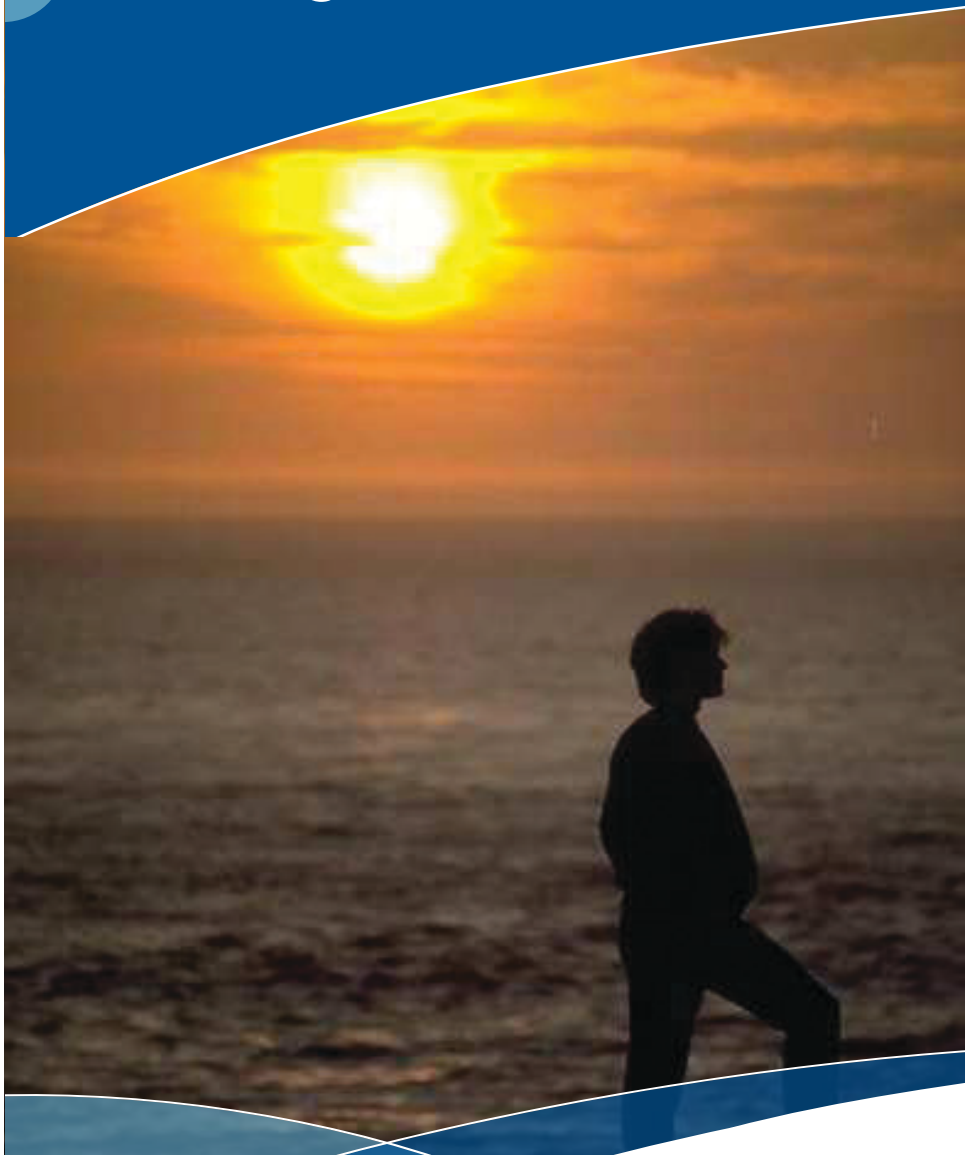


Dealing with Grief



northern health

the northern way of caring

Dealing with Grief...

. . . a resource booklet for those who have
experienced the loss of a loved one.

A special thank you to;

Palliative Care Service
Royal Victoria Hospital
Montreal Quebec

Clarke Institute of Psychiatry
Toronto, Ontario

WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT

In this sad world of ours, sorrow comes to all . . .

It comes with bitterest agony . .

Perfect relief is not possible,

You cannot now realize that you will ever feel
better . . .

And yet this is a mistake.

You are sure to be happy again,

To know this, which is certainly true,

Will make you come less miserable now.

I have experienced enough to know what I say.

- Abraham Lincoln

Three of Abraham Lincoln's sons died:
Edward, age 4;
William, age 11; and
Thomas, age 18

Dealing With Grief

There are no ready-made solutions for dealing with grief. Each person is different and reactions to the death of a loved one vary tremendously.

Nevertheless, it is possible to learn from the experience of others. The following is a list of suggestions to consider during bereavement. Some will be helpful; others will not.

They have been divided into five basic areas: physical, psychological, social, economic, and spiritual.

Physical

It is easy to neglect yourself because you don't much care about yourself while you are grieving. Because you are under great stress, you may become more susceptible to physical illness. It is especially important not to neglect your health.

Try to eat reasonably even if you derive no enjoyment from it.

Force yourself to do some physical activity each day (e.g. walk, swim, cycle, garden, or even vacuum).

Although sleep may be disturbed, try to get adequate rest. Avoid medication if possible.

If you have continuing symptoms, or if people urge you to see your doctor, do so, even if it doesn't seem important to you at the time.

Psychological

Everyone needs some help; don't be afraid to accept it. While you may feel pressured to put on a brave front, it is important to make your needs known by expressing your feelings to those that you trust.

Often numbness will see you through the first days or weeks. Don't be surprised if a letdown comes later and you actually feel worse than you did at the actual time of loss.

Many people are more emotionally upset during their bereavement than at any other time in their lives and are frightened by this. Be aware that severe upset is not unusual but if you or your family are alarmed seek professional support.

