

“Tears are the antifreeze for the soul.”

Elizabeth Latimer, MD



socially

You may feel uncomfortable, alone or like a “fish out of water”. You may withdraw from social activities or avoid them altogether. Going places once shared with your loved one (going to the store, mall, church, etc) may be difficult. Meeting people especially those you have not seen since the funeral or who did not know that your loved one had died, might be challenging. You may feel more comfortable in the company of one or two close friends instead of a large gathering.

what may help

- Do not force yourself to handle more than you are comfortable with socially
- Give yourself permission to say “No thank you. But please ask me again.”
- Attend a gathering or event but tell the host that you may need to leave early
- Go to an event with someone for support or take your own transportation so that you are able to leave if needed
- Special days will be painful – religious celebrations, holidays, anniversaries, birthdays – plan ahead with several ideas of how you will cope with that day
- Buy flowers, light a candle, write a memorial, look at pictures, visit the cemetery, plan a memorial service for your loved one
- Share with others who have experienced their own grief, in order to feel supported
- Consider attending a Bereavement Support Group which can be one of the most helpful means of finding others who understand the Grief Journey that you are now on.

spiritually

You may have many questions and feel the need to ask “Why?” and “Why me?” You may:

- Be low in spirit, detached and unable to feel happiness;
- Have doubts or loss of faith and anger at God;
- Find that your faith has increased.

Many people then explore their faith and ask questions about life after death. You may think about your own future life and may have questions about your own mortality. You may have a shift in your priorities or find new meaning for your new life.

what may help

- Connect or reconnect with a faith community which may be helpful for support
- Talk about your concerns with a clergy, counsellor or spiritual advisor
- Read grief books which talk about spiritual issues
- Spend time with nature, long walks, hikes
- Enjoy the company of children and/or animals
- Listen to relaxing or spiritual music which may calm you and help guide your thoughts
- Use meditation or prayer as a source of comfort and strength
- Create a space in your home to remember your loved one – include a favourite picture, light a candle or display cherished keepsakes

The pain of your loss leads to healing. Grieving is a journey. It is hard work and will take time to heal.

Grief causes physical symptoms.

Our emotions may experience several changes.

Feelings and emotions may seem intensified.

Your local contact for bereavement support:



HNHB Hospice Palliative Care Network
149 Hartzel Road
St. Catharines, ON L2P 1N6
Phone: 1-866-790-4642 ext. 3432
or 905-228-1018
Fax: 905-228-1019
www.hnhbhpc.net

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Your Loved One Has Died

Understanding Grief
Helping Ourselves

THE DEATH OF A LOVED ONE

may be the beginning of the most difficult experience of your life. When this happens, you are “bereaved” and begin a journey – The Grief Journey – with its many twists and turns, highs and lows.

Grieving is a normal healthy reaction to a loss. This brochure is a guide to help you begin understanding your own grief and some of the natural aspects of grieving that many people experience.

You may feel sad and hurt, shocked and in a state of disbelief. You may cry and have some trouble with sleeping and eating. It is normal to feel these emotions and others including anger, confusion, numbness, denial and even guilt. Sometimes you may feel very alone. You may have many concerns and face many changes in your life as you struggle to adjust to a new life without your loved one.

You may experience

- crying
- disbelief
- anger
- guilt
- fatigue
- confusion
- yearning
- can't concentrate
- shock
- anxiety
- memory loss
- insecurity
- frustration
- lack of energy
- loneliness
- asking “why”
- deep pain
- disappointment
- shame
- hope
- memories
- relief
- intense feelings
- trouble sleeping

after a loss you may feel changed

emotionally

You may experience many changes to your normal feelings and to how you feel about yourself. You may feel that you are overwhelmed with intense painful emotions that you have never felt before – for example – deep sadness and a feeling of being very lost.

You may feel that you are “falling to pieces” or becoming “unglued”. These changes in your emotions are normal, natural and not your fault. These changes are common; they will come and go as you go through your grief journey. You will find ways to cope with your grief. You may never go back to your “normal” life, but will develop a new normal as you mourn your losses.

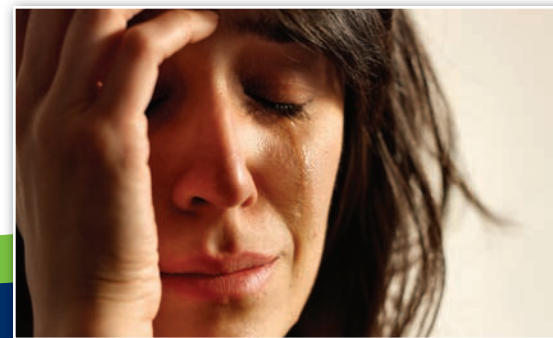
what may help

- Be patient and compassionate toward yourself
- Allow yourself to cry alone or with others
- Talk with a trusted friend, family member, family doctor, counsellor or clergy
- Know that laughter may appear inappropriate but it is a good release of emotions and can be healing
- Write down your feelings in a daily journal book. It may be helpful to write a letter or story. Children often draw the event or loss to express their feelings through art
- Read grief books to learn more about being bereaved
- Try to eat 3 meals per day and drink less caffeine products: tea, coffee, soft drinks
- Go for a walk to help relax and to help sort out your thoughts
- Spend time with your pet
- Sleep helps rest your emotions and gives you energy to face a new day

thinking or mentally

You may feel very drained and empty. It is natural to have trouble concentrating while driving, reading, watching television, or using a computer.

You may feel confused and forget things. Time may seem to stand still or fly by very quickly. Some people describe a feeling of being “foggy in the head”. You may lack energy and motivation that you once put into your work, home life and friendships.



what may help

- Don't hold your thoughts inside as it is normal to continually think of your loved one; talking out loud to your loved one's picture may help you
- Do not make major life decisions or hasty changes for at least one year
- Lower your expectations of how much you can do in a day
- Set small goals for yourself
- Make lists to remind yourself of things to do
- Mark appointments on a calendar
- Know that your mind will become more clear in time as you heal in your grief

physically

You may feel nervous and tense, low in energy and very tired. You may sigh often and have a feeling of heaviness in various parts of your body. You may become sick more often: with colds or with flu-like symptoms, headaches, nausea, or diarrhea. You may have no appetite and lose weight or you may want to eat all the time. You may feel restless and have trouble sleeping. Understand that your body grieves too. Pay attention to all physical signs of grief.

what may help

- Visit your family doctor after a significant loss for a thorough check-up
- Do not overexert your body, get plenty of rest, mild to moderate exercise helps
- Eating well-balanced meals regularly to nourish and strengthen your body
- Drink plenty of water
- Listen to relaxing music or meditation tapes/CDs
- Add to your sense of well-being through physical cleanliness and good grooming habits
- Pamper yourself with a soothing bath, shower, a massage or other relaxation therapies