

Bereavement Information

Vancouver Home Hospice Palliative Care Service



Dear Bereaved,

When someone important to you dies, your life changes forever and you begin to grieve. Many will say that the grieving starts from the first moment you learn that your loved one is seriously ill. However we label it, this can be a time of uncertainty. It may be hard to know what to expect and what is 'normal'.

Your nurse or other healthcare provider has given you this package of material that will provide you information about what happens as you grieve, what may feel helpful and where to turn if you would like additional support.

We recognize that this is a difficult time – perhaps the most difficult time you have ever had to face. Although the road ahead may feel long and difficult, we hope that it is helpful to know that there is support available, both from within yourself and within the community.

*With heartfelt sympathy,
The Vancouver Home Hospice Team*



Table of Contents

Ten Things to Know about Grief	4
The Grief Journey	6
Coping with the Challenges	7
Understanding your Emotions	12
Ways to find calm in the storm of emotions	17
Creating Rituals	20
Vancouver Area Resources	21
References	26

What the Vancouver Home Hospice Team can provide:

- Information and referral to community resources providing bereavement support
- Limited Bereavement Counselling (for families of patients receiving Vancouver Palliative Care services through Home Care)
- Bereavement information evenings
- Additional educational materials on bereavement including recommended books and supplemental materials
- Annual Community memorial gathering Honour A Life held in early December at VanDusen Gardens.

Please contact 604-742-4010 for further information

Ten Things to Know About Grief

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 would you want to.

~ Elizabeth Kubler Ross & John Kessler

When you are grieving it helps to know what to expect. Although your grief is unique to your relationship with the person who died, there are some common themes. Our staff, volunteers, and bereaved people identified the ten things discussed below as important in understanding your grief.

1 Global effect of loss

The death of someone very close to you can be a life transforming event that effects all aspects of yourself 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. It is an interior journey, like a labyrinth, moving toward central issues of meaning.

2 Grief is a natural process

The grief you feel at the death of someone important to you is the consequence of living and loving, of your meaningful connections with others. Grief is a normal part of life and a natural response to loss. Information about the phases of grief can help you to understand the responses that you experience.

3 Individual differences in grieving styles

Although grief has some definable outlines, how you grieve is a unique result of your personality, your past 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 with their own timetable. To cope with their grief, some people will openly express the emotions that they experience while others will control their thoughts and emotions. Neither of these styles is right or wrong; each can be an effective way 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 behaviour of the adults around them and will not talk about their thoughts and feelings of loss unless the adults do. Children are frightened by what they do not know or understand, so simple information about death and grief is helpful to them.

5 Social connections and support

When you are grieving you want and need support from others now more than ever. Due to awkwardness or their own feelings of grief, some people may not be able to provide the understanding and caring that you expected from them. Because all of the relationships in your life will be altered in some way after a major loss, it is normal to look at, change or, 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 can feel very different from your usual self as your emotions, your mind, and your reactions 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 will find that your feelings and responses vary at different times and phases of the process. There will be unpredictable ups and downs that may be felt as waves of grief or as good days and bad days. It is important to understand and value the good days as breaks or rests in your particular journey.

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 routine for health and social contact. Support may come from a variety of sources: family, friends, bereavement groups, chat rooms, etc. If you are concerned about yourself and your grief, seek professional counselling help.

9 *Time for grief*

Despite what you may hear about 'getting over it' or 'the first year', there are no time lines for grief; it takes as long as it takes. Often your grief journey is longer than you or other people expected and you may feel pressure to be better than you are by now, whenever this is. It is certain that this loss will continue to be part of your life and that you will always have times when you think about, miss, and grieve for the person who died.

10 *Grief as a spiritual journey of healing*

The death of someone significant in your life brings change that puts you on a different life path. Nothing will ever be the same, yet you must somehow go on and find meaning in the new path before you. As the journey continues, you may experience healing and personal growth as a result of the suffering you have endured and the lessons that you have learned about what you truly value.



