

Managing Grief and Loss

When someone dies



Emily Carter

Added Resources

Ask your nurse or social worker for a copy of any of these resources:

- ☐ Grief Counselling and Support Services Resource List
- ☐ Suggested Books on Bereavement for all ages
- ☐ British Columbia After a Death Checklist

The death of a loved one, family member, or a friend can be one of the most stressful events that happen in life.

When death is sudden or unexpected, feelings of shock can be overwhelming. Even when a person has been ill for some time and death is expected, it can still be hard.

This booklet is meant to:

- Help you through the next days, weeks, and months ahead.
- Explain aspects of grief and loss.
- Help you support others, such as children, through grief.

These are the names of the people who spoke with you when your relative or friend died.

Name: _____

Title: _____

Location: _____

Name: _____

Title: _____

Location: _____

What to do and how you might feel?

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Common questions

What happens right after the person dies?

A doctor, nurse practitioner, registered nurse, or paramedic declares (pronounces) that death has occurred, noting the time and date.

If death happens in the hospital, the person's body stays in the nursing unit for a short time. This allows you to spend time with the person if you choose. Then the person's body is then moved to the hospital morgue. (If arranged, sometimes the person's body is moved directly to the funeral home.)

If death happens outside the hospital, the person's body could be taken to a hospital morgue or a funeral home. It depends on how the death happened.

Who makes funeral arrangements?

Legally, the person named in the most current Will as the executor follows the person's wishes, chooses a funeral home or memorial society, and makes the arrangements (see 'Making Funeral Arrangements', page 7).

If there is no Will, there is another process to identify the right person to do this (see 'Managing the Estate', page 9).


If you need help with funeral arrangements, speak with a local funeral home, spiritual advisor, or religious leader.

Once chosen, the funeral director arranges for the body to be moved, works with you on the arrangements, and helps you complete forms.

Can I get help with funeral costs?

You might be able to get some help paying for the funeral costs if there are no immediate funds or assets available to pay. This might mean there is not enough money through the estate and/or the person responsible for arranging the funeral does not have enough money to pay. Start by contacting the Public Guardian and Trustee of BC.

Public Guardian and Trustee of BC

 www.trustee.bc.ca
 604-660-4444
 1-800-663-7867

Veterans Affairs Canada offers help to pay for funeral arrangements for those veterans who served in the Canadian military and living in Canada at the time of death.

What is a 'Death Certificate'?

When a person dies, the death must be recorded with the BC Vital Statistics Agency.

First, the doctor, nurse practitioner, or coroner certifies the death by completing a 'Medical Certificate of Death' within 48 hours of the death. This document is sent to the funeral home.

The funeral home registers the death with the Vital Statistics Agency. The funeral home then gives you a 'Death Certificate'. You need this document to prove the person has died when settling their legal and financial affairs. You can ask the funeral home for more than one copy or order more copies online, by mail, by phone, or in person at any Service BC office. There is a cost per certificate.

What is a 'Coroner's Case'?

The coroner might get involved when a death is sudden and unexpected, unexplained, not a result of natural causes, or when a death is not witnessed. If a coroner has been called in, they might talk to you, the family doctor/nurse practitioner, and any specialists involved in the person's care. The coroner then decides whether or not to look into the death further. An autopsy might be needed to find the cause of death.

What is an autopsy?

When the cause of death is not clear, a coroner or doctor can order an autopsy. A specially-trained doctor does a thorough examination of the body and all the body organs to find the cause of death. The autopsy is always done in a way that respects the person and their body.

If an autopsy is ordered, the person's body will not be released to the funeral home until it is completed. Please tell the coroner of any specific cultural or religious traditions, or specific wishes of the person. They will do their best to honour them.

If the autopsy is not required by law, we might ask you to agree to an autopsy so we can better understand why the death happened. The doctor will explain the reasons for asking for the autopsy. You can refuse.

If an autopsy has not been ordered but you want one anyway, talk to the healthcare team to find out if this is possible. If it is agreed to, you will have to pay for it.

The results of the autopsy are sent to the person's doctor or nurse practitioner.

What about organ donation?

The person might have left instructions or be a registered donor. Let the healthcare team know. Even if the person has not left instructions, we might ask about donating organs or tissue. No organs or tissue are ever taken without permission.

What to do after the death

Shortly after the death, you might need to:

- ☐ Collect the person's belongings from the hospital or facility.
- ☐ Call the hospital or facility ahead of time so that they can make sure the belongings are ready for pick up.
- ☐ Find out who will act as the executor or administrator of the estate.
- ☐ Secure the person's home and property. Make sure appliances are turned off. Make sure valuables are safe.

Usually done by the executor:

- ☐ Find and read the most current Last Will and Testament (the Will).
- ☐ Check the Will or other papers for any specific wishes about final arrangements and follow the wishes in the Will.
- ☐ Contact a funeral home.
A funeral home might have already been chosen by the person.
If you need a list of local funeral homes, ask your social worker/nurse.

