

COPING

WITH

Grief

TEEN EDITION

Welcome

Please feel free to use this booklet however you wish – you may want to look at it on your own, reading it all or just parts of it. You may want to share it with family, friends, or other support people as a tool for starting conversations about your grief.

Of course, not all of the suggestions provided here will work for everybody all the time, but we hope that within this booklet you may find something that is useful.

It may be helpful to find an adult who can help you with these activities or answer any questions you may have.

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What is grief?

Grief is a natural response to any type of loss. Losses can be defined as the absence of something meaningful to us.

We will all experience loss during our lifetime such as moving, end of relationships - friends or romantic partners, adults getting a divorce, life changes - graduation, further education, entering the workforce, the loss of pets and of course some people in our lives.

Grief is part of the human response to death. This experience impacts how you feel, how you think, how you relate to others, how your body feels, as well as faith, hopefulness, and/or meaning in life.

There is no correct way to grieve and no two people are going to grieve the exact same way. There is no time frame that fits every griever - some people may express their grief for a short time while others may feel their grief more intense weeks or months after their person died. The grief for every death you experience will be different.

Bill of Rights for Grieving Teens

A grieving teen has the right:

- to know the truth about the death, the deceased, and the circumstances
- to have questions answered honestly
- to be heard with dignity and respect
- to be silent and not tell you their grief emotions and thoughts
- to not agree with your perceptions and conclusions
- to see the person who died and the place of the death
- to grieve any way they want without hurting oneself or others
- to feel all the feelings and to think all the thoughts of one's own unique grief
- to grieve in one's own unique, individual way without censorship
- to be angry at death, at the person who died, at God, at self, and at others
- to have one's own theological and philosophical beliefs about life and death
- to be involved in the decisions about the rituals related to the death
- to not be taken advantage of in this vulnerable mourning condition and circumstances
- to feel guilt about how one feels they could have intervened to stop the death.

*Developed by grieving teens and shared by the Dougy Center
<https://www.dougy.org/>*

How you might be responding

Shock- Feelings of disbelief and numbness are common during this time. You may express your emotions immediately or you may feel numb for a while.

Emotional release - This may happen when you find out about the death of your person or not until months later. This often shows up as crying, though in our society crying can be discouraged. Finding ways to release your emotions safely is important.

Anger- You may feel a loss of control when your person dies. You may feel angry at friends, family, or even the world. Anger might happen when you feel that no one understands what it's like to lose someone or while you are trying to keep your emotions inside while completing all of your daily activities.

Sad- Sadness can occur when you reflect on the person who has died, their death, or when others do not understand the feelings you are experiencing. You might feel hopeless - like nothing will ever be good.

Guilt- You may think of many things that you could have, or should have, done differently when the person was alive. There can be a tendency to be hard on yourself. You may even think that if you'd done something differently your person would still be alive. If there was a period of illness, you may experience a sense of relief, which can activate guilty feelings. You may experience guilt that something is unfinished or unresolved.

Social withdrawal - You may feel an overall sense of disinterest or lack of motivation. The thought of participating in regular routines, activities, hobbies, or interests you used to enjoy might now seem completely overwhelming. You may not want to talk to, or see, anyone. It is a normal protective instinct to want to withdraw when in pain, but if this persists for a long period of time, it might be a good idea to talk with a counsellor about what you're feeling.

Physical distress - You may feel tightness in your throat, that you find it hard to take deep breaths or that your stomach is feeling uncomfortable and nervous. Your body might feel tight and you may eat more or less than usual. You may also feel the need to sleep more or that you are having trouble sleeping. If any of these feelings remain for a long time it is important to reach out to a trusted adult and your healthcare provider.

Concentrating on your person - You may find it difficult to think about anything but your person that died. You might believe you have seen your person in a crowd, expect to hear their voice when you receive a phone call, or replay memories of how they died in your mind.

Spiritual questioning - You may struggle with large, painful questions like, *Why did this have to happen? Why do people have to die? What is the point of life or death?* When you're grieving you may be trying to make sense of the loss. Some may turn to faith for comfort, others may question their faith as the result of the loss.