The Grief Journey

<i>When a death occurs</i>	<i>Adjusting to loss</i>	<i>As life goes on</i>
<p><i>Social</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Withdrawal from others • Unrealistic expectations of self and others • Poor judgment about relationships 	<p><i>Social</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rushing into new relationships • Wanting company but unable to ask • Continued withdrawal and isolation • Self-consciousness 	<p><i>Social</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More interest in daily affairs of self/others • Ability to reach out and meet others • Energy for social visits and events
<p><i>Physical</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shortness of breath and palpitations • Digestive upsets • Low energy, weakness, and restlessness 	<p><i>Physical</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changes in appetite and sleep patterns • Shortness of breath and palpitations • Digestive upsets 	<p><i>Physical</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical symptoms subside • Sleep pattern and appetites are more settled • Gut-wrenching emptiness lightens
<p><i>Emotional</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Crying, sobbing, and wailing • Indifference and emptiness • Outrage and helplessness 	<p><i>Emotional</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intense and conflicting emotions • Magnified fear for self or others • Anger, sadness, guilt, depression 	<p><i>Emotional</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emotions are less intense • Feeling of coming out of the fog • More peace; less guilt
<p><i>Mental</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confusion, forgetfulness, and poor concentration • Denial and daydreaming • Constant thoughts about the person who died and/or the death 	<p><i>Mental</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sense of going crazy • Memory problems • Difficulty concentrating/ understanding • Wild dreams or nightmares 	<p><i>Mental</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased perspective about the death • Ability to remember with less pain • Improved concentration and memory • Dreams and nightmares decrease
<p><i>Spiritual</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Blaming God or life • Lack of meaning, direction, or hope • Wanting to die or join the person who died 	<p><i>Spiritual</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trying to contact the person who died • Sensing the presence of the person who died; visitations • Continued lack of meaning 	<p><i>Spiritual</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reconnection with religious/spiritual beliefs • Life has new meaning and purpose • Acceptance of death as part of life cycle
<p><i>What Helps</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pace yourself moment to moment • Make no unnecessary changes • Talk about the person and the death • Use practical and emotional supports 	<p><i>What Helps</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognize and express emotions • Acknowledge changes • Understand grief and know that others experience similar responses 	<p><i>What Helps</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflect on progress since death • Begin envisioning a future • Engage in new activities • Establish new roles and relationships

Coping with Challenges

The pain that comes from deep love makes your love ever more fruitful. It is like a plow that breaks ground to allow the seed to take root and grow into a strong plant. Every time you experience the pain of death you are faced with a choice. You can become bitter and decide not to love again, or you can stand straight in your pain and let the soil on which you stand become richer and more available to give life new seeds.

~ Henri Nouwen

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

Decision-Making and Financial Affairs

It can be difficult to make decisions – even small ones – when you are grieving. 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. Your memory, concentration and thinking may be affected by grief, leaving you feeling less sure of yourself than usual. 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.

What May Help:

If possible, delay major decisions until you feel comfortable and confident about making a good decision to avoid later regrets. If you can't 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.

Listen with your heart to what feels right

- Take your time and be cautious when making decisions.
- Ask a reputable lawyer, accountant, bank representative or financial advisor for help.
- Ask trusted friends for recommendations; but use your own good judgment as well.
- Before making any final decisions, review your plans with a trusted professional.

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, keeping in mind that compromise might be necessary.

What May Help:

There is no particular time when you must take on this task, so it’s OK to wait to do it when you feel more 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.
- 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 will likely become easier as the intensity of your feelings and painful memories lessen.

What May Help:

- Allow yourself to go over memories unless this begins to seriously interfere with your everyday life.
- 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 health care 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, or a bereavement counsellor.
- 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.
- It’s OK for you to avoid certain places for awhile.
- If you need to re-visit a place that holds painful memories for you, ask someone you trust to go with you, or do what you can to make it easier.

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.

What May Help:

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. (eg. 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.)
- Say no to people or plans that you don't feel ready for.
- Think about joining a grief support group.

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 visitation from the person who died, yet those experiences may not come.

What May Help:

Remind yourself that these experiences – or lack of them – are normal.

- If you often wake up in distress after a dream about the person, learn meditation or relaxation techniques.
- If you are troubled during the day by images or feelings, do some physical exercise: Walk, run, swim, go outside or to a gym.
- If you are curious about your experiences and want to know more about them, write them down in a journal and make time to think about them.
- If you wonder whether your experiences are normal but feel hesitant about speaking to someone about them, seek out a trusted friend, counsellor or other grieving person.

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 accident due to stress, fatigue and distraction. You may not be eating or sleeping as you normally would. As much as possible, it is important to eat and sleep regularly. Avoid unhelpful or harmful coping patterns or people.

What May Help:

Take time to notice how connected your body, thoughts, feelings and beliefs are.

General

- Visit your family doctor; inform him or her 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.

