

Grief, Bereavement and Loss



A guide to coping with loss after the death of a loved one

Coping with the death of a loved one is a personal experience. There is no normal or perfect way to respond.

It is our hope that this booklet will:

- help you understand your feelings of grief
- offer ways to cope with your grief
- give information and resources for adults and children



What is grief?

Grief is a personal reaction to a loss. It is the body's way of responding to the loss of someone we have loved and cared for.

Grieving is how we move through the experience of significant and intense losses.

The process of grieving is similar to the process of physical healing. The work we do through grieving can bring us to a new state of physical, emotional and spiritual balance.

...the natural journey of mourning involves a struggle between the need to evade the pain of the loss and encounter the pain of the loss.

- Alan. D. Wolfelt

What can grief feel like?

When someone you love dies, your emotions, health, social life, and spiritual wellbeing can change. You may feel unusual and upset by these changes. These feelings and changes are a normal reaction to your loss.

You may feel:

- numb
- alone
- anxious or worried
- angry
- guilty
- sad, like crying or sighing
- depressed
- confused
- relieved
- hopeless

You may also experience the following:

- finding it hard to believe your loved one has died
- difficulty focusing and making decisions
- dreaming about your loved one
- seeing images of your loved one
- trouble sleeping
- changes in your appetite
- physical symptoms like aches and pains or an upset stomach

You might lose interest in:

- your day-to-day routine
- sex or intimacy
- your relationships

What if this is a sudden death?

You may feel that there is “unfinished business.” For example, there might be something you wish you had told the person, or you may feel sad, angry and upset because you lost the opportunity to say goodbye. You may have many questions that you wanted to ask that have not been answered. You may need to know more about what happened to your loved one. These are all normal feelings to have.

How long will I grieve?

Grieving is a personal experience that affects people differently. There is no right or wrong way for you to react to the death of your loved one.

Feelings of grief may occur less often and feel less intense as time passes. As feelings of grief lessen over time, you may feel able to return to day-to-day life.

People can have both good days and bad days when they are grieving. Grief can come in waves of strong emotional feelings from reminders of your loved one, or for no reason at all.

Feelings of grief can return or feel worse on special days like birthdays, anniversaries and holidays when your loved one is especially missed. It is normal to feel your grief at different times throughout your life.



Mourning never really ends. Only as time goes on it erupts less frequently.

- Alan. D. Wolfelt

How can I help myself?

Body

- Allow yourself time to eat, rest and sleep
- Keep your energy up by eating well
- Take part in activities you enjoy such as going for a walk, reading or doing exercise
- Talk to your family doctor or primary healthcare provider about any physical concerns you are having

Social

- Talk with a friend, family member or a member of your faith community
- Share memories, stories and photographs of your loved one
- Join a group or do one-on-one counseling—this can be in person, by phone or online

Emotional and spiritual

- Be patient — grieving takes time
- Know that others people have responded in the same way
- Let yourself experience the pain of grief
- Know that it is alright to express your feelings
- Write a letter to your loved one
- Use the resources of your faith or spirituality
- Talk with your family doctor or primary healthcare provider about any emotional distress you are having

If you are experiencing distress, need more support or are in crisis, you can contact some of the resources listed below.

The Toronto Distress Centre

- Website: www.torontodistresscentre.com

Gerstein Crisis Centre

- Website: <http://gersteincentre.org>

Resources for more information and support

Bereaved Families of Ontario

Email: info@bereavedfamilies.net

Phone: 416 440 0290

- Bereaved Families of Ontario offers individual and group programs across the province for children, adolescents, young adults, parents and grandparents.
- Contact information for each region is listed on the website.

Camp Widow – organized by Soaring Spirits International

- Offers weekend event for people who have lost their partner. Dates and prices can be found on their website.
- [Soaring Spirits international](#) offers other peer support programs and links to additional resources.

Canadian Virtual Hospice

- The Canadian Virtual hospice provides information and supportive resources on palliative care, end-of-life care, and loss and grief.