Readjusting - Gradually, you will adjust to loss, forming new relationships and routines. Over time, you might find that you experience a sweet sadness when remembering your loved one – glad for having known and loved them, but sad that they are no longer with you. Pain will lessen over time, there is always a chance that it will come back. Dr. Therese Rando calls this STUGs - Sudden Temporary Upsurges of Grief - or grief-bursts.

Coping with Grief: Self Care

It is understandable that at times you may struggle to know how to deal with grief. It can all seem overwhelming and confusing. Grieving is a time when your usual ways of coping with life stresses might not be enough. We hope that the information below, as well as exercises and tips, are useful for you in taking care of yourself while grieving.

Breathing - The big emotions that we often feel when we are grieving can get in the way of our ability to take slow and deep breaths. If you practice controlling your breathing, you may be able to ease some of the physical and emotional sensations of grief. This practice may also lessen the amount of time spent taking small quick breaths when big emotions come up.

Belly Breathing is an exercise you may want to try. Sit comfortably or lie down. Place one hand on your chest and one on your belly, or wherever feels most comfortable. Breathe in slowly and deeply through your nose, filling up your lungs, expanding your belly. Next, exhale slowly through your mouth. When you notice your belly moving inwards towards the spine, breathe in again through the nose and repeat. Try this in the morning or before you go to bed.

Another exercise to try: While sitting in a calm, comfortable position:

- List 5 things you can see
- List 4 things you can touch
- List 3 things you can hear
- List 2 things you can smell
- List 1 thing you can taste

Eating - When you are grieving your eating habits may change. You may eat more than you normally would or you may not have any interest in eating. Eating may also change if the person who died used to be the one who made meals for you. *Canada's Food Guide* is a good resource to check out. If you are having trouble eating, try eating small amounts during the day rather than trying to eat a meal. You may also find it useful to find someone to eat with.

Sleeping - When you are tired and run down your emotions can feel even harder to manage. You may have trouble sleeping or you may feel like you want to sleep more. Creating a sleep routine can help your body understand when it is time to wake up and when it is time to sleep. Exercise during the day can help you with sleeping at night as well as avoiding naps during the day. Avoid using your bed for homework, eating, watching TV, cell phones or laptops – the less you think of your bed as anything other than a place to sleep, the better.

Body Relaxation exercise for sleep

1. Sit comfortably or lie down. Close your eyes. Breathe slowly and relax.
2. Continue breathing naturally while you tense your toes, hold for ten seconds, then release.
3. Next, tense your feet, hold for ten seconds, then release.
4. Tense your calf muscles, hold for ten seconds, then release.
5. Continue tensing and relaxing muscle groups from your feet to your head including toes, feet, calves, thighs, buttocks, stomach, shoulders, arms, hands, fingers, neck and face.
6. If you notice lingering tension, repeat the process from head to toe.
7. Continue breathing naturally and if any one part of the body remains tense, concentrate on tensing and relaxing that muscle group several more times.

Body Scan - This is a form of a meditation exercise where you can pay attention to your body and how you are feeling. Start in a relaxed position, sitting, lying down, however feels best for you. Start with your head and work your way through your body to your toes, then back to your head. If you want some guidance, try listening to a body scan meditation on YouTube.

Moving - Movement can be a challenge when you are grieving as you may feel stressed and tired. Attempting gentle exercise such as taking the stairs or going for a short walk outside can be useful. Moving your body can help your brain to positively change your mood and outlook on life. When we move, oxygen and nutrients are delivered to our organs and tissues which gives us more energy to go about daily tasks. It can be useful to ask a friend to do this with you or join a club for motivation. Grief is hard work – listen to your body and reach out to a Doctor or Nurse Practitioner if you have any unusual symptoms or you can call 811 for guidance.

Giving yourself permission - You may need to give yourself permission to grieve every day. You may think that having feelings or sharing your feelings with others is bad. You may feel that having these feelings is a weakness. Until now, you may not have thought about sickness or death and it is even less likely that you talked about this openly with others. Our feelings are a normal and essential part of being human. There is no magic potion or shortcut through grief. In fact, the most direct way through grief is to address it head-on rather than finding ways to avoid it. One way to do this is to give ourselves permission to feel as bad as we do.