Sleep

- 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. Prescription medicines can help with consultation from your General Practitioner.
 - You may also find it helpful to change your sleeping habits for awhile (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 favourite scene or trip in as much detail as possible. 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.
 - As much as possible, limit your activities and responsibilities so as to 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.

Eating

- Even if you don't feel hungry, eat small amounts of healthy foods to give you energy. You may also want to add a vitamin or nutritional drink.
- If you feel more hungry than usual, eat healthy snacks and meals such as fruits, nuts and vegetables. 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. Keep some healthy snacks on hand.
- If eating alone is difficult, eat in a different room or sit at a different spot at the table. 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 out 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 never prepared meals before, contact your local recreational or seniors' centre to ask about cooking classes or sharing kitchens.



Understanding Your Emotions

There is sacredness in tears. They are not the mark of weakness, but of power.

They speak more eloquently than ten thousand tongues.

They are messengers of overwhelming grief and unspeakable love

~ Washington Irving

The Feelings of Grief

When someone close to you dies, you grieve. Grief is the road that you travel from how things were to how things will be. On this journey, you may have different or stronger feelings than you've had before. You may wonder if what you are feeling is normal.

Your feelings may surprise, frighten or embarrass you, showing up at times or in ways that you don't expect. It may be that you find yourself crying more – or less – than you expected. You may have deep feelings that you can't or don't want to show.

Feelings can be uncomfortable but they are not harmful. Remember that feelings are neither good nor bad, right nor wrong – they are just feelings. They are a normal and necessary part of grief. Instead of trying to stop them, trust that just as each one comes, it will also go.

Whatever your feelings, they are tied to the particular relationship or connection that you had with the person who died. In the sections that follow, some common emotions are identified along with suggestions to help you make room for the feelings you may have.

If you are experiencing other feelings, you may still find some of this information useful. If you find that you are continuing to struggle with your feelings, consider meeting with a bereavement counsellor to find new ways of coping.

Sorrow

The pain of sorrow is heartache. You may feel that your heart is broken or injured. You may feel as though you are no longer a whole person. You may express your sorrow outwardly through weeping, crying, sobbing or wailing; or you may pour your sorrow less visibly into activities that may be ordinary or special to you.

You may long for the person who has died to be with you again. You may miss the sharing of day-to-day life or the sense of closeness that comes from loving and being loved by someone. You may miss being able to provide and receive care. There may be times when the person's absence seems overpowering.

What May Help:

- Honour your sadness. Accept that it is a natural and unavoidable part of having loved someone and that it is part of your life right now.
- Share your experiences. You may want to share your sadness with friends, family or members of a grief support group; or you may prefer to use the internet.
- Express your sorrow. It's important to find ways that meet your needs and match your personality. You may need a regular time and place to feel sad and to cry, such as in your morning shower or at the grave; or you may need time to quietly meditate or reflect while walking in nature. If you want to express strong emotions, avoid doing this too close to bedtime since this can disturb your sleep.
- Create ways of remembering. Find ways that help you to remember and honour the person who died. Talk or write to him, celebrate her birthday, display photographs.

Hopelessness and Despair

As you face changes resulting from your loss, it may seem that your world has changed so much that you barely recognize it. You may feel that all you held most dear has been lost. Some people describe their feelings as 'being lost' or 'in a dark place.' Other people feel tired and unmotivated. Things that once mattered may now seem pointless. You may feel as if your world is falling apart and you'll never feel happy again.

Dealing with your grief may be harder than you expected and it may be difficult to put your feelings into words. You may feel depressed and have trouble keeping up your normal routines. You may feel that life no longer holds any purpose for you and wonder how long you can go on this way. You may even hope to die or have thoughts of ending your life.

If your mood is low, dark or numb most or all of the time, you may be depressed (as well as grieving). Most often these empty, hopeless feelings lessen as people begin to "see light in the tunnel" and re-engage with the world.

What May Help:

- Let others know and help. Spend time with others who have been through a similar experience and survived it. This could include family members or friends; or you may want to join a bereavement support group.
- Do what's right for you. It's important to give thought and time to whatever is good for you. Identify what you need: It might be rest or quiet time; or it might be physical or social activity. Staying in touch with the rhythms of the natural world and the cycle of life can be restorative and inspiring. You may also want to record your thoughts, observations and progress in some way.
- Talk to your family doctor. If your mood is often down or you are having thoughts of ending your life, seek help as soon as possible from your family doctor or hospital emergency department. Crisis lines can also provide telephone support: 604-872-3311 in the Vancouver area or 1-800-784-2433 anywhere in BC.

