

# Understanding Grief

**Palliative Care Unit:  
Aberdeen Hospital**

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# Understanding Grief

## What is grief?

Grief is a natural process that takes place after the death of someone important in your life, or someone who was once an important part of your life. The meaningful connections we make in our lives make death a difficult time. Each person experiences grief differently, but there are common themes that can help you know what to expect.

The death of someone important to you can affect all parts of your life. A death has the potential to redirect your life on a different path. Moving forward after the death of someone important can be very difficult as you try to close the gap between how things were and how things will be from now on.

It is important to know that grief still exists even if the person who has died was not a close loved one. This is why the death of someone who was once part of your life, or someone who you have a complicated relationship with, can also affect you when they die.

Social connections are important during the grieving process. However, it is important to know that not everyone close to you will be able to provide the caring and understanding you expect from them. They may have their own feelings about grief or awkwardness surrounding grief and death. Because of this, many find it comforting to talk to other bereaved people during this time.

Changes in your feelings and responses to certain situations are normal during the grieving process. You may feel different from your usual self. You may be feeling emotional pain that you've never felt before. Feeling tired, forgetful, or grumpy are normal reactions because your attention and energy are directed toward your grief and adjustment to loss.

**What are your questions?**

**Please ask. We are here to help you.**

Here are some practical suggestions about common challenges many people face when they are grieving.

## **Looking after your health**

When you are grieving, your eating and sleeping patterns may change, as well as your general health. Ups and downs in energy are often part of grieving. Grief increases your risk for illness due to stress, fatigue, poor nutrition, indifference, and more. There is also a tendency to return to old patterns of coping, some of which may be harmful to your health.

It is important to look after your physical well-being, as this can influence emotional healing after a loss. The following points are important to remember:

- › have regular check-ups and ask your doctor about any problems
- › be careful of medications and alcohol, as they mask rather than deal with the pain
- › low energy is normal – pace your activities and responsibilities
- › regular exercise is important

## Self-care

Grief is emotionally exhausting, so self-care is very important. Rest, take a nap, or do a relaxing activity when you need to. It is important to balance time alone and time with others. Try to surround yourself with things and activities that give you a sense of peace. You may wish to take a hot bath, read a book, or go for a walk.

It is important to do things at your own pace, and with people you trust. Grief does not have a set course or a time limit. **It is important to let yourself feel the pain of loss.** These feelings of grief will come and go throughout the healing process.

You may find it helpful to talk with others who have experienced loss. Support groups led by grief and loss experts offer a safe place to listen and share stories with others experiencing grief and loss.

Most importantly, if you are worried about how you are feeling, or how you are coping with the loss of someone close to you, talk with your primary health care provider or seek out support services in your area.

## **When to seek professional help**

Everyone grieves differently. Some of the symptoms of grief include:

- › exhaustion (feeling very tired), or insomnia (not being able to sleep)
- › anxiety
- › depression
- › feeling helpless, suicidal thoughts
- › anger that you can't control
- › withdrawing from family, friends, work, school, or other activities that you once enjoyed
- › using drugs or alcohol

If these symptoms don't get better over time, or if you feel like you are not coping well with your grief, you may wish to seek professional help.

# Resources

## Mental Health and Addictions

If you or someone you know is dealing with any of the symptoms listed above, please call 1-844-855-6688 to complete an intake screen with Mental Health and Addictions Services.

## Bereavement support groups

Support groups give you a safe space to feel your emotions. Groups are led by a grief and loss expert. Talking with others experiencing grief and loss allows you to learn from and support them. You will get education about grief and loss. You will have the chance to reflect on your experience and try to find strength and hope for the future.

## Grief support group

Aberdeen Hospital, New Glasgow

- Facilitated by Rosemary Fitzgerald and Mary MacLellan
- 6-7 weeks on Mondays, 1:30-3 p.m.
- Held when there are enough people to take part
  - › For more information, contact Rosemary Fitzgerald (902-752-7600 ext. 1165)

## **Family Services of Pictou County**

115 MacLean Street, New Glasgow

- Provides grief support at little to no cost
  - › For more information, call 902-752-7562.

## **Antigonish Bereavement Support Group**

- For people dealing with the loss of a loved one
- 8 weeks on Monday evenings, 7-9 p.m. in the spring (March-May) and fall (starting on the Monday after Thanksgiving)
- No charge; tea and a light snack are provided
  - › For more information, contact Gladys MacDougall (902-863-1375) or Mica Francis (902-863-6221).

## **Friendship Corner**

John Paul Centre - 308 Main Street, Antigonish

- Meet and socialize with others
- Tea, coffee, and snacks are provided
- Tuesdays and Thursdays, 1-4 p.m.
  - › Email: [help@depressionsupportgroup.com](mailto:help@depressionsupportgroup.com)

## **Grief counselling**

Counselling can help individuals and families who are having trouble coping with their loss.



## **Helpful websites**

- MyGrief.ca: [www.mygrief.ca](http://www.mygrief.ca)
- Nova Scotia Health Authority Cancer Care Program: [www.nshealth.ca/cancer-care](http://www.nshealth.ca/cancer-care)
- Canadian Virtual Hospice: [www.virtualhospice.ca](http://www.virtualhospice.ca)

## **Children and teens**

Children experience grief differently than adults. They may not have experienced grief before, or may be scared of what they do not know or understand.

Children usually learn how to grieve from the important people in their lives. Seeing you talk about your feelings will help them to do the same. Giving a child simple information about death and grief can help.

## **For more information on child and teen grief, contact:**

Pamella Beliveau - Bereavement Coordinator  
Pediatric Palliative Care Service, IWK Health Centre

- › Phone: 902-470-8942
- › Email: [pamella.beliveau@iwk.nshealth.ca](mailto:pamella.beliveau@iwk.nshealth.ca)



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Contact your local public library for books, videos, magazines, and other resources.

For more information, go to <http://library.novascotia.ca>

Connect with a registered nurse in Nova Scotia any time: call 811 or visit <https://811.novascotia.ca>

Learn about other programs and services in your community: call 211 or visit <http://ns.211.ca>

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The information in this pamphlet is to be updated every 3 years or as needed.