It can be difficult to give yourself permission, especially if you have never done this before. Self-talk is the running conversation with yourself inside your head. When you are grieving you may find that your self-talk includes:
*Stop being so silly. Smarten up and get on with things.
There's something seriously wrong with me. Get a grip.*

Some people find it helpful to write down their self-talk as it can be uncomfortable at first. Putting your negative thoughts on paper can help get them out of your head and make them easier to challenge. Here are some things you can say (or write) to yourself that you may find useful:

- *I feel really bad today, but it won't always be like this.*
- *It's okay to do whatever I need to do to grieve, as long as I am safe.*
- *I loved _____ so much and their death has created a huge hole in my life.*
- *My grief and feelings of loss are normal.*
- *My heart hurts.*
- *Feeling angry and lost is a normal part of grief.*
- *Remembering _____ is painful, but I want to because they were important to me.*
- *It won't always be like this. And I will always remember them.*

Making boundaries - It is important to tell the people around you what you need and what you do not need. This does not mean that the people around you will always listen or understand. The first step to healthy boundaries is awareness. It's important to remember that boundaries can change depending on the situation or context. Deciding what your boundaries are can be difficult as we sometimes do not know what we need while grieving. At times, you may want peace and quiet and then suddenly feel that you want to be around others or doing an activity. Being in nature can be very soothing, for example:

- Going for a walk in nature or to your favourite spot
- Throwing rocks into a river, lake, or the ocean
- Laying on your back and watch the sky; observing the clouds, stars, moon, and anything else that you see up there.

Coping with grief-related emotions

As we have learned throughout this booklet, grief usually has a wide range of emotions that you may feel. You may feel as though you are on a rollercoaster with your emotions. With sharp turns, huge dips and unexpected changes of direction, and most of the time you do not know where you're going to be next.

You may not feel like yourself at all. You may have thoughts, feelings or even reactions you've never felt before. This might feel uncomfortable and painful for you, but some experiences could be powerful or uplifting. So, you may need more skills for coping at different times to deal with the many various emotions that may come up while grieving.

Anxious Feelings

Everyone is prone to feelings of anxiety. This may include worrying, nervousness or a sense of unease. Anxious feelings can be related to a specific event in your life, or you may be unsure of why you're experiencing them.

Grief-related anxiety can come out in many different ways. It could be because your person who died helped

give you a sense of safety, it could be your way of life has changed, or you have fears about death or illness.

You might start to feel anxious after someone you care about dies. This can happen because you keep thinking about them, how they died, or worrying about what will happen next. These thoughts can go around and around in your head, make you feel upset, and even make it hard for you to sleep.

One strategy is to do the belly breathing (page 9), or the body relaxation exercise (page 11) to help calm the racing thoughts you may be experiencing.

These exercises might not always stop your thoughts, but they can help you focus your mind. One way to do this is by picturing something in your head. For example, you can imagine your thoughts inside a cartoon bubble, and then pop the bubble in your mind when the thoughts get too distracting. The key to this exercise is to make it as personal and meaningful to you as possible.

Sometimes you might have thoughts you wish would just go away. It's not easy to completely stop these thoughts, but you can learn ways to keep them quiet for a while. This gives you time to rest and wait until you're ready to deal with what the thought really means.

One way to help manage unwanted thoughts is to imagine a safe place in your mind to put them away. This is called a 'thought container'. On the next page, you'll see an example of how you can create your own.

The Container

Try to picture a secure container, sitting in front of you, or maybe in another secure place. This container will be strong enough to hold whatever you choose to place in it. There must be a way to open and close the container if and when you choose to do so.

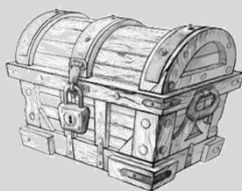
Perhaps it is a safe, a filing cabinet, a shipping container, a crate, a trunk, a safety deposit box, or some other vessel.

Picture everything about your container in detail. What colour is it? How big is it? What does it look like? What is it made of? What makes it safe and secure? Does it have a lock? How does it open and close?

Think about your container's capacity. Can it hold more than one thought? Maybe different anxious thoughts need different containers. Picture as many containers as you need, but remember to imagine them as vividly as possible.

