

## HOW CAN I HELP A LOVED ONE?

Many people feel like they don't know what to do or say when a loved one is experiencing loss. If the loss also affected you, you may be working through your own experiences of grief. One of the most important things you can do is to simply be there for your loved one. Grief can feel overwhelming, but support and understanding can make a huge difference.

Here are some tips for supporting a loved one:

- Understand that a loved one needs to follow their own journey in their own way and express their feelings in their own way.
- Ask your loved one what they need, and regularly remind them that you're there for support if they aren't ready to talk with others yet. Remember to offer practical help, too.
- Talk about the loss. It's common to avoid the topic and focus on a loved one's feelings instead, but many people find sharing thoughts, memories, and stories helpful or comforting.
- Remember that grief may be bigger than the loss. For example, someone who loses a partner may also experience a lot of fear or stress around financial security and other important matters.
- Include your loved one in social activities. Even if they often decline, it's important to show that they are still an important member of your community.
- Help your loved one connect with support services if they experience a lot of difficulties.
- Take care of your own well-being and seek extra help for yourself if you need it.

## DO YOU NEED MORE HELP?

Contact a community organization like the Canadian Mental Health Association to learn more about support and resources in your area.

Founded in 1918, The Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) is a national charity that helps maintain and improve mental health for all Canadians. As the nation-wide leader and champion for mental health, CMHA helps people access the community resources they need to build resilience and support recovery from mental illness.

**Visit the CMHA website at [www.cmha.ca](http://www.cmha.ca) today.**

# GRIEVING



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Loss is one of life's most stressful events. It takes time to heal, and everyone responds differently. We may need help to cope with the changes in our lives. Grief is part of being human, but that doesn't mean we have to go through the journey alone.

## WHAT IS GRIEF?

Grief (also called bereavement) is the experience of loss. Many people associate grief with the death of an important person or pet. However, people experience grief after any important loss that affects their life, such as the loss of a job or relationship. Grief after diagnosis of an illness or other health problem is also common.

People experience grief in many different ways—and experience many different thoughts or feelings during the journey. People may feel shocked, sad, angry, scared, or anxious. Some feel numb or have a hard time feeling emotions at all. At times, many people even feel relief or peace after a loss.

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Grief is complicated. There is no one way to experience grief. Feelings, thoughts, reactions, and challenges related to grief are very personal. Some people have thoughts or feelings that seem at odds with each other. For example, someone may feel very depressed about their loss but accept the loss at the same time. Many people find that the intensity of their grief changes a lot over time. Holidays can often bring up strong feelings, for example. People work through grief in their own time and on their own path.

## WHAT CAN I DO ABOUT IT?

People express or talk about grief in different ways, but we all feel grief after a loss. In most cases, people navigate through grief with help from loved ones and other supporters and, in time, go back to their daily life.

Some people need extra help from a mental health professional. Grief can be more complicated when the loss is sudden or unexpected, frightening, the result of an accident or disaster, or the result of a crime. Other factors also play a role. A person's experience of mental illness, lack of personal and social supports, and difficult personal relationships can also affect the impact of grief. A type of counselling called grief counselling supports people through difficulties around grief.

Here are some tips to help you through your journey:

- Connect with caring and supportive people. This might include loved ones, neighbours, and co-workers. It could also include a bereavement support group or community organization.
- Give yourself enough time. Everyone reacts differently to a loss and there is no normal grieving period.
- Let yourself feel sadness, anger, or whatever you need to feel. Find healthy ways to share your feelings and express yourself, such as talking with friends or writing in a journal.
- Recognize that your life has changed. You may feel less engaged with work or relationships for some time. This is a natural part of loss and grief.



- Reach out for help. Loved ones may want to give you privacy and may not feel comfortable asking you how you're doing, so don't be afraid to ask for their support.
- Holidays and other important days can be very hard. It may be helpful to plan ahead and think about new traditions or celebrations that support healing.
- Take care of your physical health. Be aware of any physical signs of stress or illness, and speak with your doctor if you feel that your grief is affecting your health.
- Offer support to other loved ones who are grieving. Reaching out to others may be helpful in your own journey.
- Be honest with young people about what has happened and about how you feel, and encourage them to share their feelings, too.
- Work through difficult feelings like bitterness and blame. These feelings can make it harder to move forward in your life.
- Make a new beginning. As the feelings of grief become less intense, return to interests and activities you may have dropped and think about trying something new.
- Think about waiting before making major life decisions. You may feel differently as your feelings of grief lose their intensity, and the changes may add to the stress you're already experiencing.