You may find that you are forgetful and have difficulty concentrating. It may be helpful to keep a daily journal and make lists of what you need to do.

Whether you feel you need to be alone or accompanied by others, make it known. Needing others around is common and does not mean that you will always be dependent on it. Needing both alone time and time spent with others is an integral part of a healthy lifestyle.

Except where necessary, (e.g. as a parent with young children) try not to assume responsibility for other people's feelings. In time you will again be responsive to how they feel but it's important to tend to your own feelings.

There is no set time limit for grieving. It varies from person to person, depending on individual circumstances. Expect that moments of grief will remain with you for the rest of your life.

Social

Friends and family are often most available early in bereavement and less so later. It is important to reach out to them when you need them. Don't wait for them to guess your needs. They will often guess incorrectly and too late.

Someone who is not too close to you but who is willing to listen may be particularly helpful.

During a period of grief it can be difficult to judge new relationships. Don't be afraid of them, but be aware that it is usually unwise to rush into them.

No one can substitute for the person you have lost. Try to enjoy people as they are. Do not avoid social contact because of the imperfections of those you meet.

Sometimes in an effort to stop the pain of grief, people act to replace the lost person (e.g. by having another child or remarrying) too soon. This kind of solution may only lead to other problems.

Economic

Avoid hasty decisions. Try not to make major life decisions within the first year unless absolutely necessary.

In general, most people find it best to remain settled in familiar surroundings until they can consider their future calmly.

Don't be afraid to seek advice. Usually it is wise to get more than one opinion before making a decision.

Consult experts before making any major financial decisions.

Having a job or doing volunteer work in the community can be helpful, but do not overextend yourself. A job cannot fill all your needs and you should be careful not to turn to excessive involvement in work. Relationships with family and friends should not be sacrificed in an effort to keep busy.

Spiritual

Many people find that personal faith is a major source of comfort during bereavement. For others, maintaining faith and usual religious observances such as prayer or church attendance may be difficult during this period of loss. Either reaction may occur and both are consistent with later personal spiritual growth.

It is usual to feel hopelessness, meaninglessness, or aloneness during bereavement.

Anger and/or guilt may also surface within the confines of faith. It is important, when you are ready, to talk to someone about those feelings.

Dealing with Grief in Children

Children will take cues about appropriate grief from the adults who surround them. They need age-appropriate, accurate information and meaningful support.

After an initial emotional response, children often act as if they have not been affected by the loss of a loved one.

Try to help children understand that sadness is perfectly normal and that neither theirs nor yours needs to be hidden. It is important that periods of happiness are enjoyed and do not become a cause of guilty feelings.

Symptoms such as lack of appetite, “tummy aches”, sleep disturbances, or a return to the type of behavior that characterizes a younger age group are signs that a child is grieving.

It is important to talk honestly with the child about the death. Remain a reliable source of accurate information to your child. If you do not know an answer to their questions, say “I don’t know.” Do not use “religious” words you personally do not believe to be true.

Children and adolescents often work through grief behaviorally rather than with words. Offer opportunities for vigorous exercise as well as slower activities, especially in the early phases of grief.

Attending and participating in a funeral or a visit to the cemetery maybe helpful, even with young children.

It is important to help the child recognize that the dead person will not return. Very young children may have to be reminded of this several times as they do not understand the concept of the finality of death.

If possible, avoid any abrupt change of routine since this can foster another sense of loss in the child. However children should not be forced to maintain a rigorous structure of activities which allows no time for processing their loss.

If problems persist, professional help should be sought.

Grief and Growth

Time alone will not heal grief. Should you choose to avoid or mask your grief with alcohol, drugs, work, etc., it will wait and re-emerge at another time. You will have to work through your grief. Over time you will learn that suffering can be used for personal growth.

Some of the world's finest art and literary works have been born out of personal grief. You too can become more than you were, your present can be more than your past. Consider the following possibilities:

- Begin a diary or journal describing the path and direction of your grief. Be sure to include moments of joy and energy as well as times of sadness.
- Attempt to rediscover talents and skills once part of your life (e.g. writing poetry, painting, needlework, sewing, music, athletics).
- If you are also interested in the activity, become involved in an interest which was important to the person who has died.
- Consider setting up a memorial fund for some ongoing creative or educational purpose.
- Join others who have also been bereaved. You need their support and also supporting others will be healing for you.
- Develop a ritual which will allow you to deal directly with your loss and the emotions associated with it. Rituals can help you “let go” of the past and “welcome” the future.
- Go for regular walks. They will energize you as well as give you time to center and focus your day.
- Place an emphasis on the spiritual part of your life. Your search for meaning and hope needs inspiration!
- Get professional help if you need it. Do not allow crippling grief to continue. A few sessions with a counsellor may help you resolve the anger, guilt, and despair that can destroy you.

The best memorial to a loved one is a full, growing life. Remember that you are not alone. Others will be there to help you share your load if you allow it. Do not deny them the opportunity to share your grief.

Resources That May be Helpful to You

1. Many people have access to Employee Assistance Programmes through their work place, which provide referral for grief counselling.
2. In Prince George and throughout Northern Health there are numerous private counsellors that can deliver grief counselling.
3. Help can also be obtained through Mental Health Services at your local health care facility.
4. Your own minister or priest may also be very helpful.
5. Hospice volunteers are available in many areas of Northern Health and they are trained to give information and support during bereavement.
6. Your public Library may have or may order books that you may find helpful.
7. Check the internet. You may find a chatroom or other resources to link you with others who have experienced a similar loss (eg. grieveworksbc.com or journeyofhearts.org).



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10-141-6004 (IND 03/13)