



# Bereavement Resource Handbook

## *The Grief Journey...*

***Grief is a natural part of the Palliative journey***, not reserved for end-of-life alone, but a part of each symptom, diagnosis, and shift throughout the final chapter of life for the patient and their family. Learning grief's reality and process is a first step, followed by naming the losses, and expressing the emotional responses being experienced with a trusted other, without numbing or avoiding. The processing of losses with a "trusted other" can be an integral part of acceptance and peace.

**The Heartland Hospice Resource Library** located in the bookcase of the Family Room has numerous books for all ages on the topics of dying, death and grief. These are available to the patients and family of Heartland Hospice.

*We cannot  
change the outcome,  
but we can  
affect the journey.*

## *Anticipatory Grief:*

### *Family Caregiver's Constant Companion*

When someone close to you is diagnosed with a terminal illness, everyone begins to grieve. This anticipatory grief process can be confusing and difficult. On the one hand you are attending to the needs of the family member who is ill and maintaining your relationship; on the other hand, you have begun grieving their loss and may be over-whelmed at times with complex feelings of sadness and loss. You may also wonder and worry about what will happen, how life will continue after the person dies. There is never enough time or energy to attend to these intense needs. The steps you take to cope are called tasks. You will find that you are engaged in all of these tasks at varying degrees at the same time.

Looking at each of these separately will help you to understand more exactly the demands of the situation and to make the best use of family time, energy, and your ability to cope with the tasks.

#### **1. Fluctuating from denial to acceptance of the illness and death**

Some denial of reality is healthy and necessary for you to function. It allows you to take in information at a more tolerable pace, and gives you a break from the emotional stress of a situation. Acceptance of what is happening will not necessarily bring peace.

#### **2. Establishing a relationship with health professionals**

You may need to learn how to be assertive, in a constructive manner, as well as finding ways to deal with frustration. Family conferences with hospice team members can help to reduce your anxiety by opening lines of communications and giving you direct information. It may help to write your concerns down before meeting with hospice team members.

### **3. Meeting the needs of the dying person**

As the illness progresses the patient's physical and emotional needs will change. Your task will be to help in the best way you can without taking away the patient's control or independence. Remember to ask about the patients' needs and wants. Discussion can make all the difference.

### **4. Maintaining the family**

Everyone in the family takes on new roles and responsibilities when a family member is ill. At the same time, maintaining some of the family's normal routines is very important. This helps to give everyone some security in the midst of stress and change.

### **5. Living with emotions**

During this time both patient and family experience intense swings in emotion. Having information about these feelings and being aware of your own reactions will help you begin to cope. It is important to let each other know how you are feeling and what you need. There may also be things that you prefer to discuss with someone outside the family.

### **6. Dealing with people outside the family**

You have little energy at this time for outside relationships and everyone's reactions are unpredictable. Friends may avoid the sick person. You may resent others' stability and good fortune. People don't understand what you are going through.

### **7. Anticipating the family's new reality**

It is impossible to imagine the future. However, estate planning, dealing with different kinds of unfinished business and building in emotional supports are things that can help you to prepare. You may need help with some of this.

## **8. Finding appropriate hope**

What you hope for throughout this time will change. Long term plans need to be replaced by short term plans; you find yourself giving up treatment that aims for cure in favour of that which relieves symptoms and creates comfort. As you are able to accept the goal of comfort rather than cure, you are taking a step towards acceptance.

## **9. Making decisions**

There may come a time when a patient is unable to make decisions. Prior discussions, the use of a Living Will or your knowledge of the person's wishes will help to represent their best interests.

## **10. Taking care of yourselves**

When you are focused on caring for another it is hard to have energy for yourself and to see this as important. Building in time for self-care is crucial. Recognize that you have needs – physically, emotionally and spiritually.

These tasks are part of a process. You will find that you are more aware of different ones at different times. There is no set procedure or need for completions. The important thing is to do the best you can.

*There is a sacredness in tears.  
They are not the mark of weakness, but of power.  
They speak more eloquently than ten thousand tongues.  
They are messengers of overwhelming grief  
...and unspeakable love.  
Washington Irving*

## *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 died, there are some common themes. The following were identified as ten things that are important to know about grief.