Guilt and Blame

The time leading up to someone's death is often confusing, exhausting, stressful and filled with unclear and difficult choices. Under such circumstances, it's often impossible to be sure of your choices or to know the 'right' thing to do.

While grieving, it is natural to re-examine your part in all that happened. You may have many 'what if' or 'why' questions. You may be wondering about 'if only.' You may have regrets about things done and not done, or said and not said.

If you are feeling angry with others, you may be trying to understand what happened: What exactly was the cause of death? Were any warning signs missed or not taken seriously enough?

Feelings of guilt or blame often come from a belief that everything in life happens for a reason. Something life-changing has happened and you are trying to understand how and why. You may blame yourself or others, even though you know there isn't any one thing or person to blame. If you are someone who likes to always get things right, feelings of guilt or blame may be especially hard for you.

Feelings of guilt and blame are often tied to ideas about how you or other people think you should behave. Perhaps you are telling yourself you should feel more sad or less angry, or that you shouldn't be grieving in this way or for so long. Often these 'shoulds' are the echoes of what you've been hearing from family and friends.

It's also possible that your feelings of guilt are grounded in regret. As a caregiver, you may have been tired and said something you thought was hurtful or not listened to a complaint. Perhaps you think you did, or didn't do, something that contributed to your loved one's struggle.

What May Help:

- **Examine your guilt.** Pay attention to what you say to yourself and about yourself. Describe and examine why you feel guilty. Look at what you are actually guilty of – if anything – and decide what you need to do. When someone you care about dies it is natural to think about the actions you could have taken. It is impossible to go through life in close relationship with others without saying or doing something you later wish you could change.
- **Forgive yourself or others.** Feelings of guilt or blame can keep you stuck in your grief. Ask yourself if these feelings are helping you to be the person you want to be. If not, find ways to forgive and let go when you are ready.
- **Do a reality check.** Ask trusted friends and family if they have ever experienced something similar and find out how they handled the situation. Also talk to other people who were involved and find out if anyone sees things differently than you do. Recall not only the times when you or someone else failed, but also those times when you or they did or said what was needed.
- **Take action.** Once you have carefully examined your feelings, you may still feel there is good reason for your guilt. In this situation you may want to find ways to make amends, for example, by volunteering with, making a donation to or learning more about a cause that mattered to the person who died. You might also decide to make a change in your lifestyle or behaviour based on what you've learned.

Anger

Anger can be a natural and common response to loss. It is a normal reaction at times when you feel powerless, frustrated or wronged in some way. Even so, it may be difficult for you and others to accept or tolerate the expression of angry feelings.

Your anger may be directed at a certain person, agency or policy. There may (or may not) be valid reasons for this. You may feel that someone should be accountable for actions taken or not taken, such as medical treatment or other decisions. You may feel disillusioned or let down by the care provided to the person who died by a physician or other service provider. You may feel angry with the person who died for not taking better care of him- or herself. You may feel angry with family members for what they did or didn't do or say. You may feel angry with yourself, thinking that there was something you should or shouldn't have done or said. You may feel angry with God.

It's also possible that you may feel angry and not know (or not want to know) who you're angry with or what you're angry about. You may find yourself exploding in situations where normally you wouldn't.

Anger can protect or distract you from other, painful feelings, such as sadness, loneliness or despair. If you're not yet ready to feel these other emotions, anger can be a way to hold them back. This isn't wrong – it's just a way of coping.

Some other words that might describe your anger are irritation, frustration, resentment, upset, tiredness or disappointment.

What May Help:

- Be safe. Take steps to prevent your anger from hurting you or other people. Learn about what you can do with these feelings when they surface: Go for a walk or spend time in a soothing environment. Stop activities such as driving. Take a few slow breaths. Try writing or journaling about whatever is on your mind. You might need to take a 'time out' by putting some distance between you and someone else. Tell the other person you need time out and when you will return. Then walk away.
- Defuse your anger. Find ways to safely let off steam. Physical activities that use big muscle groups are great. Try racket sports, running, yoga or aerobics. If your physical health isn't strong, you might try gentler activities such as walking, stretching or swimming. Repetitive actions are good: Hammering, chopping, digging and kneading can help to release some of the energy that builds up with anger.
- Express yourself. Tell the whole story. Be specific about all of your thoughts and feelings. Tell the story until you are clear about your anger: What and who is it about? Try doing this through letter writing, journaling, art projects or conversation with a counsellor or trusted friend.
- Take constructive action. Once you've found clarity about your anger and what you want to do, identify the specific steps you need to take. You might send a letter to someone or you might work towards creating a change in education, policy or procedure. This may also be a time for forgiveness, letting go or acceptance of what can't be changed.