Now imagine taking your anxious thought and putting it inside the container. Repeat the thought in your head or say it out loud and then picture yourself placing the thought inside your container, securely closing the lid or cover, shutting the door, and locking it if you wish. Now that your thought is inside, where do you want the container to stay? Imagine leaving your container in a secure place.

You can access your container at any time when you want to add to it or retrieve a thought to examine it before storing it away again.



Anger

Feeling angry after losing someone is normal. Everyone experiences it in their own way, and some people might not feel angry at all.

Anger can show up as quick, strong feelings that feel out of control, or as a constant feeling that affects many parts of your life. Feeling angry can be confusing or feel wrong, which can make it hard to deal with grief in a healthy way.

You might use words like frustration or annoyance instead of anger to describe how you feel. This can happen if it seems like other people don't understand what you're going through or aren't giving you the support you need.

You might feel angry about how your person died. For example, if they died from an illness, you might feel angry at the doctors or nurses for not being able to save them. You might even feel angry at the person who died—maybe because of things they did in the past, or because they left you behind. This can also make you feel guilty at the same time. You might feel angry at the world or even at God for letting it happen. All of these feelings are normal and okay to have after someone has died.

Holding in your feelings can be bad for both your body and your mind. This book has lots of ideas to help you feel better, but not every idea will work for everyone. You might have to try a few different things to see what helps you the most. Here are some ways you can let out your anger instead of keeping it bottled up.

- Being active can really help when you're feeling angry, because anger is a strong feeling that affects your whole body. Things like running, hitting a pillow, swimming, or going for a walk can help you let out your anger in a healthy way.
- Writing down your angry thoughts can help you feel better. No one else has to see what you write, it's just for you. It doesn't have to look nice or even make sense.
- Art is a great way to let out your anger. You can try drawing, painting, or even making something like a sculpture. It doesn't have to be perfect just use colors and shapes that show how you feel.
- Play some of your favourite music but LOUD!!! Turning up the volume and singing along at the top of your lungs can help you let go of some of your anger. Just be sure to respect the people around you.
- Sometimes it helps to just scream or yell! If you have a private place—like the beach, the woods, or even the shower—you can let it all out by yelling, crying, or just being really loud. Just make sure you're not disturbing anyone nearby.
- Talk to someone about how you're feeling. You might worry that people will think you're being mean or rude, but it's okay to share your feelings. Just make sure to talk to someone you trust, like a good friend or a school counsellor. They are safe people to talk to when you're feeling angry.

- Count to 10. It might sound simple, but it really can help. Taking a moment to cool down gives you time to think. You might even notice that you're feeling more than just anger maybe you're also sad, hurt, lonely, or disappointed. Sometimes, there's a mix of feelings underneath the anger that need your attention too.

Guilt

Guilt is a feeling you get when you think you've done something wrong even if you haven't. When you're grieving, guilt often shows up as wishing you had done something differently. You might think things like, *I should have spent more time with them, or I should have been there at the end..* These 'should' thoughts are really just a way of saying how much you miss the person and wish they were still here.

Feeling guilty can happen when you feel helpless or like you lost control. For example, when you say things like *I should have...* it might feel like if you had done something different, the person you lost wouldn't have died. Even though guilt can really hurt, sometimes it feels easier to think you could have changed things than to admit there was nothing you could do. Saying 'should' might be your way of trying to feel more in control when you're feeling really sad and unsure. It might help to make a list of all the good things you did for the person and the special parts of your relationship. When you start feeling guilty, look at that list to remind yourself of the positive times you shared.

Depending on your relationship with the person and how they died, it's totally normal to feel relief after they're gone. Feeling relieved doesn't mean you're a bad person, and it doesn't mean you didn't love them. It just means you're glad their pain is over and that your pain from watching them suffer is over too. We all make mistakes in relationships with those we love.

Feeling relief after someone dies can sometimes make you feel really guilty. You might think you're only supposed to feel sad, but grief is more than just sadness. It's a mix of many different emotions, and none of them are wrong or bad.

You can't go back in time to fix things you think you did wrong, but you can still say you're sorry. It's harder when the person you want to apologize to has died, but you can still talk to them in your own way. This might be a one-way conversation, but it can still help. It might be painful, but holding those feelings inside can be painful too.

