



Foothills Country Hospice Society
Loss of A Loved One
A Guide Through Grief





What we once enjoyed and deeply loved we can never lose, for all that we love deeply becomes a part of us"

Helen Keller

The death of someone important to you brings many changes in your life. As you are adjusting to these, you may also experience challenges. Some of these will be practical in nature while others will be emotional. In the pages that follow, you will find information, ideas, and suggestions to support you with these challenges.

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10 Things to Know About Grief

1. Global effect of loss: The death of someone very close to you can be a life-transforming event that affects all aspects of you and your life. It can feel as if your world has been shattered. The grief process is the journey between how things were and how they will be.

2. Grief is a natural process: The grief you feel at the death of someone important to you is the result of living and loving, and of your meaningful connections with others. Grief is a normal part of life and a natural response to loss.

3. Individual differences in grieving styles: Although there is a lot of literature on what grief can look like, how you grieve is a unique result of your personality, your history of loss, and the relationship that you had with the person who died. Each person in your family will grieve in their own way, and in their own timeline. To cope with their grief, some people may openly express their emotions, while others may be more reserved. Neither of these styles is right or wrong, each can be an effective way of working through grief.

4. Children and grief: Children look to the important adults in their lives to learn how to grieve. They are sensitive to the moods and behaviors of the adults around them, and may not want to talk about their thoughts and feelings of loss unless the adults do. Children can be frightened by what they do not know or understand, so age-appropriate information about death and grief can be helpful to them.

5. Social connections and support: When you are grieving you may want and need support from others. Due to discomfort, or their own feelings of grief, some people may not be able to provide the understanding and caring that you expected from them. Because relationships will be altered in some way after a major loss, it is normal to evaluate, perhaps change, and sometimes end certain relationships. You may find that the company of other bereaved people is particularly comforting.

6. Experiences you might have in grief: When you are actively grieving, you may feel different from your usual self as your emotions, your mind, and your reactions can seem unreliable. It is possible that you are feeling intense pain and emotions that you have never felt before. You are not going crazy; this is a natural part of grief. Responses such as fatigue, forgetfulness, and irritability result from your attention and energy being directed toward your grief and adjustment to loss.



7. Fluctuations in the grief process: As you journey along the path of grief, you may find that your feelings and responses vary at different times. There will be unpredictable ups and downs that many people describe as waves of grief. It is important to understand that having good days are part of the journey, and are encouraged to be welcomed as breaks from your grief.

8. Self-care and what helps: There are things that you can do to help yourself at this challenging time. Getting information about grief can help you to understand your responses and your journey. Be gentle and patient with yourself as you grieve. Do what you can to keep some normal routines for health and social contact. Support may come from a variety of sources including family, friends, bereavement groups, chat rooms, etc. If you are concerned about yourself and your grief, you may want to seek professional counseling help.

9. Time for grief: Despite what you may hear there are no timelines for grief; it takes as long as it takes. Often your grief journey is longer than you or other people expect, and you may feel pressured by these expectations. This loss will continue to be part of your life and you will continue to have times when you think about, miss, and grieve the person who died.

10. Grief as a spiritual journey of healing: The death of someone significant in your life brings change that may lead you on a different path. Nothing will ever be the same, yet you must somehow find meaning and a new sense of purpose. As the journey continues, you may experience healing and personal growth.



The reality is that you will grieve forever. You will not 'get over' the loss of a loved one; you will learn to live with it. You will heal and you will rebuild yourself around the loss you have suffered. You will be whole again, but you will never be the same. Nor should you be the same, nor would you want to.

Elisabeth Kübler-Ross

Content courtesy of Victoria Hospice Society



Coping with Challenges

Looking After Your Health

While you are grieving, you may not have the energy to look after yourself; but it's important that you make an effort to do so. You are at greater risk of illness and accidents due to stress, fatigue, and distraction. You may not be eating or sleeping as you normally would. As much as possible, it's important to eat and sleep regularly. Avoid unhelpful or harmful coping patterns or people.