Fear, Worry and Anxiety

Fear is a powerful emotion. When you feel afraid, you may have strong physical reactions such as a racing or pounding heart, rapid breathing, sweaty hands or upset stomach. You may also feel nervous, anxious, panicky or tearful.

Fear usually alerts you to a danger but when you're grieving, you may feel afraid even though there seems to be no danger present. You may feel anxious about leaving your home, going to new places or being around people. You may also be afraid of the intensity of your own emotions and wonder if you're going crazy. You may worry about losing control, thinking that if you let your feelings out you won't be able to stop them.

You may feel scared by certain thoughts or memories of the person who died, their illness or their death. You may worry that these memories are all you have left of the person. You may also worry about illnesses or risks that normally wouldn't concern you, or you may have thoughts that you or another person in your life will die. These worries and fears are a natural response to your experience with someone else's death, and will gradually lessen over time.

What May Help:

- Name your fear. Any time you feel fearful or worried, stop what you are doing and simply notice. Breathe slowly and deeply, and ask yourself, "What is going on with me right now?" If you think you are having anxiety or panic attacks, ask your doctor or a counsellor for help and advice.
- Ask questions and take action. Ask yourself questions such as: "Am I doing or not doing anything to cause myself to feel scared or worried? What do I need right now? Is there anything I can do at this time to dispel or lessen my fear? Is there anywhere I can go? Who can help and what can they do? What other kinds of help are available to me?" Using these questions, order your thoughts and then take small, focused steps to lessen your fears or worries. As you begin to take action, you may find that your feelings change.
- Identify what helps you. Pay attention to what helps you feel better or worse. Does it feel better to be alone or with other people? Does it help to tell yourself that you are safe, that there is no danger, that you are OK? Is there a person you can call or some physical activity you can do, such as going for a walk or cleaning the house? Would a bath or massage help? Is prayer, music or meditation a comfort?
- Learn breathing and relaxation techniques. For example, throughout the day, take time to breathe slowly and deeply. Take a big breath in through your nose and let it out through your mouth with a sigh.

You may also wish to visit the BC Anxiety website: <http://www.anxietybc.com>

Ways to Find Calm in the Storm of Emotions

CS Lewis once wrote in A Grief Observed “No one ever told me that grief felt so much like fear. I am not afraid, but the sensation is like being afraid. The same fluttering in the stomach, the same restlessness...” At times the mixed emotions of grief can feel intense and overwhelming. In times of distress, practices to help with grounding and relaxation may be helpful.

Grounding Skills

Grounding is a practice for coping with any form of overwhelming emotional distress, including anxiety and stress that can arise at times of loss. The following skills were selected for their simplicity. Ideally it is best to practice grounding skills daily, rather than only when distressed. The goal of any grounding technique is to:

- have less fear around emotions
- establish a sense of balance
- reconnect to the here and now, your body, and personal control

1. Identify inner strengths

Begin by identifying your inner strengths that you already rely on:

What are you already doing in real life that is helpful to cope with distressing feelings, thoughts, images, or sensations.

What is working for you now or has worked in the past?

Are there coping strategies that you have tried in the past that don't work now?

2. Breathe

Breath is a subtle sensation in the face of a powerful emotion. With practice, it can become an ever present ‘friend’ and an alternative, encompassing focal point. When you focus on breath, breathing tends to slow down, which in turn slows down the heart rate and mind chatter. Breathe slowly: breathe in for a count of two; hold for a count of two, breathe out for a count of two, hold out for a count of two.

3. Feet to the Floor

Stand and feel your feet. Bring your awareness to your feet, noticing your connection to the floor/ground. Imagine your feet as if deep tap roots into the earth, embedded in solid, strong, stable earth that nourishes and supports you. Notice how your weight is distributed between your feet. Continue to feel into your feet, breathing out through your feet into the earth; breathing in from the earth to your feet. Now stamp your feet and feel how solid, strong, and unbreakable the ground is beneath you, no matter how hard you stamp. Stretch and flex your toes and take a few slow deep breaths.