You might want to talk to a friend or family member about your guilt to help let it out. Just remember that people who care about you might try to make you feel better by telling you not to feel guilty. Sometimes that helps—but other times, it might feel like they don't really understand how strong your feelings are. That's why it's important to talk to someone who can really listen and just be there for you.

Writing a letter to the person who died can be a good way to let out feelings of guilt. You can also try writing down all the 'shoulds' you're thinking about. Getting

those thoughts out on paper can help you feel some relief.

You can keep the letter as a reminder until you don't need it anymore.

Loneliness

Loneliness in grief can feel really heavy. It can make you wish things could go back to how they were before, back when your person was still here.

When you hear the word 'lonely', you might think it means being alone or not having anyone to talk to. That's one kind of loneliness. But when you're used to spending time with someone talking, hanging out, or just being together, and then they're suddenly gone, it can leave a deep and painful kind of loneliness that's hard to explain.

There's also the kind of loneliness where you feel alone on the inside. It's not just about being by yourself. You can feel lonely even if you're in a room full of people. This kind of loneliness can make you feel like you don't really belong or like something important is missing—even if you're surrounded by people who love and care about you.

After someone you care about dies, loneliness can feel really confusing. You might feel like you want to be around friends and people who care about you—but at the same time, you might also need space to be alone and think about your loss. Feeling lonely can be uncomfortable and even scary sometimes, but it's a normal part of grieving. Over time, it might not feel so

overwhelming. But while you're still experiencing this, here are some things you can try to help you deal with feeling lonely.

Activities - Some people deal with loneliness and grief by staying busy. They might do things on their own like taking photos, working out, writing, reading, painting, walking, gaming, listening to music, or dancing. These activities can feel good and help you feel like you're doing something meaningful, which is really helpful during hard times. But if you spend all your time doing these things just to avoid your feelings, it might stop you from really dealing with your grief.

Social Time - Spending more time with others is another way to help with loneliness and grief. You could video call friends you haven't talked to in a while, join a new club or sports team at school, or even volunteer in your community. Hanging out with pets also counts as social time! It's okay if you don't feel like talking a lot, just being around others can help. Sometimes, wanting to be around people but also wanting to be alone can feel confusing. That's normal, and you don't have to push yourself too hard. Just take small steps when you're ready.

Distractions - Sometimes, people try to distract themselves from feeling lonely or sad by doing things that feel good in the moment like: watching TV, playing video games, scrolling through social media, eating junk food, or shopping. These things can be fun and give you a break from your feelings, but they don't really help you

understand or deal with your loneliness in the long run. They're more like quick escapes than real solutions.

In small amounts, distractions can actually be helpful, and sometimes you really need them. But even healthy coping strategies can stop working if they're the only ones you use. That's why it's important to have a mix of different ways to cope. Finding the right balance can help you handle your feelings better over time.

Reading about these different types of coping strategies you may immediately recognize your go-to category of coping.

Sadness

Sadness can surprise you; it can show up out of nowhere. Grief can feel like an empty, heavy pain, and it can hurt both your body and your heart. One of the hardest parts about feeling sad is being stuck between two things: the pain that comes with remembering your person, and the fear that you might start to forget them.

When you're grieving, memories of your person can feel both comforting and really sad. You might remember the sound of their laugh, their hugs, or how they greeted you, and those memories can make you smile and cry at the same time. Sadness can be triggered by anything: a smell, a sound, a place, or even an object that reminds you of them. These moments can bring up strong feelings, even if you thought your grief was starting to fade.

Our bodies feel emotions just like our minds do. For example, you might feel excited when you hear your favorite song, get butterflies in your stomach when you're nervous, or feel your shoulders get tight when you're upset but can't say how you feel. Grief works the same way - your body can hold onto it. When you move around, like going for a walk or doing something active, the tightness in your body can start to relax, and some of those heavy feelings might begin to let go too.

It might surprise you when strong feelings of sadness show up, but it's better to let them out than to keep them bottled up. Letting your feelings out is healthier than holding them inside. Grief can feel a lot like ocean waves, sometimes the sadness washes in really strong, and then it fades for a while. It comes and goes, but over time, the waves get easier to handle.