Visit Your Family Doctor

Inform them that you are grieving. Your energy level will go up and down. Pace yourself. Exercise regularly. Choose something you can stick with and enjoy. This might be a time when you are tempted to use alcohol or drugs to escape the pain of your grief. Be careful in your use of medications, alcohol, and other drugs since these can interfere with the natural grieving process.

Eating

- Even if you don't feel hungry, eat small amounts of healthy foods to give you energy. You may also want to add vitamins or nutritional drinks.
- If you feel more hungry than usual, try to eat healthy snacks and meals such as fruits, nuts, and vegetables. Try to avoid snacking on 'junk food.'
- If making meals is difficult for you, try some ready-made, healthy meals from a grocery store or food catering service.
- If eating alone is difficult, try to eat in a different room, or sit at a different spot at the table. Try to accept meal invitations from supportive friends, or invite them in for take-out meals. You might consider letting trusted friends know about your difficulties and asking them to help in any way they can. Think about setting a regular lunch or dinner date with family or friends. For example, this could be once a month or once a week.
- If you have not prepared meals before, contact your local recreational or seniors' center to ask about cooking classes or sharing kitchens.



Changes In Sleeping Patterns

If you have trouble falling or staying asleep:

- Avoid alcohol and caffeine, and refrain from watching television or engaging in physical exercise in the evening.
- Try natural remedies such as herbal teas, warm milk, soothing baths, quiet music, or relaxation exercises. Consult your Medical Doctor regarding persistent sleep issues.
- You may also find it helpful to change your sleeping habits for a while (e.g., sleep in a different room or on the other side of the bed; go to bed later; sleep with an extra pillow or a stuffed animal for comfort).
- Read something light and easy such as a magazine, or recall a favorite scene or trip in as much detail as possible. You might also try “daydreaming” – plan a trip or plot a novel. Just be sure to avoid any activity that is stimulating.
- After 30 minutes, get up and do something pleasant and relaxing for a few minutes.
- If you can’t get or return to sleep, let go of any effort to sleep and tell yourself that you are simply going to rest.

If you are sleeping more than usual:

- Remind yourself that this can be normal for a grieving person and that it is temporary.
- Be mindful of commitments and activities and make adjustments so that you can conserve your energy.
- Notice when or where you feel most sleepy. As much as possible, give yourself time for extra sleep: Try to nap or rest as needed.

Decision-Making

It can be difficult to make decisions – even small ones – when you are grieving. Your memory, concentration, and thinking may be affected by grief, leaving you feeling less sure of yourself than usual. This may be especially true when it is your partner who has died and you do not have the usual person there to discuss plans, consider options, and share decisions.



If possible, delay major decisions until you feel comfortable and confident about making them. If you are unable to wait to make a decision, the following guidelines may help you:

Talk about the decision with a person you trust.

- This might be a professional, family member, or friend.
- Explain the problem and your goal as clearly as possible.
- Make a list of as many solutions as you can think of. Note the pros and cons and all the steps needed for each solution.
- Review all the information and look for anything you may have missed.
- Choose the best option from your list.
- Follow through step by step.

Financial Affairs

Settling an estate is difficult for most grieving people. You may feel worried that you don't have the knowledge you need to deal with these financial and legal matters. You may need or want help as you pay bills, make decisions about money or real estate, or plan for your future.

The following guidelines may help you to make good decisions and avoid later regrets:

- Take your time and be cautious when making decisions.
- Ask a reputable lawyer, accountant, financial advisor, bank, or credit union for help.
- Ask trusted friends for recommendations; use your own good judgment as well.
- If you can't get a recommendation for a particular professional, ask for references and professional affiliations.
- Before making any final decisions, review your plans with a trusted professional.

Changes in Relationships

After someone dies, other relationships may also change. You may notice that some people behave differently around you. You may be surprised or disappointed by things they say or do – or don't do.



