

With Sympathy

Mourning is the process of coming to terms with a loss. We must grieve those who have died so that we can go on living.

There is no right way of coping with a death; people deal with loss in their own individual way. Although each of us reacts to loss in a different way, this booklet will talk about some of the feelings and experiences most often felt by bereaved people.



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Accepting the Loss

After a loss you may go through a period of shock and numbness. You may feel strangely calm and detached and have periods of disbelief that the death has happened. These are all normal defense mechanisms of your mind to protect you from being overwhelmed. This allows you to take in the loss in your own time. When the “shock” wears off, unfortunately, the grief strikes full-blown.

Sadness and Yearning

You may feel overcome with sadness, and miss the physical closeness of your lost loved one. You may look for them in a crowd, see or hear them about the house, and sometimes even talk with them at length. You’ll shed many tears, and then be worried when you can’t cry any more.

Anguish, Emptiness and Despair

This may be the longest part of grieving. You may feel that you no longer have a reason to live, and that nothing interests you. You may feel guilty about things you didn’t do or say, or about conflicts you had with the deceased person. Or, you may be angry - at God, at your loved one for leaving you, at the hospital and medical staff, or at friends and family who, unlike you, are able to carry on with a normal life.

Disorganization, Helplessness, Anxiety and Fear

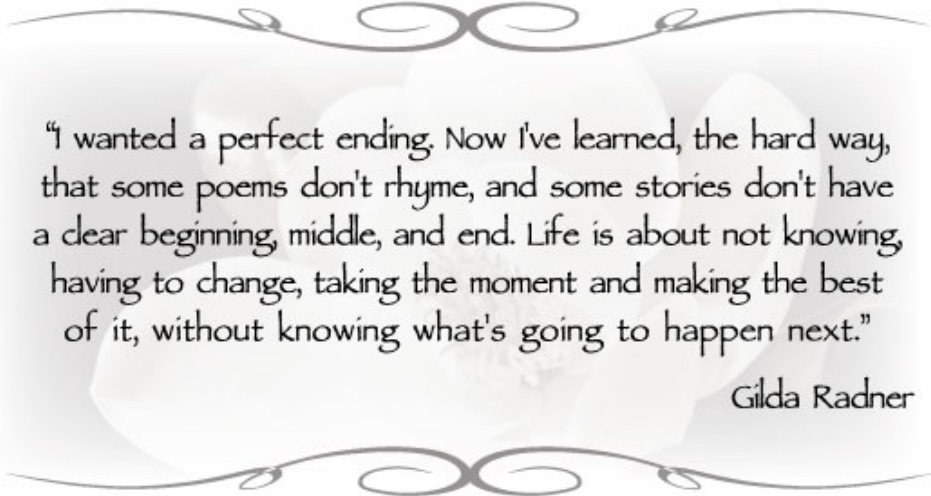
You may have periods when you are forgetful and cannot focus, concentrate or carry out your normal tasks. Feelings of anxiety, fear, helplessness and loneliness are common. You may feel you will never be normal again.

Grief is painful. You may want to escape and so you may think about moving to get away from the memories. It is better to put off making important decisions until you are thinking more clearly.

Physical Symptoms

You may experience muscle tightness, body pains, restlessness, or feel very tired. You may have sleep problems such as not being able to sleep, sleeping too much, or disturbing dreams.

If you think you need relief from your anxiety, speak to your family doctor. An occasional sleeping pill won't hurt.



"I wanted a perfect ending. Now I've learned, the hard way, that some poems don't rhyme, and some stories don't have a clear beginning, middle, and end. Life is about not knowing, having to change, taking the moment and making the best of it, without knowing what's going to happen next."

Gilda Radner

What can I do to help my grieving children?

No child is too young to notice when an important person in their life is no longer there. While death can be confusing for children, they cope better if you give them honest information about the illness or condition and death and, by letting them be part of the experience. Adults often try to protect children from the pain of the death by withholding information from them. This often leaves children with many unanswered questions such as "Am I responsible?", "Will it happen to me?", and "Who will take care of me?". Children can sense when they are not being told the whole truth. They will often use their imaginations to fill in the missing information, which can leave them confused and imagining a situation even worse than the one that is actually happening.

