

LET'S TALK ABOUT GRIEF



**“Our grief is as individual as
our lives.”
- Elisabeth Kübler-Ross**



**Mental
Health
Estrie**



CHSSN



**Public Health
Agency of Canada**

**Agence de la santé
publique du Canada**

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- The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent the views of the Public Health Agency of Canada, Health Canada, or of the CHSSN.

Your relationship
with the deceased is
not gone, it has
simply changed

Myths and Facts

Myth: Pain goes away when you ignore it

Fact: Ignoring the pain will make it worse long-term

Myth: If you don't cry, it means you aren't upset

Fact: Crying is a normal response to loss, but it isn't the only one

Myth: Moving forward with your life means you are forgetting the thing you've lost

Fact: Moving forward means you have accepted the loss, not forgotten it

Myth: Friends can help by not bringing up the subject

Fact: People who are grieving usually want and need to talk about the loss they have experienced

Myth: Grief should last about a year

Fact: There is no timeframe for grief

Myth: Grief is only psychological

Fact: Reactions to loss can be physical, psychological, emotional, or social

Types of Grief

Normal Grief

Normal grief is predictable. It follows an expected pattern marked by a grieving period that moves towards acceptance and the gradual alleviation of grief symptoms.

Traumatic Grief

Traumatic grief is when the griever perceives the nature of the death as frightening, violent, or unexpected (e.g., car accident, suicide, homicide). If the death had not been traumatic, the grief would be normal, but because of the traumatic nature of the death, it is traumatic grief.

Collective Grief

Collective grief is felt by large groups of people such as entire communities, societies, villages, or nations as a result of a major event or tragedy (e.g., Polytechnique massacre, residential school unmarked graves discovery).

Masked Grief

Masked grief presents as physical symptoms or behaviours, such as fatigue, body pain, insomnia, or nausea.

Types of Grief

Anticipatory Grief (AG)

Anticipatory grief begins before someone has died. This is often seen within the family of someone who has a terminal illness. It can begin as soon as a diagnosis is received. AG can appear as envisioning life without that person, imagining how you will react once they have died, or loss of emotional control.

Prolonged Grief (PG)

Prolonged grief differs from normal grief in the length of time (it does not decrease as time goes on) and it stays intense (no gradual alleviation of symptoms). People experiencing PG may be preoccupied with the death, long for a reunion, or be unable to adjust to life without their loved one.

Absent Grief

Absent grief is when the griever does not show any signs of grieving. They may continue with their daily activities as if nothing has happened. This type of grief does not account for the differences in how people grieve. Some people are very expressive while others are quiet in their grief.

This booklet does not cover all types of grief.

Who Can We Grieve?

Death of...

- friends
 - seniors losing lifelong friends and new friends from their residence homes
 - young people losing friends to addiction and car accidents
- family members
- spouse
- strangers
 - celebrities (e.g., Princess Diana, Elvis, Martin Luther King Jr.)
 - large-scale disasters (e.g., Lac-Mégantic rail disaster)
- acquaintances
 - friends of friends
 - classmates



What Can We Grieve?

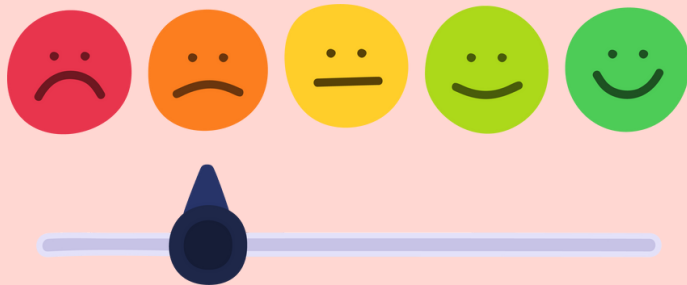
Loss of...