4. *A Solid Chair*

Notice the support of the chair underneath you; how solid the chair feels. Relax fully into the chair's support; let go of every muscle that does not need to be working right now. Notice how your back contacts the chair; notice how your back straightens as you sink into the chair.

5. *Focusing on Senses: 5-4-3-2-1*

This is a very focused activity and especially helpful in strong emotions, bringing awareness to the environment and external senses. What do you notice that you are seeing? Hearing? Feeling through touch? Begin by noticing and naming with 5 things I see, then 5 things I hear, then 5 things I feel. Then continue with "4 things I see; 4 things I hear; 4 things I feel; 3 things I see" Down to "1 thing I see, 1 thing I hear, 1 thing I feel, 1 thing I see."

6. *Embodied Affirmations*

Think of realistic, self-generated, strengths-based statements that resonate with you.

To stay connected to your body, gently tap the sternum with an open hand while repeating the affirmation, allowing time to feel and digest every word. (Shapiro, 2012)

Affirmation examples:

- Everything passes; this (strong emotion) too is changing.
- Just this next step is important right now.
- Sensations are just sensations. Thoughts are just thoughts. I watch them come and go.
- I can do this (something small, specific, concrete, positive, e.g., wash the dishes, sweep the floor, step outside).

7. *Other Quick tips for shifting the intensity of emotions*

- Change your environment. Get outside. Go for a walk.
- Spend time with a pet. Watch a squirrel. Study a colony of ants.
- Take an unhurried shower or a bath. Sense a full connection with the water.
- Carry a grounding object in your pocket. Touch it for grounding.

Take a self-compassion break - add your own words

Take three breaths

Acknowledge and name this is a moment of suffering

(I am feeling, I am sensing, I am telling myself) - mindfulness

This hurts, this is grief, I'm overwhelmed or shut down

This is a part of life and a human experience – shared humanity

No wonder I feel this way, Other people feel this way, I am not alone, we all feel the pain of loss

May I be kind to myself – loving kindness

May I learn to accept myself just as I am

May I remember that I am doing the best I can

~ Kristin Neff



Creating Rituals

Grief is how you love all those things in life that end

~ Stephen Jenkinson

Throughout history people have used ritual as a way to mark significant life transitions, particularly the death of a loved one. A recent study found that those who overcame their grief more quickly had one thing in common - they performed some kind of personal ritual.¹ The ritual of a funeral or memorial service is the most common one after a death. However the study found that the rituals that were most helpful were personal, not public and most were not religious in nature.

Ritual is a way to create a metaphorical container that may evoke the emotions of grief, but may also provide an action or behavior or thought process that engages the person at a deeper level.

Creating your own personal rituals to remember your loved ones allows you to access and work through your grief in a meaningful way. Some examples of personal rituals include:

- Lighting a candle at certain, special times of the day or week to remind you of your loved one (for example, at dinner time to represent sharing meals with him or her)
- Creating a memory scrapbook and filling it with photographs, letters, postcards, notes, or other significant memorabilia from your life together
- Spending time listening to your loved one's favorite music or creating a special mix of music that reminds you of that person
- Planting a tree or flowers in your loved one's memory
- Creating an artistic expression of your loved one e.g. a painting or sculpture, a quilt made up of cloth from your loved one's clothing, a collage of pictures
- Making a donation to a charity that your loved one supported
- Visiting your loved one's burial site
- Carrying something special that reminds you of your loved one that you can take out and hold when you feel the need
- Preparing and eating a special meal in honor of your loved one
- Developing a memorial ritual for your loved one on special days or whenever you wish
- Writing a letter to your loved one. Then you may choose to burn the letter, visualizing the smoke carrying your message to them, wherever they are
- Taking up an activity your loved one enjoyed in life and using the time you spend doing this activity to remember or feel your connection with them

Some people engage in the smaller, spontaneous rituals listed above on a regular basis. You may do something similar, or you might choose to create a more structured ritual. You may decide to create a special ritual only one time, or you might decide to hold your ritual on a regular basis—daily, weekly, monthly, or on special days like birthdays or anniversaries. What is most important is that it is meaningful to you personally, helps you express your grief, and also engages you in some sort of symbolic activity.

Lower Mainland

Grief and Bereavement Resources

BC Bereavement Helpline

Clearing house for information on bereavement support. Listings are province-wide.

604-738-9950

Province-wide helpline: 1-877-779-2223

www.bcbh.ca

BC Cancer

Counselling for patients of BC Cancer and their families.