In our world today, people often think being sad is a bad thing. You can see this on TV shows where everyone always seems happy. Many of us believe that if we just think positively or live a healthy life, we'll always feel good. But if everyone is so focused on being happy all the time, where does that leave space for feeling sad or grieving?

When you're grieving, it can be really hard because the world around you keeps saying you should be happy. You might feel like people don't have much patience if you're still sad. Sometimes, you might even feel guilty for not being happy. But what if, instead, you saw your sadness as something to be proud of? It might sound strange, but many people believe that feeling deep sadness that

comes with grief as a sign that you really loved your person a lot.

Coping strategies are not intended to minimize your sadness, but to help you feel sad in manageable ways. They are just suggestions to help you honour your person with your sadness when and how you decide.

When you miss your person, you might ...

- Cry and let your feelings out.
- Share stories with others about good times with your person.
- Plant a tree in their memory.
- Look at pictures and make a collage of your favourites to be framed and hung in your home.
- Talk to someone who understands, who will not try to fix your grief, and who will just listen.
- Visit your person's grave and talk to them about how you are feeling.
- Create a memory book with stories, concert tickets, photos, and other memorabilia.
- Write a letter to your person telling them how much they are missed, offering an overdue apology, telling them about the changes in your life, or, after a time, about how you will move forward.

Exhaustion

Exhaustion doesn't just happen to your body; it can affect your mind and emotions too. Just like you get tired when you don't sleep enough, your mind can get tired when

you're dealing with a lot of hard feelings. Feeling this kind of tiredness is a normal part of trying to understand and cope with a loss.

Sometimes it takes more emotional energy to hold in your feelings than to let them out. You might feel really tired after a big cry, and that's okay. This kind of tiredness can make your arms and legs feel heavy, and it might make you not want to do anything at all.

Your exhaustion may affect your ability to think, reason with others, or concentrate. You may question why you are thinking the way you do. You might make decisions you wouldn't normally make, get overwhelmed by things you typically wouldn't have, or you may be very organized in the beginning and feel exhausted later on down the road. Again, all of these reactions to a loss are normal and to be expected. The following might be helpful for decision making.

- When overwhelmed by tasks (for example: responsibilities at school, work and at home), try to narrow them down to your top three most important tasks.
- Get more information by asking for others' advice, researching online, reach out to a trusted adult, or calling an agency or organization that may have additional information or expertise relevant to your questions.
- Remember that there is usually more than one solution to a problem. Consider as many possible options as you can, identifying the pros and cons of each option.

- Choose a course of action.
- Follow through with the decision – try listing the steps required to reach a certain goal or outcome e.g. Step 1, Step 2, Step 3, etc., and then focus on one step at a time.

Remember that it's okay to ask for help when things get overwhelming and exhausting. It can feel like you are supposed to do this alone, which makes asking for help difficult. Grief is an experience and it is useful to do in community with others, like friends, family, neighbours, and service providers.

Searching for peace

You may find yourself looking for peace and experiencing:

- a longing for balance and wholeness
- a search for meaning or purpose in life
- a need for connection with other people and the universe

Some people may find comfort in nature while others may find it in spirituality. Spirituality may include beliefs, practices, rituals and symbols that are shared by a community. Some people live and express their spirituality within an organized religion while others do not belong to a religion but still live highly spiritual lives. One is not better or more desirable than the other. Grief can affect you at a spiritual level regardless of how you identify your personal spirituality or religion.

Spirituality can also be about your struggle with the big questions about the nature of existence, the reason for

suffering, and our place in the grand scheme of things. You may be asking:

- *Why did this have to happen?*
- *What's the point of anything anymore?*
- *What happens to us when we die?*
- *What is the meaning of life?*

When grieving, these questions often indicate a search for meaning; an effort to try and make sense of the loss. Some people turn to religious or spiritual faith for comfort, while others may question their faith as the result of the death. The questions are important, even if they are not easily answered.

Some ways in which you may find meaning include:

Story telling – Sharing memories and stories of your loved one can help you make sense of their life and death as well as your own pain. These stories may include an expression of your shame, pain or grief moving you toward peace and acceptance.