- long-term relationships or friendships from growing apart, severing the relationship, or death
- sense of self
 - often observed after health issues (e.g., arthritis, diabetes) or job loss
 - loss of a child or spouse (having to redefine your identity)
- childhood
 - trauma or “growing up too fast”
- previous life
 - seen in caregivers upon taking on the caregiver role
- future hopes/dreams/aspirations
 - seen when someone has a life-altering experience (i.e., traumatic brain injury that leads to complications or development of a mental illness)
 - when someone cannot do the job or activity they used to, or as well as they used to
 - rejections from job or academic institution
- multiple losses at once
 - death of a parent, friend, and loss of a friendship all at once

Symptoms of Grief

Emotional

- helplessness
- disbelief/shock
- sadness/despair/anxiety
- anger/irritability
- confusion/disorientation
- meaninglessness/
numbness
- guilt/shame
- longing/yearning
- loneliness
- relief/contentment
- apathy
- hopelessness



Behavioural

- dreaming of your loved one
- absent-mindedness
- crying
- forgetfulness
- avoidance
- over or under sleeping
- lashing out

Symptoms of Grief

Physical

- tightness in chest/throat
- lack of energy/weakness
- shortness of breath
- inability to concentrate
- weight gain/loss
- heart palpitations
- tearfulness
- insomnia
- fatigue
- loss of appetite
- nausea
- dry mouth



Social

- unusually dependent on others
- withdrawing from friends and family
- neglecting yourself but caring for others



Types of Coping

Emotion-Focused Coping

- reducing emotions associated with the stressor while avoiding the problem itself
- if you can't change the problem, change your outlook
- involves using inward-facing strategies such as meditation, journaling, and breathing techniques

Meaning-Focused Coping

- making meaning of the situation
 - finding a lesson
 - looking for silver linings
 - giving us purpose
- often spiritual beliefs, values, and goals influence a person's tendency to use this type of coping

Social-Focused Coping

- seeking emotional support from their community
 - friends or family
 - support groups
 - clubs
 - connecting with others who have similar experiences

Types of Coping

Avoidance-Focused Coping

- avoiding the stressor/problem/feeling by pursuing alternative tasks or seeking distractions
- can include denying, minimizing, or otherwise escaping dealing with the problem (e.g., self-medicating, seeking numbness with substances)

Problem-Focused Coping

- control stressors by (1) defining and interpreting them, (2) planning solutions, and (3) creating an action plan
- deals directly with the problem/stressor/feeling

Facts

- Problem-focused coping is the most effective way to cope with problems
- *BUT it is only effective if the individual has control over the outcome
- For situations out of someone's control (grief), emotion-focused, meaning-focused, and social-focused are the best ways to cope because they address things we have some control over

Techniques

Use Evocative Language

Definition: “tough” words that capture people’s attention and convey strong action or emotion.

- speak of the person who has died in the past tense
 - they “were”... instead of they “are”
- use words like died instead of lost
 - they are not lost, they will not come back
- gives a sense of finality
- helps with accepting the death

Directed Imagery

- imagine the loved one in a familiar place (e.g., a chair in front of you)
 - try to imagine details such as facial expressions and clothing
- talk to them and tell them all the things you didn’t get to say or want to remind them of

Communicate Using Metaphors

- great for people who have difficulty expressing, identifying, or confronting their emotions
- a communication tool to prevent emotions from building up over time

E.g., “It feels like there’s a weight on my chest”, or “it feels like I was hit with a ton of bricks.”

Techniques

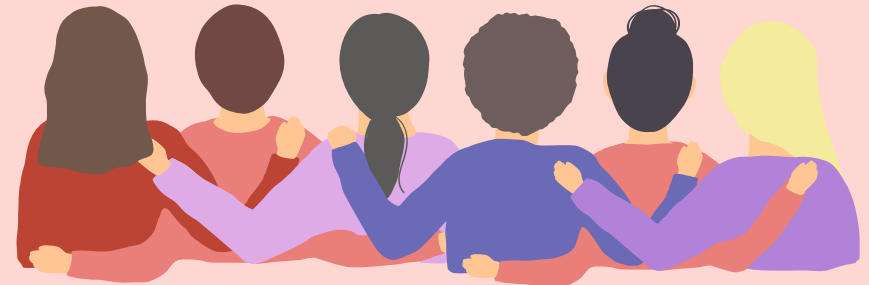
Grief Plan

A list of...