604-877-6000 local 672194

www.bccancer.bc.ca/health-info/coping-with-cancer/emotional-support/loss-and-grief

Burnaby Hospice Society

Burnaby Hospice Society is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to providing compassionate care to individuals and families during the end-of-life journey.

604-520-5087

www.burnabyhospice.org

Camp Kerry Society

Offers retreats designed to meet the needs of parents, grandparents, caregivers, children and youth who are grieving the death of a loved one. Camp Kerry also offers ongoing “circles of strength” as well as a yearly retreat.

604-553-4663

info@campkerry.org

<http://campkerry.org/>

Canadian Virtual Hospice

Online information and support on palliative and end-of-life care, loss and grief.

<http://www.virtualhospice.ca>

Chilliwack Hospice Society

Provides emotional support groups for the newly bereaved.

604-795-4660

www.chilliwackhospice.org

Compassionate Friends

Self-help support for bereaved parents.

778-222-0446 Burnaby Chapter. Meets on the last Wednesday of every month.

604-941-9196 Coquitlam Chapter. Meets on the 3rd Thursday of every month

604-289-0097 Mission Chapter. Meets on the 2nd Monday of every month.

604-878-9904 North Shore chapter. Meets on the 2nd Wednesday of every month

604 715-1927 Surrey chapter. Meets on the 2nd Wednesday of every month

National Compassionate Friends Line 1-866-823-0141

Counselling BC

Information on counselors who provide grief counselling

<http://www.counsellingbc.com/>

Crisis Services

Crisis telephone lines for adults, teens and children in crisis. 7 days/week. Greater Vancouver Distress: 604-872-3311

Toll free Lower Mainland, Sunshine Coast: 1-866-661-3311 BC-wide: 1-800-784-2433

Mental Health Support Line: 310-6789

Seniors Distress Line: 604-872-1234

Online Chat/Resource Service for Youth (Noon to 1AM): www.YouthInBC.com

Online Chat Service for Adults: www.CrisisCentreChat.ca

Crossroads Hospice

Must be tri-cities resident. No counselling, 1:1 companionship, groups throughout year with skilled volunteers.

604-949-2274

<http://www.crossroadshospice.bc.ca/>

Delta Hospice Society

Open to Delta Residents only. Supportive Care Centre offers groups and individual grief counselling for adults and for children and art therapy for children.

604-948-0660

www.deltahospice.org

Family Services of Greater Vancouver

Professional counselling to children, adults, couples, and families living in the Lower Mainland with offices in: Vancouver, New Westminister, Richmond, and Surrey. Sliding scale fee.

604-874-2938

<http://www.fsgv.ca/index.html>

Find a Bereavement Counsellor:

BC Association of Social Workers

604-730-9111

<http://www.bcasw.org>

BC Association of Clinical Counsellors

1-800-909-6303

<http://bc-counsellors.org/>

BC Psychological Association

604-730-0522 or 1-800-730-0522

www.psychologists.bc.ca

Griefnet

Internet community of persons dealing with grief, death, and major loss

<http://www.griefnet.org/>

Jewish Family Service Agency

Individual bereavement counselling. Fee for service.

604-637-3309 (Alan Stamp)

astamp@jfsvancouver.ca

<http://jfsvancouver.ca/>

Kids Grief

A free online resource that helps parents support their children when someone in their life is dying or has died. This resource equips parents with the words and confidence needed to help children grieve life's losses in healthy ways.

www.kidsgrief.ca

Lasting MAGIC

Local charity providing a host of no cost services to grieving children including counselling.

778-385-4438

<http://www.lastingmagic.org>

Lower Mainland Grief Recovery Society Grief Groups:

Grief support groups and grief education and resources. Registration is required. Downtown Vancouver (Burrard & Georgia) and Kerrisdale (near 41st & Larch) Register at lmgr@lmgr.ca or call 604-696-1060 and leave a message. Please state which Program Location and Date you are interested in attending.

www.lmgr.ca

Living Systems

Various Offices in the Lower Mainland.

A registered society offering counselling for families and individuals on a sliding fee scale.

604-926-5496

www.livingsystems.ca

Living through Loss Counselling Society of BC

Individual Counselling and Closed Therapy Groups for those experiencing stress due to loss.

604-873-5013

<https://livingthroughloss.ca>

Military Family Resources Centre Society

Family liaison officers provide individual support for grieving military families. Can also help link to community-based resources.