Perhaps some people you were counting on haven't been there for you, while other people have unexpectedly come forward to offer their support. It's also possible that you may not want to visit with people while you're grieving, especially if you worry that your true feelings will be a burden to others.

It's important that you pay attention to your changing needs and responses and take steps to find the support you need.

- Spend time with welcoming people who are OK with your grief.
- Let people know what is—and is not—helpful to you.
- Tell supportive friends about the things you find difficult and ask for their help. (For example, if you feel you can't make plans too far in advance, ask if you can have the option to change your mind later or leave early.)
- Realize it's okay to say no to people or plans that you don't feel ready for.
- Think about joining a grief support group.

Personal Belongings

You may experience powerful memories and emotions while going through the personal belongings of someone who has died, making the task seem overwhelming. You may not have the energy, or you may feel unable to decide what to do with them. You may feel comforted by some of these items and find the idea of "getting rid of" them to be very painful. Sometimes, other family members will have different thoughts about this task than you do. It's important to talk about these differences openly.

There is no particular time when you must take on this task, so it's ok to wait to do it when you feel ready.

- Take your time. Do what feels right to you.
- You may find it easier to do this task a bit at a time; or you may want to set aside some time to do it all at once.
- It might be helpful to sort things into groups: things to keep; things for family and friends; things for sale or charity; things to decide about later.
- Ask friends or family members to help you.

Memories and Reminders

You may find yourself thinking over and over about past events. This is natural and



can help you to come to terms with what has happened. You may also find it difficult to spend time in certain places that carry memories for you. Over time, this may become easier as the intensity of your feelings and painful memories lessen.

Allow yourself to go over memories unless this begins to seriously interfere with your everyday life. Know that visiting familiar places may be difficult and do what you can to make this easier.

- Share your memories with others who will just listen – friends, family, or members of a bereavement support group.
- If you have questions about the care received by the person who died or about their illness or final hours, contact a healthcare provider who can talk about this with you.
- If you are troubled by thoughts about what you or others did or didn't do, talk to a trusted friend, a bereavement volunteer, or a bereavement counselor.
- As you are adjusting to life without the person who died, you may want to change your routines or schedules. For example, you could sleep or eat in different rooms than you did before. You may also find it helpful to re-arrange some of your furniture or temporarily put away sentimental objects. Know that visiting familiar places may be difficult. It's OK for you to avoid certain places for a while.
- If you need to revisit a place that holds painful memories for you, you could ask someone you trust to go with you.

Dreams and Visitations

You may have dreams that seem real or sense the presence of the person who has died. This may be a comfort to you, or you may find it upsetting. It is also possible that you may long for a dream or visit from the person who died but not have it. Remind yourself that these experiences – or lack of them – are normal.

If you often wake up in distress after a dream about the person, it may be helpful to learn meditation or relaxation techniques.

- If you are troubled during the day by images or feelings, it may help to do some physical exercise: Walk, run, swim, paddle, or go to the gym.
- If you wonder whether your experiences are normal but feel hesitant about speaking to someone about them, seek out a trusted friend, counselor, or other grieving person



FCHS – Grief Support Programs

We want to help and support those who have experienced a loss to find meaning, and to be able to work through their grief process to begin healing. The following programs are offered at the Foothills Country Hospice and can be accessed through our website at www.countryhospice.org or by calling 403-995-4673.



Bereavement Boxes

Bereavement boxes support individuals following the loss of a loved one by providing grief resources and coping strategies. It can be a tangible way for someone to have access to resources that they can use in their own time.

Compassionate Conversations

Trained bereavement volunteers will arrange for regular calls with grieving family members to offer a supportive, compassionate ear as their grief journey unfolds. If issues arise that are more in-depth or require further support, volunteers will engage our social work team and additional grief support resources will be recommended.