### **1. Global effect of loss**

The death of someone very close to you can be a life transforming event that effects 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, sometimes, 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 and 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 “up and down 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 at 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, please, don't hesitate to seek help from a Professional Counsellor.

## **9. Time for grief**

Despite what you may hear about 'getting over it' or 'the first year', there are no time lines 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 as 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.

*The reality is that you will grieve forever. You will not "get over" the loss of a loved one; you will learn to live with it. You will heal and you will rebuild yourself around the loss you have suffered. You will be whole again but you will never be the same. Nor should you be the same nor would you want to.* Elisabeth Kubler-Ross



## *A Metaphor for the Grief Journey: The Labyrinth*

We have chosen the image of the labyrinth as a metaphor for the journey through grief. A labyrinth is not a maze as there are no dead ends and no wrong turnings. There is only one way – forward. So it is with grief.

The only way through is forward, with many turns and going back and forth over what seems like the same territory. We journey to the centre of our grief, to the centre of ourselves, and then slowly return to re-enter the world.

Each person's experience on the journey of grief will be different. This is a reflection of our personal style, our relationship with the person who died, our internal and social resources, and our past history of coping. As you journey through your own grief process, there will likely be unexpected turns and insights.



## *Grief: 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 are 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.

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

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.

### *Personal and Family Events*

- Weddings, funerals, christenings
- Religious and cultural holidays
- Reunions, graduations
- Birthdays, wedding anniversaries
- Other anniversaries

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 he or she was 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 WINTER 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 by enlisting 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 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 COPING WITH 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 his or her 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 right now?" Please prioritize your self and your needs when you are struggling.

### ***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 him or her 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.

## ***Bereavement Resources in Moose Jaw***

**Mental Health and Addictions Courses** through Dr. F. H. Wigmore Hospital Moose Jaw - 306-691-6464  
<https://www.fhhr.ca/AdultGroupServices.htm>

### **W.J.Jones & Son Funeral Services Grief Support :**

- Hope Grief Support for ALL Losses of a Loved One: 2nd Wed. of each month at 7:30pm
  - Bereaved Parent Grief Support Group: 3rd Wed. of each month at 7:30pm
  - Survivors of Suicide Grief Support Group for those who have had a Loved One Die by Suicide: 4th Wed. of each month at 7:30pm
  - Common Ground for Bereaved Spouses
- For info contact [della@jonesparkview.com](mailto:della@jonesparkview.com) or Phone: 306-693-4644

**GriefShare: at Minto United Church 1036 7th Ave.  
NW Phone: 306-693-6148.**

**Also at Victory Church 306-691-5051**  
Faith-Based Grief Course

*When someone we love dies, then, we feel a gaping hole inside us...But when you trust in the process of grief and you surrender to the mystery, you will find that mourning, like love, will bring you to a place of transformation. - Alan D. Wolfelt, Ph. D.*

## ***Online Resources***

To supplement those resources, we offer you the following links to grief resources.

**MyGrief.ca**-*Information and support on advanced illness, palliative care and grief.*

<http://www.mygrief.ca/>

**Teens and Death**-*Coping with Death/Understanding Grief*

<https://www.teensanddeath.com/coping-with-a-death.html>

**KidsGrief.ca**-*Talking with kids and teens about serious illness, dying and death*

[www.kidsgrief.ca](http://www.kidsgrief.ca)

**The Dougy Centre for Grieving Children and Families**

<https://www.dougy.org/>

**Centre for the Grief Journey with Dr. Bill Webster**

<https://griefjourney.com/>

**Center for Loss and Life Transition**

<https://www.centerforloss.com/>

**Mindfulness Meditation for Grief and Loss**

<http://mindfulnessandgrief.com/guided-meditation-for-grief-and-loss/>

### **Mind Shift:**

A user-friendly self-help tool based on proven scientific strategies, MindShift™ CBT teaches about anxiety, helping users to engage in healthy thinking and to take action. Users check in each day to track their anxiety and work with tools in the app.

*“We bereaved are not alone.*

*We belong to the largest company in all the world  
-the company of those who have known suffering.”*

*Helen Keller*

Special thanks to Victoria Hospice  
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resources.

[www.victoriahospice.org](http://www.victoriahospice.org)



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