0456

Referrals to family counselling must be made through Ministry of Children & Family Development

Child & Youth Mental Health: 778-699-2272

Website: thebridgeservices.ca

Support/Counselling Groups

Central Okanagan Hospice Association Bereavement Groups

Category: All grief, Age 19+

About: Adult grief group focusing on the grieving process and based on the unique needs of each group.

Hours: Grief groups organized in fall and spring. Call for more information.

Phone: 250-763-5511

Address: 200 - 1890 Cooper Road Kelowna, BC

Website: hospicecoha.org

Compassionate Friends of Canada

Category: Child death grief, Available to parents

About: Offers support in the grief and trauma which follows the death of a child, no matter the age or cause.

Hours: Second Thursday of every month.

Phone: 250-807-2487

Address: 721 Bernard Avenue, Kelowna BC

Website: tcfcanada.net

Ki-Low-Na Friendship Society

Category: Various Support

About: Offers health and wellness, community/family support services, children's programs, employment and education, youth services, and administration programming.

Hours: 8:30am-4:30pm.

Phone: 250-763-4905

Address: 442 Leon Ave, Kelowna BC

Website: kfs.bc.ca

Support/Counselling Groups

Mental Health & Substance Use Friends and Family Education and Support Group

Category: Support group

About: Offers an education and support group for persons affected by another's substance use. Combines a short educational session followed by a group discussion and support.

Hours: Every other Tues 4 pm-6 pm. Preregistration required.

Phone: 250-868-7788

Address: 505 Doyle Ave, Kelowna BC

Moms Stop the Harm: Healing Hearts Kelowna – Grief Support and Substance-Related Passing

Category: Support Group, Substance Use

About: Peer-led support group for those who have lost loved ones to substance use.

Hours: Second Tuesday of the month. Contact for specific time/location.

Email: healingheartskelowna@hotmail.com

Website: facebook.com/groups/healingheartskelowna

Online Resources

Suicide

Living with Suicide

Website: pbs.org/weblab/living

Easy to use website sponsored by PBS. There is information, a place to read other people's stories and also add your own. This site also has a message board where you can post a question or struggle that you are having and other suicide grieverers can respond to you.

Surviving Suicide

Website: survivingsuicide.com

Site hosted by a suicide bereaved mother. It has a lot of easy to access information organized by topic. It also provides links to many other websites for suicide grieverers.

Surviving Suicide

Website: journeythroughsuicidegrief.com

Online suicide support groups made up of people who have lost loved ones to suicide.

General Grief

Facing challenges

Website: optionb.org

Option B helps people build resilience and find meaning in the face of adversity.

Grief support

Website: griefnet.org

An internet community of persons dealing with grief, death, and major loss. A number of email support groups are offered, including a group for violent death.

Grief support

Website: griefworksbc.com

The main objective of this website is to provide grief support to those in need of information and resources. It includes chat rooms to talk to others online about your experience of grief.

Counselling

Website: psychologytoday.org

An online place to find pay for service counselors within your community.

Homicide

Informative Website

Website: canadianpomc.ca

An online resource that attempts to provide support and assistance to all survivors of homicide victims across Canada.

Substance-Related Death

Informative Website/Support

Website: grasphelp.org

Grief Recovery After Substance Passing. Website for those who have lost someone after substance use or addiction. It provides resources as well as information on support groups within Canada.

Informative Website

Website: momsstoptheharm.com

Website for those experiencing the loss of a loved one due to substance use. Includes informative information, resources, support groups, and ways to get involved.

Financial Assistance

Benefits Finder

Website: Search for “Benefits Finder” on canada.ca.

A database designed to help you find benefits that you may be eligible for within Canada/your local province.

This Grief and Loss Resource is intended to provide some practical information as well as reassurance to help you, or someone you care about after a death.

RDCO RCMP Victim Services asks if you have any suggestions to help us enhance this booklet, please email us at Kelowna.VictimServices@rcmp-grc.gc.ca when the time is right for you.

All Central Okanagan photos included are by Former Victim Services Caseworker Jocelyn L.