- things you can do to cope
- people you can talk to
- self-care plan
- positive thoughts
- can be customized with other categories based on your needs

Seek Support from Others

- friends
- family
- support groups
- online groups/forums
- church
- clubs



Activities

Create a Memory Book

- document your loved one's life by collecting pictures, certificates, letters, doodles, notes, etc. and putting them in a memory book
- you can add journaling entries with memories or things you wish you could share with them

Journaling

- provides a judgement-free space
- reflect on feelings and thoughts
- get out ideas that feel trapped inside
- write about the scary parts of grief that might be too difficult to talk to someone about

Some prompts:

1. Today I miss...
2. Remember when...
3. If I could say something to you, I would say...

Creative Activities

- activities that provide an outlet for your emotions
- write, paint, draw, dance, play or listen to music, etc.

Activities

Write a Letter

- similar to journaling, it is judgement-free
- allows you to say all the things you didn't get to say
- fosters your connection to them
- you can write about things big or small that you wish you could communicate with them

Taking Care of Yourself

- practice hygiene maintenance
 - shower, brush teeth, comb hair, put on clean clothes, change bed sheets, moisturize, etc.
- body care
 - exercise, eat balanced meals, sleep, avoid mood-altering substances
- improve your environment
 - tidy a room, laundry, dishes, sort items

Laughter

- laugh about the good times, bad times, inside jokes, memories, and small moments
- nurtures the connection to the one we've lost

Identity

- it's normal to feel lost or confused about your identity after the loss of a loved one (spouse, parent, child, etc.)
- remember other aspects of your life when you are trying to answer the question "who am I?"
 - Are you a parent, grandparent, sister, brother, student, friend, mentor, partner, etc.
- ask yourself "what type of support do I need now that this person has passed away?"
 - do I need to reach out to a counsellor?
 - do I need to connect with my friends more?
 - do I want to engage in community activities or groups?
- you don't have to rush to find a new identity, allow yourself time to adjust to your new reality
- many people feel overwhelmed with the routine change that follows the loss of a significant person
 - what skills will I have to learn?
 - how will my daily routine change?
 - how will I navigate not knowing how to do something?



Communication

How to talk to someone who is grieving

- spend more time listening and less time talking
- avoid "at least" statements
 - E.g., "at least you had a long life with them" - the reality is even if they had a long time with their loved one, it will never feel like enough time
- don't begin sentences with "you should" or "you will"
 - there is nothing they "should" be doing
 - nobody can know what they "will" experience
- ask closed-ended questions
 - these are meant to be answered with quick, yes-or-no, or very short statements
 - easy questions that don't involve a lot of thinking
 - do you need space or company?
 - do you need help around the house?
 - when was the last time you went outside?
- don't be offended when the griever sets boundaries

This could look like:

- "I don't want to talk about my loved one"
- "Thank you for the company, but I want to be alone now"

How to Help Someone Who Is Grieving

Offer Ongoing Support

- make sure the person you are supporting knows your offer to support and talk is not time-limited
 - many people need time to themselves after experiencing a loss
 - by the time they want to talk (weeks or months later) everyone has gone back to their personal lives
 - remind them your support is continuous



Talk About the Person

- give your loved one permission to grieve
- use the name of the person who has died
- share memories or ask the griever to share stories
- offer validation, empathy, and kindness

How to Help Someone Who Is Grieving

Go to the Scary Places

- sit with them in the sad and uncomfortable moments without judgement
- don't try to fix them or offer solutions
- don't show your fear or discomfort
- sit in silence
- be there for the tears, anger, and outbursts without judgement

Think Outside the Box

- flowers are nice, but when they die, the person has to deal with them
- Instead try:
 - home-cooked meals
 - remembrance items (blankets or photos)
 - food and home staples (toilet paper, basic food items)
 - gift cards
 - personalized self-care box (shampoo, conditioner, soap)

Need to talk to someone?