Children and Youth Grief Network

- The Children and Youth Grief Network provides information, resources and programs across the province of Ontario for grieving children and youth.

Family Service Toronto

Phone: 416 595 9618

Email: sau@familyservicetoronto.org

- Offers in-person counseling services at 5 locations in Toronto, including traumatic experiences. Fees are charged on a sliding scale based on household income. No referral needed.

Hospice Association of Ontario

Website: <http://hospice.on.ca/members/members.php>

- The hospice association of Ontario has over 180 associate and individual members who provide free bereavement support across Ontario.

Find a therapist

Ontario Association of Social Workers

To find a social worker affiliated with the Ontario Association of Social Workers go to www.FindASocialWorker.ca.

- No referral needed. You may need a referral to be reimbursed by your insurance. To check if a social worker is a member of the Ontario College of Social Workers, go to www.ocswssw.org or call 1 877 828 9380.

Ontario Psychological Association

To find a psychologist affiliated with the Ontario Psychological Association go to www.psych.on.ca/Utilities/Find-a-psychologist.aspx.

- No referral needed. You may need a referral to be reimbursed by your insurance. To check if a psychologist is a member of the College of Psychologists of Ontario, go to <http://www.cpo.on.ca>.

Ontario Society of Registered Psychotherapists

To find a psychotherapist affiliated with the Ontario Society of Registered Psychotherapists go to www.psychotherapyontario.org/find-a-therapist.

- No referral needed. You may need a referral to be reimbursed by your insurance. To check if a psychotherapist is a member of the Ontario Society of Registered Psychotherapists, go to <https://www.crho.ca/find-a-registered-psychotherapist>.

WoodGreen

Phone: 416 572 3575

- Registered social workers provide in-person counselling, psychotherapy and support services to people 16 years and older. Free of charge. No referral needed.

Phone and online support

Big White Wall Distress line

- Community of members giving peer support to cope with grief and loss. Available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

www.kidshelpphone.ca

Phone: 1 800 668 6868, text or live chat.

- Available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
- Professional counseling, information and referrals, and volunteer-led, text-based support for young people between 5 and 20 years of age.

KidsGrief.ca

- A free online resource that helps parents support their children when someone in their life is dying or has died.

For people coping with a cancer diagnosis or the death of a loved one from cancer

Gilda's Club Greater Toronto

Email: info@gildasclubtoronto.org

Phone: 416 214 9898

- Gilda's club offers support groups, workshops, lectures, social events, and activities for adults, teenagers and children affected by a cancer diagnosis.

Wellspring Cancer Support Network

Phone: 416 961 1928

- Wellspring is a community-based cancer support program that offers a variety of support services to individuals and family members including bereavement support.

Other resources

- Your faith or spiritual community
- Your family doctor, health care team or walk-in clinic
- Your funeral home

Books for adults

- **Grief's Courageous Journey: A Workbook** by Sandi Caplan and Gordon Lang
- **Mourning Has Broken** – A Collection of Creative Writing about Grief and Healing
- **Understanding Grief: Helping Yourself Heal** by Alan D. Wolfelt, PhD

Books for children and teens

- **Healing Your Grieving Heart for Teens: 100 Practical Ideas** by Alan D. Wolfelt, PhD
- **Lifetimes** by Bryan Mellonie and Robert Ingpen
A book that parents and family members can use to explain life and death. Helps children understand that dying is as much a part of living as being born.
- **When Someone Very Special Dies: Children Can Learn to Cope with Grief** by Marge Heegaard
- **When Dinosaurs Die** by Laurie Krasney Brown and Marc Brown
- **The Memory Tree** by Britta Teckentrup

Find more resources at the UHN Patient and Family Libraries and Learning Centres. For locations and contact information visit www.uhnpatienteducation.ca

Important: This is not a full list of agencies and organizations. The University Health Network does not recommend one organization over another and is not responsible for the care and services provided. Some information may change. Please contact agencies or organizations directly to make sure the information is correct or to find out more about their services.

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