Expressive Arts

Our expressive arts therapy program will provide opportunities for those experiencing grief to socialize, connect, and share with others. Expressive arts includes a variety of therapeutic and creative events and workshops aimed at helping people process and work through their grief in a supportive environment.

Grief Group

Our monthly grief group is open to anyone who has experienced the loss of a loved one. Participants can expect a monthly topic for discussion and a safe space for connection, sharing your loved one's story, and building peer relationships.



Grief Counselling

Individual counselling is available to anyone in our community who has experienced a loss and who may benefit from more personalized support. We offer up to three 1:1 sessions with a social worker where participants will learn useful coping strategies while being supported in their grief experience.



What To Do When Someone Has Died Checklist

This checklist may help you organize the tasks that need to be completed following the loss of a loved one. Before you start this checklist, communicate with your funeral home to see what tasks they will complete for you. All Government-related tasks are of high importance and must be done.

Documentation of Death:

You must have one of the following documents before you can cancel, transfer, or apply for benefits and obligations. You may need several copies.

- Statement of Death
 - Issued by the funeral home
- Medical Certificate of Death
 - Issued by a physician or the Medical Examiner's office
- Death Certificate
 - Ordered through Service Alberta
 - <https://www.alberta.ca/order-death-certificate.aspx>

Personal Documents:

- Birth Certificate
- Driver's License
- Marriage Certificate
- Passport
- Personal Will
- Social Insurance Card (or Number)

Financial Documents:

- Bank Account Numbers, Passbooks, Statements (Chequing, Saving, Line of Credit, etc.)
- Bank and Credit Cards
- Investment Records (stocks, bonds, RRSP, GIC's, etc.)
- Lease and/or Rental Contracts
- Loan Agreements (money owed or owing)
- Mortgage Papers
- Safety Deposit Box Number

Health Documents:

- Alberta Health Care Number
- Alberta Blue Cross Number
- Other health insurance providers

Property Documents:

- Land Titles
- Personal Possessions (artwork, jewelry, etc.)
- Vehicle Registration(s)

An electronic copy of this guide can be found on our website, which will provide easy one-click access to the provided links.

www.countryhospice.org



Property Documents:

- Insurance Policies (life, health/medical, home, car, business, mortgage etc.)
- Membership Information (rewards/points programs, sport clubs, professional memberships, etc.)
- Pension Information
- Previous Tax Returns
- Utility Account Numbers (phone, cell phone, gas, water, electricity, cable, internet, etc.)

Applications/Tasks to be Completed:

- Application for Canada Pension Plan Death Benefit
 - www.canada.ca/en/services/benefits/publicpensions/cpp/cpp-death-benefit.html
- Application of Canada Pension Plan Survivor's and Children's Benefits
 - www.canada.ca/en/services/benefits/publicpensions/cpp/cpp-survivor-pension.html
 - www.canada.ca/en/services/benefits/publicpensions/cpp/cpp-childrens-benefit.html
- Canada Revenue Agency Notification – 1-800-959-8281
 - www.canada.ca/en/revenue-agency/services/forms-publications/publications/rc4111/canada-revenue-agency-what-following-a-death.html
 - Let the CRA know the deceased's date of death.
 - Determine if any action must be taken regarding the deceased's GST payments, if applicable.

Items to be Cancelled:

- Alberta Health Care Toll-free 310-0000, at the prompt dial 780-427-1432
 - Alberta Health Care requires the name, address, and personal health number of the deceased.
- Alberta Blue Cross 1-800-661-6995
 - Alberta Health Care usually notifies Alberta Blue Cross, but you can also contact them directly. Alberta Blue Cross requires the name and Alberta Health Care number of the deceased, the name and address of the executor, and the name and address of the person providing this information.
- Alberta Senior's Benefit 1-800-642-3853
 - You will need to provide Alberta Health Care with the deceased's name and health care number.
- Service Canada Tasks – 1-800-277-9914
 - www.canada.ca/en/services/benefits/publicpensions/cpp/cancel-cpp.html
- Canada Pension Plan (CPP)
 - Cheques can be canceled by telephone. You will be asked to provide the name, address, and social insurance number of the deceased.