Chilliwack: 604-858-1011 Local 1162 Ann Adkins or ann@bcmfrc.com

Vancouver: 604-225-2520 Local 2572 Nancy Szastkiw or nancy@bcmfrc.com

Family Services of the North Shore

Clinical Counsellors provide confidential support to individuals and families who are grieving or faced with other life challenges. Counselling is available on a sliding fee scale for those who live or work on the North Shore.

604-988-5281

www.familyservices.bc.ca

North Shore Hospice and Palliative Project

Counselling services for children and adults. Services available to those who have a friend/family member registered with the North Shore palliative program.

604-363-0961

www.northshorehospicepalliative.com

Office of Life, Marriage & Family (Vancouver)

Program of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Vancouver.

Individual marriage and family counselling, including bereavement. Sliding scale fee.

Limited assistance available.

604-443-3220

www.rcav.bc.ca/cfs

Pacific Family Life Counselling Centre (Richmond)

Offers individual, family and couple's counselling including grief and loss.

604-716-7976

www.pacificfamilylife.com

Providence Health Care Bereavement Support (St. Paul's Hospital, Vancouver)

Please contact social worker for most current information regarding grief and bereavement supports.

604-682-2344 local 6235

Qmunity

Bereavement support for men who've lost a same-sex partner.

604-684-5307 x110

mensbereavement@qmunity.ca

<http://www.qmunity.ca>

S.A.F.E.R. (Various locations)

Works to reduce suicidal risk among those in crisis, to assist family/friends who care about them and to promote healing among those bereaved by suicide. Consultation through intake worker.

604-675-3985

<https://suicideprevention.ca/british-columbia-crisis-centres>

Squamish Hospice Society

Grief support in a group setting or one-on-one for bereaved adults as well as children. Also offers six week structured bereavement programs, walking groups and information packages.

604-567-2009

hospicesociety.seatosky@vch.ca

www.squamishhospice.com

S.U.C.C.E.S.S.

Counselling Service Division provides individual and family counselling in both Cantonese and Mandarin. Sliding scale fee.

604-684-1628

www.success.bc.ca

Surrey Grief Group

Drop-in bereavement support group first and third Thursday of the month. Initial telephone contact required. No charge.

Emerald Building 9080 159th Street, Surrey

604-808-0351

Vancouver Home Hospice Palliative Care Service

Individual and family counselling, and bereavement support for family and friends of VCH clients.

604-742-4017 Social Work / Counsellor support

604-742-4018 Spiritual Care support

www.vch.ca

Vancouver Hospice Society

Host of services for Vancouver residents including one-on-one counselling for adults; family and adult grief group and a bereavement walking group.

604-737-7305

<http://www.vancouverhospice.org/>



References

Excerpts from *Trauma informed Practice Guideline*, BC Ministry of Health, 2013

Hughes, S. and P. Hyman, “Trauma-informed body-centered interventions” in *Becoming Trauma Informed*, N. Poole and L. Greaves, Editors. 2012, Centre for Addiction and Mental Health Toronto, ON. p. 89-98.

Levine, P.A., *Healing trauma: A pioneering program for restoring the wisdom of your body* 2005, Boulder, CO: Sounds True Inc.

Levine, P.A., “Trauma, Rhythm, Contact, and Flow” in *Caring for the Caregiver: The use of music and music therapy in grief and trauma*, J.V. Loewy and A. Frisch Hara, Editors. 2007, American Music Therapy Association: Silver Spring, MD. p. 145-153.

Neff, K.D. and C.K. Germer, “A Pilot Study and Randomized Controlled Trial of the MindfulSelf-Compassion Program”. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 2013. 69(1): p. 28-44.

Norton, Michael I. and Gino, Francesca, “Rituals Alleviate Grieving for Loved Ones, Lovers, and Lotteries” *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General* © 2013 American Psychological Association. 2014, 143(1), 266 –272

Shapiro, F., *Getting Past Your Past: Take control of your life with self-help techniques from EMDR2012*, New York: Rodale.

Victoria Hospice Society. www.victoriahospice.org Materials used with permission

Compiled by
The Vancouver Home Hospice Palliative Care Service
Including some materials from Victoria Hospice Society used with permission.
2015

Cover Photograph courtesy of Tammy Dyson.

For more copies, go online at <http://vch.eduhealth.ca>
or email pchem@vch.ca and quote Catalogue No. **GV.200.22.B47**
© Vancouver Coastal Health, October 2018

The information in this document is intended solely for the person
to whom it was given by the health care team.
www.vch.ca