If you feel the need to talk to someone, there are many organizations and services available to you. Organizations have been separated into different service categories and whether they are servicing local or regional communities.

Active Listening

Vent Over Tea

Regional: Serving communities across the Eastern Townships

Vent Over Tea offers free and confidential active listening services to all members of the community. They have trained empathetic listeners that can support you. Their services can be offered online for everyone in the Townships. Currently, in-person support is only offered in the Sherbrooke region.

Email or visit their website to make an appointment.

📍 A public space that is convenient for you.

✉ info@ventoverttea.com

🌐 <https://ventoverttea.com>

Mental Health Organizations

Centre l'Élan

Local: Serving the RCM of Memphremagog

Le Centre L'Élan is a non-profit organization supporting someone going through a period of emotional imbalance or suffering from mental health problems. Services include individual and group supports and much more.

📍 209 rue Hatley, Magog, QC

☎ 819-843-8885

✉ direction.centrelelan@gmail.com

🌐 <https://centrelelan.org/>

La Croisée des sentiers – Ressource communautaire en santé mentale

Local: Serving the RCM of Des Sources

La Croisée des Sentiers empowers people who live with mental health challenges or are going through emotional difficulties on their life journey.

📍 C241 Boul. Morin, Val-Des-Sources, QC

☎ 819-879-4886

✉ info@lacroiseedessentiers.com

🌐 <https://lacroiseedessentiers.com/>

L'Éveil Ressource Communautaire en Santé Mentale

Local: Serving the RCM of Coaticook

This organization strives to help and support individuals with emotional and mental health challenges. They offer one-on-one grief counselling, support groups, light therapy, and much more.

📍 240 Roy St. Coaticook, QC

☎ 819-849-3003

✉ info@eveilcoaticook.ca

🌐 <https://eveilcoaticook.ca/>



Mental Health Organizations (Continued)

Mental Health Estrie

Regional: Serving communities across the Eastern Townships

Mental Health Estrie is a non-profit community organization serving family, friends, and individuals impacted by a mental illness. Services include peer support groups, information and referrals, workshops, a lending library, and much more. We invite you to visit their website's resources page as it contains a list of mental health resources in and outside the Estrie region.

📍 3355 College Street, Sherbrooke, QC

☎ 819-565-3777

✉ info@mentalhealthestrie.com

🌐 <https://www.mentalhealthestrie.com/>

To access the list of additional resources, please visit:
<https://www.mentalhealthestrie.com/mental-disorders-resources>

Virage Santé mentale

Local: Serving the RCM of Haut-Saint-François

Virage santé mentale is a non-profit community organization that provides workshops and conferences, individual support, a grief and bereavement support group, support for family, and so much more.

📍 209 rue Angus Nord, East Angus, QC

☎ 819-832-4404 or 1-800-832-4404

✉ viragesm@abacom.com

🌐 <https://www.viragesantementale.org/>

Women's Centres

Avante Women's Centre

Local: Serving the RCM of Brome-Missisquoi

Avante's Women's Centre welcomes all English-speaking women in the Brome-Missisquoi region and provides various forms of support, including a grief support group.

📍 9 rue de la Rivière

☎ 450-248-0530

✉ info@awcentre.com

🌐 <https://www.awcentre.com/>

Le Point d'Ancrage

Local: Serving the RCM of Val-Saint-François

Le Point d'Ancrage offers many services for women and their families, such as individual and group supports, workshops, conferences, and much more.