Paying attention to the ordinary things to make meaning – You may experience meaningful moments in the most ordinary everyday things such as a beautiful sunset, a creative pursuit, or feeling an overall sense of awe and wonder.

In relationship with others – You can also find deeper relationships with others. Your shared grief may bring a newfound appreciation for who they are. You may find meaning and purpose in reaching out to, or helping, others.

Engaging in spiritual pursuits – Spiritual clarity may be found when reading sacred writings, going to church/synagogue/temple/mosque, attending spiritually themed workshops, praying and meditating, or creating the time and space to connect with that which we personally hold sacred.

Belonging to a caring community – Connecting with others in your community, with a group of family, friends, or neighbours, can sometimes help bring some comfort. Lasting connections can be found in caring for vulnerable members of our society and feeling that you have made a difference.

Love and gratitude

Not all of the emotional reactions you will have in grief will be negative or distressing. The deep sadness at losing someone is intimately connected to your love for them. While there is sadness in your heart, feelings of fondness and connection may also be present too. You may experience a memory or hear a story that makes you both cry and smile at the same time.

Another emotion that may surface is gratitude for who the person was and what they meant to you. You may experience a wave of appreciation or affection when thinking about all of the ways your life was touched and enhanced by the person who died.

Positive emotions can catch us off guard during funerals or memorials. With many people coming together who knew the person, the telling of stories or sharing of

memories, there may be moments of joy and laughter along with the sadness. While this can be a pleasant way to remember someone, it can also sometimes lead to feelings of unease. When we're grieving, we may feel bad about feeling good.

For a period of time following a death, it may feel like it is wrong to enjoy yourself, even for a moment. Laughter and joy can also trigger sadness when you acknowledge that your person is no longer here to share the good times. Human emotions are complex. It's common to feel two or more emotions at the same time.

Feeling good does not mean we miss the person any less. We can practice just noticing and feeling all our emotions without trying to fix or change them.

Recognizing when more help is needed

In the beginning sections of this booklet it was stated that grief is a normal and necessary reaction to loss. It is normal for grief to be intense, painful, and all-consuming for a period of time. However, this intensity can sometimes linger long after death. It becomes draining and can interfere with your daily living. This is referred to as complicated grief – when other issues are making the grieving process more complex than usual. Many factors influence how you might experience grief and cope with your loss. In addition to grieving the loss of your person, you may also be coping with:

- severe depression
- drug and/or alcohol use
- a history of mental illness
- developmental disabilities

- chronic health problems
- a violent or traumatic death
- poverty
- past or present sexual, physical or emotional abuse
- suicidal thoughts, feelings, or plans
- a significant prior loss or series of losses

Complicated grief might include other signs. Although some reactions may be extreme, they can be considered normal especially right after death. Some extreme reactions include:

- excessive use of alcohol and/or other substances
- wishing or planning your own death, e.g. thinking or saying things like, *I wish I could die, I would be better off dead, or I want to be with my person.*
- lengthy and persistent withdrawal from family, friends or work
- inability to get up in the morning and perform basic self-care tasks.

When these reactions persist and/or pose a danger to your own health and safety, it is recommended that you consult with a counsellor or healthcare professional.

Two supports that are available 24/7 are:

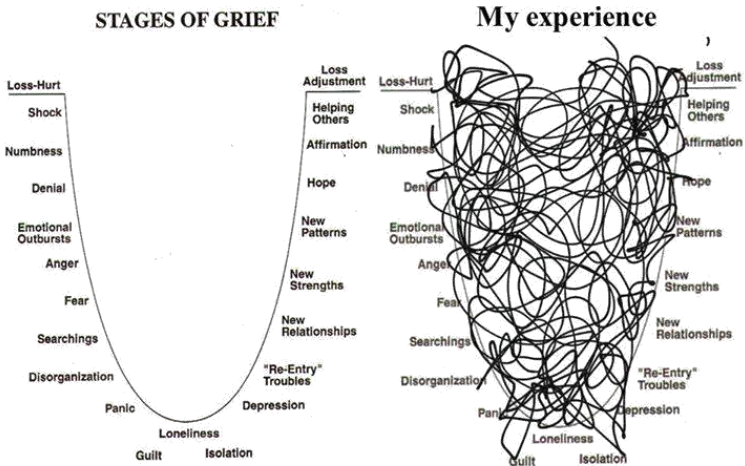
Kids Help Phone - 1-800-668-6868

Mental Health Crisis Line - 1-888-429-8167

When does grief end?

