

LIVING THROUGH GRIEF

Written for
the Ontario Funeral Service Association
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ONTARIO
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ASSOCIATION

The death of someone you love is the beginning of one of the most painful times of your life. It is a time when your life comes unglued. You feel like you have lost your anchor, you have lost direction, and nobody cares.

When you lose someone or something of value, the natural response to that loss is to grieve. You may grieve the loss of relatives and friends, pets, your home, friends who move, jobs, financial security, and possessions through fire, theft, or flood. You may also grieve the loss of youth, health and energy as you age.

WHAT IS IT THAT MAKES GRIEVING THE LOSS OF A LOVED ONE SO DIFFICULT?

1. The extent of the loss. When the one you love dies, you also lose your dreams and hopes for the future, a friend, someone who understands you, someone who really cares about you, and someone who shares your past. When a spouse dies, you lose intimacy, possibly financial security, the driver, the carpenter, the cook and perhaps someone to argue with! Much is lost and it may take you months to understand the extent of the loss.

2. The wide range of emotions. You may experience a range of emotions you have never known before. Anger, fear, or intense loneliness may be emotions that are foreign to your life. Experiencing any emotion for the first time may be frightening for you.

3. The intensity of the emotions. Not only do you experience new emotions, you feel them with an intensity that makes coping more difficult.

These emotions can erupt like a volcano inside us. This increases the difficulty you may have sorting through your emotions and coping with them.

4. Each death is unique. The losses involved with the person who has just died are unique. No matter how many deaths you may have experienced in your life, this loss will be unique. The loss is unique, and so is the grief.

5. Lack of understanding. A grieving person will often ask, “Why do I feel the way I do?” Quite simply, most of us don't understand grief or its effect on our lives. Hopefully, this brochure will help you to understand what you are going through and how you can work through it.

FIVE BASIC FACTS ABOUT GRIEF

1. Grief is a process that takes a lot of time, energy and determination. You won't “get over” your grief in a hurry.
2. Grief is intensely personal. This is your grief, don't let others tell you how you should be grieving.
3. Grief is an assault on your entire being. It will affect you physically, emotionally, socially, mentally and spiritually. There will be days when you won't understand yourself or your reaction.
4. You will be affected by this loss for the rest of your life. As time goes by, you will have new insights into what this death means to you.
5. Grief has the potential for being transformative.

You will change, your values may change and you will see life from a new and different perspective.

WHAT CAN YOU EXPECT TO EXPERIENCE?

Sadness — This will be one of the saddest times of your life. You may feel overwhelmed at times. You may be afraid that you will never laugh again.

Loneliness — It may be that you have never been this lonely before. Evenings and weekends may be the most difficult for you.

Anger — Those who are left are often angry at the doctors for not being able to do anything. You may be angry at God for not intervening. You may be angry with family and friends for not supporting you like you thought they would. You may also be angry at the person who died for leaving you!

Confusion — Grief is one of the prime causes of stress. You may experience some confusion, memory loss and inability to concentrate. This is temporary and you are not “losing your mind.”

Guilt — Almost everyone finds something to feel guilty about after someone has died. It is normal to feel guilty about things you wish you had said or done. Feelings of guilt may be justified. Most often they aren't. Most of us do the best we can with our lives.

Lost — The death of one you love often involves the death of your dreams and the loss of your future as you thought it would be. You may feel completely lost. This feeling is often accompanied by intense anxiety over what the future holds.

Relief — If the death has followed a long illness, you are probably relieved that it is finally all over. This is quite normal and there is no need to feel guilty about this.

Thankfulness — It may be that you are a person for whom this death was truly “a blessing.” It's okay to feel that way and to be genuinely thankful for the person who died and for the time you had together. It is true you will have days of sadness, loneliness and tears, but gratitude and thankfulness are great healers.

HOW CAN YOU HELP YOURSELF?

In the end, you will find that you must make a conscious decision to work through your grief. It will be very painful at times, but you will begin to notice signs of healing. Here are some tips others have found helpful.

- 1. Learn all you can about grief.** On the back of this brochure is a list of books you may find helpful.
- 2. Give yourself permission to grieve** — to feel the pain and accept the reality of your loss.
- 3. Be patient with the process.** It takes a long time. In many aspects of your life, you may expect immediate results. Grief is different. Take time, and be patient with yourself.
- 4. Get plenty of rest.** Your body needs it while recovering from emotional stress.
- 5. Treat yourself occasionally** — you're worth it!

Things that add beauty to your life will comfort and encourage you. Activities like massage therapy or yoga can work wonders.

6. Find people with whom you can share your loss. Many newly bereaved people find a great deal of support and encouragement from bereavement support groups. You may find it helpful to talk with your doctor, clergy person, funeral director or a counsellor.

7. Take time to reflect on and reassess your life. What did you gain from the relationship you had? How will that relationship sustain and guide you now? How is this experience changing you? The greatest tribute you can pay your loved ones is that you learned and experienced personal growth from them. This on-going influence in your life will help you carry on.

8. Draw on the resources of your faith. Let whatever helps you make sense out of life sustain you at this time. The journey through grief is a spiritual one. Allow your spirituality to become a focus of your life. Listen to the words and music of your spirituality. Let them speak to you and give you courage and hope for your journey.

The grieving process has the potential for transforming you. If you can say “yes” to that concept, then life will be renewed. You will live and love again. The memory and the love of your loved one will continue to move you and inspire you for the rest of your life.

ADDITIONAL READING

FERRIS, Frank D. and MARTIN, Rev. John D. I Can't Stop Crying: It's So Hard When Someone You Love Dies. Toronto: Key Porter Books Limited, 1992.

GROLLMAN, Earl A. Living When A Loved One Has Died. Boston: Beacon Press, 1977.

GROLLMAN, Earl A. What Helped Me When My Loved One Died. Boston: Beacon Press, 1981.

MANNING, Doug. Don't Take My Grief Away From Me. Hereford, Texas: In-Sight Books, 1979.

MENTEN, Ted. Going Solo. Philadelphia: Running Press, 1995.

RANDO, Therese A. Grieving: How To Go On Living When Someone You Love Dies. Toronto: Bantam Books, 1988.

SAYNOR, John Kennedy. Genesis: A Personal Guide Through Grief. Warkworth, Ontario: Genesis Bereavement Resources, 1999.

TEMES, Roberta. Living With An Empty Chair. New York: New Horizon Press Publishers, 1992.



HELPFUL BOOKS...

Many books have been written on grief and the funeral. Your O.F.S.A. funeral director has an up-to-date list of available books and may have their own resource library.

The following brochures and many others are available from member firms of the Ontario Funeral Service Association:

- **Funerals. A Celebration of Life**
- **Mr. Dressup - Helping Children Understand Death**
- **Should Children Know About Death**
- **Helping Each Other After Suicide**
 - **Funeral Etiquette**
- **What Every Family Should Know**
 - **The Time To Plan A Service**
 - **To Make It Easier**
- **Talking About It (Cremation)**
- **Multicultural Funeral Practices**

Additional copies of this brochure are available from
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