📍 75 Allen St., Windsor, QC

☎ 819-845-7937

✉ info@lepointdancrage.ca

🌐 <https://lepointdancrage.ca/>

Lennoxville & District Women's Centre

Regional: Serving communities across the Eastern Townships

LDWC empowers and connects English-speaking women and their families in the Estrie region through activities, workshops, and support services.

📍 175 Queen Street, Suite 203, Sherbrooke, QC

☎ 819-564-6626

✉ info@ldwc.ca

🌐 <https://www.ldwc.ca/>

811 Info-Social

A health professional provides health and psychosocial advice 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

☎ Dial 811

🌐 <https://www.quebec.ca>

Local CLSC

Your local CLSC provides many services that can be helpful to you and has health professionals that can help you through your journey.

Funeral Homes

Are you aware that some funeral homes provide grief support groups and services? Reach out to a nearby funeral home to learn more about the support they may offer.

Order of Psychologists of Quebec (*Ordre des psychologues du québec*)

This is an excellent resource if you would like to find a psychologist or a psychotherapist that can help you based on your needs. In addition, the services of these professionals are fee-based and are generally covered by private insurance plans. Alternate, low-cost resources are also offered.

☎ 1-800-561-1223

✉ info@ordrepsy.qc.ca

🌐 <https://www.ordrepsy.qc.ca/english>

Cowansville Support Group for Widowed Women

The support group meets on the first Monday of every month at the Emmanuel Church in Cowansville from 10 am -noon. There is no fixed agenda and no registration is required, Occasionally they invite speakers to speak with issues related to being a widow. English and French speakers are welcome.

📍 203 rue Principale, Cowansville, QC J2K 1J3

✉ bcbellingham@gmail.com

Online Resources

Everybody Grieves - Webinar (YouTube)

Hosted by the Canadian Hospice Palliative Care Association, this webinar explains what grief is, how you or your family may react to it, and how to process grief.

[griefstories.com](https://www.griefstories.com)

Through sharing stories, this website offers support for someone who is in grief, or for a supporter, who would like to receive additional tools to support a friend or family member.

🌐 <https://www.griefstories.org>

[MyGrief.ca](https://mygrief.ca)

MyGrief.ca is an online resource aimed at guiding individuals through their grieving process in the convenience of their homes and at their preferred speed. This resource facilitates a deeper understanding of one's grief and provides support in tackling the challenging questions that may emerge.

🌐 <https://mygrief.ca>

Online Resources (Continued)

The Compassionate Friends of Canada

This website offers a secure space, offering assistance to parents mourning the loss of a child, regardless of the child's age or the circumstances of their passing.

🌐 <https://tcfcanada.net>

Virtual Canadian Hospice

This website provides support and personalized information about advanced illness, palliative care, loss, and grief for everyone going through a hard time.

🌐 https://www.virtualhospice.ca/en_US/Main+Site+Navigation/Home.aspx

whatsyourgrief.com

This website provides a wealth of information on grief, filled with resources related to understanding grief and loss, provides guidance on how to help a grieving friend or family member, provides online courses about grief, and so much more!

🌐 <https://whatsyourgrief.com>

Online Resources For Kids & Youth

KidsGrief.ca

This platform provides a wealth of information for parents and educators to help understand how children (0-18 years old) grieve and how to support them.

🌐 <https://www.kidsgrief.ca/>

YouthGrief.ca

This website has been developed by grieving youth, for grieving youth. It offers insights, personal stories, and guidance by individuals who have firsthand experience with grieving the loss of a loved one.

🌐 <https://youthgrief.ca/>

Why this guide?

Townshippers' Association and Mental Health Estrie collaborated in the the creation of this booklet in order to promote healing, resilience, and community support in the face of loss. Knowing there are limited local resources and supports on this subject, we wanted to provide information and resources for those who might be needing support during a difficult time.

We hope that that this document is helpful and provides you with the light you need through this journey. Don't hesitate to contact Mental Health Estrie or Townshippers' Association for additional information.



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