One of the most common sources of distress for people who are grieving is that the pain they're experiencing seems endless. It's natural to wonder, *When it will be done?*

There are also many theories and ideas about the endpoint of grief. For instance, you may have heard of Elizabeth Kubler-Ross' *5 Stages of Grief* including denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. It is understandable that it would be comforting to have a predictable roadmap to follow but that is not a realistic expectation. This work was important, but it is not a roadmap for grieving the death of your person.



You may also believe that grief ends within a set period of time – a common time frame is one year. There can be an

implied or stated expectation that you should be 'over it' about a year after your person's death.

Still others might think of an ending to grief in terms of 'closure'. You may have been told that closure is an emotional resolution to a difficult event.

We can tell you with confidence that your grief is unique to you and should not be compared with anyone else's experience. There are a number of circumstances that can affect the length and intensity of grief.

- Your relationship to the deceased
- Your previous experiences with significant loss
- Your level of material (financial), practical and emotional dependency on the deceased
- Your age and gender
- The type of death (sudden or prolonged, peaceful or violent)
- The condition of the person's body (disfigured)
- The quality of your relationship to your person just prior to their death
- The perceived need to hide your feelings from others
- The level of social support you receive
- Your religious and/or spiritual beliefs

How our grief impacts us can change overtime, but it might be something that always carry with you. The reality is that missing the person who died, thinking about them, and caring about them will likely never really leave you. Those feelings can, and often do, lessen in intensity over time, but your feelings for your person

don't disappear. When someone dies they are no longer physically present, but your relationship with them continues on.

Grief is the road you travel to develop a new type of relationship with them – a relationship made of memories. As time goes on, you may be able to draw some comfort from knowing that your memories and your grief are necessary and important. They are, in fact, a tribute to how your person touched your life.

Imagining your grief

Imagine three glass jars – one small, one medium-sized, and one large. Take one ball, exactly the size of the smallest jar.

Now stuff it into the small jar. You can barely squeeze it in. This is the way grief feels to most people. It fills everything and there is no room for anything else. Grief has taken over all the available emotional space in your world leaving no room for anything else. It is so large it even makes breathing difficult.

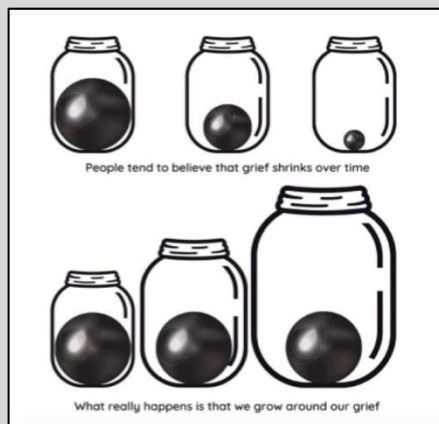
As time goes by, you may be able to put that same ball in the medium-sized jar. There is more room around the ball and it is not taking up all the space in the jar. It's still a big presence but there is more space for other thoughts and feelings.

Finally, put the ball in the largest jar. It fits easily with lots of room to spare. It is not difficult to manage grief within the space of the large jar.

As painful as it is, many people do not want to stop grieving. They feel it will sever their final tie with their person who has died. Their relationship with their person still has great value and they don't want to forget.

The ball (your grief) has not changed its size or shape. It will always be present and cannot be erased or ignored. But the jar has gotten larger to accommodate your grief within a whole and balanced life.

Image based on Lois Tonkin's Theory of Grief (1996)



About Us

Colchester East Hants Hospice Society is a non-profit community organization dedicated to providing a safer and accessible space for those in our communities to understand and navigate grief.

Our team is here to help and can be reached at:

902-893-3265

www.cehhospice.org

info@cehhospice.org

Some days the waves are small.
Some days the waves are big.
All you can do is learn to swim.





Hope & Understanding for the Grieving

Our office is located at:

89 Queen Street, Truro NS

902.893.3265

info@cehhospice.org

www.cehhospice.org



| @cehhospice