How Children Think About Death

Children are concrete thinkers, so it is important to use clear, concrete language when explaining the situation. Tell the child the name of the disease (i.e., "cancer") or condition (i.e., "car accident") that caused the death. Try not to use confusing phrases such as "passed away", "gone away" or "gone to a better place". Do NOT describe death as being like sleep.

Use the words "dying", "died" and "death".

Children Need Reassurance

Children need reassurance that the death is not their fault, and that they will not catch the illness or condition. Let them know who will take care of them, but don't promise that you won't die. If you are healthy, you can say, "I will likely live until I am very, very old but no one knows for sure."

Children often have many questions about dying and death and it's important that they get a chance to ask them. Do not be afraid to say "I don't know" if you cannot answer their questions.

How Children Grieve

Children grieve differently than adults. They have a natural ability to switch from being very sad one moment, to playing and having fun the next. If a child does not seem to be upset about the death, it does not mean the child isn't grieving. Give the child time to grieve in their own way. Do not push the child to talk about it, but DO give children permission to express their feelings. Let them know that all of the feelings they may have are okay – sad, worried, happy, lonely, mad, etc.

Children need to feel secure so they can grieve and carry on with life. By keeping a structure, and some rules and limits you give the child a sense of security. It may be helpful to give the child a special item from the person who died, or to make a memory book or box.

How Children Express their Feelings

Children will often express their feelings through their behaviour. Grieving children may complain of tummy pains or headaches, or may wet the bed or have trouble sleeping. They may act out, act younger than their age, be unruly, or be withdrawn or sulky. Some children cry, and some don't.

Help the child find healthy ways to express his or her feelings through drawing or music, punching a pillow, physical activity, writing in a journal, or talking to someone.

It is helpful for you to grieve with your child, as your tears and sadness give your child permission to be real too. Touch, hold, or hug your child if he or she is open to it.

Children benefit from being part of the rituals around the death, such as the funeral. It is comforting for children to know that death does not end a relationship. Continue to share stories and memories of the person who has died.

What else should I know about bereavement?

Bereavement Can Strain Your Relationships

Some of your family and friends may find it hard to talk to you about your loss. They may avoid talking about the death, or say things that are not helpful. Sometimes nothing people say to try to comfort you seems right. Although no one can really understand what you are going through, there are people who are willing to listen and will try to understand as much as they can. It is better to share your feelings with someone who is sympathetic and caring, than to try to hide your feelings.

If friends and family seem to be avoiding you, it is possible they do not know what to do or say. Most people want to be helpful and are open to you telling them what you need. People can't guess your feelings. Tell them if you want to talk about your loss, talk about something else, see a movie together or be invited over for dinner.

Bereavement can put a strain on your relationship with your spouse. Remember that everyone grieves differently and, you and your spouse will not experience the same emotions at the same time.

Beginning To Live Again

Allow yourself to talk about your feelings with someone you trust. Allow yourself to cry, laugh and be angry. You have lost someone and it hurts. Set some realistic goals to re-introduce things you used to find pleasure in. In time, you will notice that you are having more good hours or days. You will find you can remember something once shared with the one who has died without feeling so sad. Little by little, you will find it easier to try new activities or re-new old ones. During these times, you may feel disloyal to the memory of your loved one. Try to remember that while the past will always be with you, there is a future and a life to live.

If it Doesn't Get Better

Most people are able to grieve without getting very depressed. If you find that your intense and painful feelings are not subsiding, you may be depressed and you should get help. Start with your family doctor. Symptoms of depression are:

- Lasting and intense feelings of guilt
- Thoughts of suicide or worries about dying
- Feelings of worthlessness
- Markedly slow speech and movements
- Lying in bed most of the day
- Inability to carry out normal daily activities
- Lack of interest in spending time with family or friends or enjoying any leisure activity
- Loss of appetite, weight loss or weight gain

What will happen at the time of death?

What will I have to do?