Items to be Cancelled Continued:

- CPP Disability Benefit
 - You will need to cancel disability payments, both federal and Provincial. Provincial disability payments may include AISH (Assured Income for Severely Handicapped).
- Veterans Benefit – 1-866-522-2122
 - Pension or compensation benefits continue for one year after death. There may be other Veterans Affairs benefits available. Contact Veterans Affairs for further information.
- Old Age Security (OAS) including:
 - Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS)
 - Allowance
 - Allowance for the Survivor
- Social Insurance Number (SIN)
 - www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/services/sin/reporting-death.html
 - When someone passes away in a Canadian province, the provincial vital statistics agency automatically notifies the SIN Program, therefore, you do not have to do so. However, if the death occurs in a territory or outside Canada, you must inform the SIN Program.
- Secure Certificate of Indian Status (SCIS) – 819-664-2962
 - www.sac-isc.gc.ca/eng/1100100032475/1572459510512#chp3
 - Contact Indigenous Services Canada to report the death of a registered friend or family member
- Passport
 - www.cic.gc.ca/english/passport/map/map.asp
 - If the deceased held a valid passport at the time of death, return it to the nearest passport center or mail it to the processing center. Include a copy of the death certificate or a letter stating why you are returning the passport.
- Insurance Policies
 - Notify all insurance companies with whom the deceased had policies (e.g., car, home, business, life insurance, etc.). You may also need to contact the person's employer to cancel workplace insurance policies.
- Bank Related Tasks
 - These tasks must be done by the executor, or whomever has the authority to do so.
- Bank Cards/Accounts
 - Contact the issuing bank to cancel bank cards and accounts held by the deceased.
- Safety Deposit Box
 - Contact the bank for access to the safety deposit box registered to the deceased, then close the safety deposit box held by the deceased.
- Credit Cards
 - Contact the issuing bank to cancel credit cards held by the deceased.



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- Loyalty/Points Programs
 - If the deceased was enrolled in a bank-specific rewards program, the points may be transferable.
 - Leases/Rentals
 - Cancel any lease or rental contracts in the name of the deceased or transfer them to another name.
 - Memberships (sport/recreation clubs, professional associations, libraries, reward points programs, etc.)
 - Cancel memberships or transfer them to another name as appropriate.
 - Some reward points programs, such as WestJet and RBC Avion Rewards, can be transferred into another name as well.

Income Tax:

- A final tax return must be filed.
 - If the death occurred between January 1st - October 31st, the final return is due by April 30th of the next year.
 - If the death occurred between November 1st - December 31st, the final return is due six months after the death.
 - If tax returns from previous years have not been completed, they must also be filed.

Contact Canada Revenue Agency (1-800-959-8281) for more information.

www.canada.ca/en/revenue-agency/services/forms-publications/publications/t4011/preparing-returns-deceased-persons.html

There may be further individual-specific tasks that need to be completed. If your loved one was a member of any distinct group, consider contacting them to determine what must be done.

Content referenced from:

The City of Calgary. (n.d.). Practical Matters: Following the Death of a Loved One. Victim Resources - Death and Bereavement. Retrieved December 2, 2022, from www.calgary.ca/cps/community-programs-and-resources/victims-of-crime/victim-resources-death-and-bereavement.html





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To honor your grief is not self-destructive or harmful, it is courageous and life-giving.

Alan D. Wolfelt

Resources

Community Bereavement Resources

Alberta Health Services Grief Support Program (Calgary Zone)

- Short-term individual counseling for adults and grief support groups.
- Call 403-955-8011 (8:30-4:00 pm, Mon-Fri)
https://bit.ly/GriefSupportProgram__AlbertaHealthServices

Solace Grief Support Society

- Twice-monthly Tuesday evening group sessions at Okotoks and High River libraries.
- Telephone for dates and times or send an email to solacegrief1@gmail.com
- Leaders: Vi Sharpe, MSW: 403-860-3189 and Henry Friesen, MDiv: 403-875-3188
- Individual/family sessions are also available.

