

Grief: Changes and Challenges

The death of someone important to you brings many changes in your life. As you are adjusting and responding to these changes, there are challenges you will have to face. These could be about the death and the circumstances at the time, or about your grief and how you are coping. Some common issues for people are included below.

Decision-Making...

Decision-making can be difficult when you are grieving. This is especially true when your partner has died and you do not have the usual person there to discuss plans, share decisions and consider consequences. Your memory, concentration and perspective may be affected by grief, leaving you with little confidence at this time.

Postpone major decisions, if you can, until you are feeling better able to handle them. If you must make major decisions, consult with someone objective.

Financial Affairs...

Settling the estate can be a complex and exhausting task. Learning unfamiliar skills for dealing with financial affairs can be overwhelming when you are actively grieving. You may need or want help with paying bills, investing money, and planning your financial future.

Legal advice and assistance may be helpful with the estate or other issues. Ask your bank for help and seek the services of a qualified account or financial planner to assist you.

Personal Effects...

Dealing with the personal belongings of the person who died can be very emotional. You may want to delay it because you do not have the energy, you are not up to the decisions, or you are comforted by the familiar presence. There is no particular time when

this must be done, so do it when you feel ready. Doing it a bit at a time may make it manageable.

Changes in Relationships...

You may find that other people have changed the way they relate to you since the death. Their attitudes, responses and expectations may be different. They may not be as understanding and supportive of your grief as you would like.

Your own needs and responses may have changed also. Your energy for and interest in social activities may be limited. Loneliness and longing may effect your comfort and composure in social situations.

Memories of Recent Events...

Particularly in the early days of grief, you may find that you are frequently thinking about the circumstances of the illness and death. Recurring thoughts about how the person looked or acted, about the care given, about what you and others did or didn't do, about how you heard the news, are all common and natural. Repetition seems to help us come to terms with difficult or stressful times. Although these memories are pervasive now, memories of other times will return.

Certain Rooms and Places...

There may be certain rooms or places that you wish to avoid as they are associated with the death or the person who died. The courage required to face these places may return of its own accord. However, if your discomfort is intense and is interfering with your day-to-day life, you may wish to seek counselling help.

Special Dates and Events...

The calendar is full of reminders of the person who died. Birthdays, anniversaries, holidays, etc. will be times of missing and thinking of the person, especially during the first year. Planning ahead about how you want to acknowledge these times can be helpful. Give yourself permission to do things differently and review the suggestions given here.

Dreams and Visitations...

Many people have vivid dreams about the person who died, or hear, see or feel their presence. Often this is comforting, but occasionally it is not. You may be shy to share these experiences with others, but it is important to believe that your experience is real.

Although grief experts say that the majority of bereaved people have these experiences, some people long for a sense of presence and don't have it.

Looking After Your Health...

When you are grieving, your eating and sleeping patterns may change, as well as your general health. Fluctuations in energy are often part of grieving. Grief increases your risk for illness due to stress, fatigue, poor nutrition, indifference, etc. There is also a tendency to return to old patterns of coping, some of which may be detrimental to your health. It is important to look after your physical well being as this can influence emotional healing after a loss.

Sleep...

Many bereaved people, though they feel exhausted, have trouble going to sleep or staying asleep through the night. Others find that they sleep more, to avoid the pain or due to exhaustion.

Eating...

Your appetite and eating patterns are likely to change for a while; you may have no appetite or feel constantly hungry. Mealtimes can be difficult reminders of your loss. Food preparation, shopping, and nutritional meal planning may be new skills for you and may be things that highlight your loss.

We have chosen the image of the labyrinth as a metaphor for the journey through grief. A labyrinth is not a maze as there are no dead ends and no wrong turnings. There is only one way—forward. So it is with grief. The only way through is forward, with many turns and going back and forth over what seems like the same territory. We journey to the centre of our grief, to the centre of ourselves, and then slowly return to re-enter the world.

Each person's experience on the journey of grief will be different. This is a reflection of our personal style, our relationship with the person who died, our internal and social resources, and our past history of coping. As you journey through your own grief process, there will likely be unexpected turns and insights.



Cowichan Hospice Society provides psychosocial and emotional support to people experiencing grief after a loss of a loved one. Services include:

- ✓ One to one support: An opportunity to connect with a trained volunteer who will listen and offer you understanding and companionship.
- ✓ Grief Support Groups: An ongoing group for clients to have a chance to connect and share with others who have experienced similar losses. A supportive and confidential environment is created by our staff and volunteers who can assist individuals with emotional expression, self-discovery and connection.
- ✓ Reiki and Therapeutic Touch: Body and energy work for relaxation and support.
- ✓ A Walking group: A chance to get outside and walk and talk with volunteers and hospice clients.
- ✓ Meditation Group: A monthly drop-in for clients of Hospice.

To connect with our Grief Support Services at Hospice simply call us:
250-701-4242.



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