The doctor will complete a medical Certificate of Death which is sent to the Ontario government. This must be filled out before your loved one's body is moved from the hospital. The body remains in the hospital morgue until you select a funeral home. The funeral home transports the body from hospital to the funeral home. The funeral director will give you copies of the 'Funeral Director's Statement of Death' which you will need to settle your loved one's estate.

Organ and Tissue Donation

You may be making many decisions at this time that you did not expect. Some families find that one of the most meaningful decisions after a loved one's death is to donate their organs and tissues. One donor can help as many as 75 people.

If you think that your loved one may have wished to donate their organs and tissues to help someone else, a member of the health care team or a coordinator from Trillium Gift of Life Network will speak with you. If you have questions about how organ and tissue

donation can save lives, or how it can help those waiting for an organ transplant, please ask a member of the health care team to contact the Trillium Gift of Life Network.

Autopsy

A doctor may ask you to give permission for an autopsy. The autopsy is an examination of the body to find out the exact cause of death. It is performed by a specially-trained doctor in a way that respects your loved one's body. An autopsy may help you understand why your loved one died and, can offer information that may help treat others. You may refuse an autopsy unless it is required for legal purposes, as in the case of a sudden and unexplained death. In such cases, the coroner may tell you that an autopsy must be done, if he feels this information will be helpful.

The autopsy report is sent to your loved one's family doctor. This usually takes a few months. The family doctor can help you understand the autopsy report. If your loved one did not have a family doctor, contact the doctor who cared for your family member while in hospital. If the autopsy was ordered by the Coroner, contact the Coroner's Office at 416-314-4100.

How do I go about planning a funeral or memorial?

Funeral Homes and Funerals

Funeral rites and ceremonies are important to help you honour your loved one's life. They can provide comfort and a time to share your grief with family and friends. Funeral directors are familiar with religious and cultural rites and practices. Call a funeral home of your choice and they will guide you through the process.

It is important that you plan a funeral that you can afford and feel comfortable with. You can express your love for the person you have lost with a simple, dignified funeral. Most funeral homes can provide a low cost funeral, but you have to ask. Call several funeral homes and compare prices. The funeral home chapel is available for memorial services. Family, friends and clergy may be helpful to you in making these decisions.

- For information and a list of funeral homes in Ontario, please log on to the following link:
www.ofsa.org
- If all you require is a basic cremation or burial, there is no need to use a funeral home. Direct cremation and burial services offer this option.
- For more information, you may wish to contact:
Aftercare Cremation and Burial Services (416-440-8878) **www.aftercare.org**
or Affordable Cremation Options (905-566-1938)
www.affordablecremationoptions.net

Funeral and Burial Assistance for those with Low Incomes

Social Services will pay for a full service funeral and burial for anyone who meets the financial eligibility criteria, including people who get support from Ontario Works office (OW), Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) and, persons with limited income who do not qualify for other benefits (see below).

- You must confirm that you qualify for financial help with your local social services office **before** signing a contract with the funeral home of your choice.
- Tell your funeral director and he or she can assist you in contacting social services.
- Any family member or friend who takes responsibility for the funeral arrangements can apply.

Jewish and Muslim funerals are usually held the day after the death and it may be difficult to apply for financial assistance **before** the funeral. Jewish funeral homes and mosques will proceed with funeral arrangements pending authorization.

- In Toronto, contact the Social Services: Special Needs Hotline (416-392-1666) or **www.toronto.ca/socialservices/funeral.htm**
- Outside the City of Toronto, contact your local Ministry of Community and Social Services office before signing a contract with a funeral home. To find your local office, use www.google.com and search, "Ontario Works office" followed by the name of your community.

Canada Pension Plan (CPP)

A lump-sum death benefit is payable to the estate from CPP if your loved one paid into the program for the minimum qualifying period. Contact your local CPP office for more information (1-800-277-9914). Your funeral director can provide the forms that you will need to fill out to apply for this benefit.

Veterans

Veterans who have been getting a Department of Veterans' Affairs pension or allowance may be able to get a grant towards the cost of a funeral. You can ask for this help through the Department of Veteran's Affairs. Your funeral director or the welfare office of your local branch of the Canadian Legion can assist you in contacting them.