Grief & Children Resources

Children's Grief Center/Sage Centre, The Outreach and Education Centre

- Child/Youth programs provide anticipatory and bereavement support/education for children and youth and their family members who are coping with the terminal illness of a loved one or grieving the death of a close family member.
- Call: 403-263-4525; 1245 – 70 Ave. SE Calgary, AB
- www.hospicecalgary.com

Rainbows

- Provides support for children and their families who are grieving a death, divorce, or other painful transition in the family,
- <https://www.rainbows.ca/services/programs/>

Grief Counsellors

- www.psychologytoday.com/ca/therapists/grief/ab/okotoks
- <https://www.psychologytoday.com/ca/therapists/grief/ab/calgary>

Grief Support Groups Calgary

- <https://www.psychologytoday.com/ca/groups/grief/ab/calgary>

Grief Share Group Meetings

- 12-week course independent of faith
- <https://www.griefshare.org/>



Resources

Centers for Individual Counselling

Calgary Counselling Centre

- To register: 403.691.5991
- Suite 1000-105, 12 Avenue SE Calgary, AB
- <https://calgarycounselling.com/>

Distress Centre

- The crisis line can be accessed by anybody at 403-266-4357 (HELP)
- 300, 1010-8th Ave SW, Calgary, AB
- <http://www.distresscentre.com/>

Jewish Family Service

- Bereavement support available for any/all faiths
- 403-287-3510
- <https://bit.ly/jfsc-org-programs-services-grievingsupport>

Catholic Pastoral Centre

- Information about bereavement resources offered at churches in the city
- 403-218-5500
- 120-17 Avenue SW, Calgary, AB

Spiritual Direction

FCJ Christian Life Centre

- Ecumenical spiritual direction and programming
- 403-228-4215
- 219 19th Ave. SW, Calgary
- <https://www.fcjcentre.ca/spiritual-direction>

Additional Website Supports

- www.virtualhospice.ca
- www.victoriahospice.ca
- www.mygrief.ca
- www.centerforloss.com
- www.LivingMyCulture.ca
- www.helpguide.org/articles/grief/coping-with-grief-and-loss.htm
- <https://bit.ly/MyHealthAlbertaGriefandBereavement>
- <http://webhealing.com/links-to-grief-resources/>



Books You Might Find Helpful

The following list of books were recommended by bereaved individuals:

Finding Your Way When Your Spouse Dies

Author Linus Mundy

Grief One Day at a Time: 365 Days of Understanding Your Grief

Author Alan Wolfelt

Healing A Spouse's Grieving Heart: 100 Practical Ideas After Your Husband or Wife Dies

Author Alan Wolfelt

Healing the Adult Child's Grieving Heart: 100 Practical Ideas After Your Parent Dies

Author Alan Wolfelt

Healing Your Grieving Heart: 100 Practical Ideas

Author Alan Wolfelt

How We Grieve: Relearning the World

Author Thomas Attig

It's Okay That You're Not OK

Author Megan Devine

The Widowers Journey: Helping Men Rebuild After Their Loss

Author Herb Knoll

The Fall of Freddie the Leaf: A Story of Life for All Ages

Author Leo Buscaglia

The Invisible String

Author Patrice Karst



Though some day we all have to part with those we love, they are not lost. We are always better for having loved. In this way, love transcends even death.

Leo Buscaglia





There are some who bring a light so great
to the world that even after they have
gone the light remains.

Unknown



Foothills Country Hospice Society
Box 274, 322001 32nd Street E
Okotoks, AB T1S 1A5

Phone (403) 995-4673

grief@countryhospice.org
Website: countryhospice.org