The Last Post Fund (416-923-1608) provides for the burial of any veteran of the Canadian Armed Forces who served during a major war.

Native Canadians

If your loved one was a member of an Indian Band and, lived on an Indian Reserve within the last 12 months, you may ask for help from Indian and Northern Affairs, Ontario Region at Indian and Inuit Affairs, 5th Floor, 25 St. Clair Ave., Toronto, ON, M4T 1M2 (416-973-6234).

If the Band cannot give you any funds, Toronto Social Services may be able to help.

Returning the Body to the Country of Origin

Returning your loved one's body to the country where they were born is a complicated and expensive process. Each country has their own regulations and fees. You will likely have to visit the country of origin's consulate in Toronto to deal with the paper work involved.

The costs include:

- Country of origin fees
- Funeral home fees in Toronto and in the country of origin
- Metal lined casket and a shipping container
- Land transportation fees in country of origin
- Airline costs (several thousand dollars)

What do I do with my loved one's bank account, investments and other holdings?

Settlement of the Estate

After the funeral, you will need to look after your loved one's financial affairs. Many of the forms you will have to fill out for benefits and claims will require a 'proof of death' or a 'Funeral Director's Statement of Death'. You can get multiple copies from your funeral director. A copy of the Death Certificate is not usually needed. If you want one, you can get a certified copy from the Registrar General of Ontario for a fee.

You will have to call or write the following to let them know of your loved one's death:

- OHIP
- Health Insurance providers
- Canada Pension Plan - you may be able to get a death benefit or continuing benefits (1-800-277-9914)
- Life Insurance Policy providers
- Banks to close accounts or gain access to funds in joint bank accounts

If your loved one had very little money in his or her bank accounts, no investments, has no will or, is on ODSP or OWP, you may not need a lawyer. A copy of the 'Funeral Director's Statement of Death' or a letter from the hospital verifying the death should be enough information for the bank to issue money to cover the cost of the funeral and pay any unpaid bills.

If the estate is more complicated, or your loved one had assets and no will, you may want to consult a lawyer. If you do not have a lawyer and you are concerned about hiring one, you can contact The Law Society of Upper Canada at 416-947-3300. They have a lawyer referral service. The first half hour with the lawyer is free if you tell the lawyer that you were referred by the Law Society of Upper Canada.

Where can I turn for more help?

Sources of Help

- **Bereaved Families of Ontario (BFO) (Toronto)**
(416-440-0290) www.bfotoronto.ca or
(www.soul2soul.ca - youth site)

BFO offers bereavement groups for children and adults, and one-to-one support with trained volunteers who have experienced a similar loss. Under the resources area of their website, click “Affiliates” for a list of BFO offices across Ontario. You can also click on “Links” for other bereavement resources in Ontario.

- **Bereavement Ontario Network** www.bereavementontarionetwork.ca
- **Family Service Ontario**
(416-231-6003) www.familyserviceontario.org

Offers counselling with accredited therapists on a sliding fee scale. When on the website, click on “Membership” for a list of agencies across Ontario.

In Toronto you can contact Family Service Association of Toronto
(416-595-9618) www.fsatoronto.com

Books

- *The Year of Magical Thinking* by Joan Didion
- *How to Go On Living When Someone You Love Dies*
by Therese A. Rando
- *The Courage to Grieve* by Judy Tatelbaum
- *When a Child You Love Is Grieving* by Harold Ivan Smit

Books for Young Children

- *When Someone Very Special Dies: Children Can Learn to Cope with Grief* by
Marge Heegaard
- *How It Feels When a Parent Dies* by Jill Krementz
- *When Dinosaurs Die* by Laurie Krasney Brown & Marc Brown

Books for Adolescents and Teens

- *Facing Change* by Donna O'Toole
- *Help for the Hard Times ~ Getting Through Loss* by Earl Hipp
- *Fire in My Heart, Ice in My Veins* by Enid Traisman
- *Dead is a Four Letter Word* by John Saynor

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