Information the funeral home needs about the person:

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Full name | <input type="checkbox"/> Occupation and Job Title |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Address | <input type="checkbox"/> Date of death |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Marital status | <input type="checkbox"/> The mother's maiden name |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Date of birth | <input type="checkbox"/> Social Insurance Number |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Place of birth | <input type="checkbox"/> The names and birthplaces of both parents |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Citizenship | |

In the first week

This is a time to start sorting out the person's affairs and tell others of the death. Here are some of the usual people and places that would need to be told of the death in the first week. Some of these things are done by the executor.

- ☐ Inform family members and friends
- ☐ Prepare an obituary or death announcement
- ☐ Legal ☐ Lawyer ☐ _____
- ☐ Work ☐ Employer ☐ Colleagues
- ☐ Union ☐ _____
- ☐ Finances ☐ Bank** ☐ Mortgage provider
- ☐ Credit Cards ☐ Local Employment Insurance office
- ☐ Accountant ☐ _____
- ☐ Home ☐ Landlord ☐ Spiritual leader
- ☐ Hydro / Gas ☐ Place of worship
- ☐ Telephone / Cellular ☐ School
- ☐ TV ☐ Home care agency
- ☐ Internet ☐ Social Services agency
- ☐ Newspaper ☐ Rental Tenants
- ☐ _____ ☐ _____
- ☐ Insurance **
 - ☐ Check to see if death benefits are available
 - ☐ Cancel policies
 - ☐ Request refund of unused premiums
 - ☐ Start insurance claim (extended health, life insurance)
 - Examples: ☐ Home ☐ Employer Pension
 - ☐ Automobile ☐ Canada Pension Plan (CPP)
 - ☐ Life ☐ Old Age Security (OAS)
 - ☐ Mortgage ☐ Department of Veteran's Affairs
 - ☐ Extended Health (might need a Regimental Number)
 - ☐ Income Protection ☐ _____

**See the section on 'Managing the Estate', page 9 for more details.

Over the next month

You or the executor needs to notify these people and places of the death and cancel all personal identification documents.

- ☐ Canada Post – arrange to forward mail (can be done online)
- ☐ Driving
- ☐ Driver's License**
 - ☐ Car registration**
 - ☐ Parking permit(s) such as 'disability' permit
 - ☐ _____
- ☐ Home
- ☐ Family doctor
 - ☐ Specialist doctors
 - ☐ Neighbours
 - ☐ Dentist
 - ☐ Clubs
 - ☐ Associations
 - ☐ Library
 - ☐ Passport
 - ☐ Pharmacy (take in medicines for disposal)
 - ☐ Magazine subscriptions
 - ☐ Places/groups with membership
 - ☐ Social media accounts (Facebook, etc.)
 - ☐ Email accounts
 - ☐ _____
 - ☐ _____
 - ☐ _____
 - ☐ _____
- ☐ Finances
- ☐ Creditors (anyone the person owed money to)
 - ☐ Debtors (anyone who owed the person money)
 - ☐ Financial advisor / accountant
 - ☐ Canada Revenue Agency (tax return filed the year after the death)
 - ☐ _____

**See the section on 'Managing the Estate', page 9 for more details.

Consider donating

- ☐ Donate
- ☐ Medical Equipment (e.g. wheelchair, walker, cane) to Red Cross
 - ☐ Hearing aid(s) to Lions Club
 - ☐ Glasses to Lions Club
 - ☐ Artificial limb/prosthetic to War Amps
 - ☐ _____

Making funeral arrangements

By law, a person must be either buried or cremated. There is no specific time-frame for the funeral service or celebration of life. You do need to have all the permits and proper paperwork completed.

- ☐ Before making arrangements, check with the executor or lawyer to see if the person left instructions about the funeral either in the Will or along with the Will.
- ☐ Choose a funeral home or memorial society, preferably as soon as possible.
 - If you don't know of any, ask family, friends, or others in the community.
- ☐ Meet with the funeral home.
 - Arrange for burial or cremation.
 - If a cremation is planned, you must wait at least 48 hours after death.
 - If the death is a Coroner's Case, there might be a delay in the body being moved to the funeral home.
 - Ask about all the related costs.
 - Consider what the person would want and what funds are available to pay for it.
 - Take someone with you to help with the decisions.
 - Tell the funeral home your wishes for the funeral service.
- ☐ Choose a date for the funeral service.
 - Think about relatives and friends who might need to travel long distances to attend. Consider a date that gives everyone time to travel.
 - Some airlines offer a discount (called compassionate air fare) for travel to a funeral. Ask when scheduling the travel.

☐ Plan the funeral service.

- Talk with family and friends about what kind of service would be best, including any specific wishes the person had.
- If you do not know anyone who could conduct the service, ask the funeral home for suggestions.
- If you have a spiritual advisor or religious leader, ask them to help plan and conduct the service.

What if the body or cremated remains are to leave Canada?

If you plan to take the body or cremated remains out of Canada, you must carry a copy of the 'Death Certificate'.

Check with the airline for their procedures and possible restrictions.



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Managing the Estate

After the funeral, someone needs to manage the person's assets and financial affairs. Legally, this is the executor named in the most current Will or an administrator appointed by the Court.

If the person died without a Will, someone needs to be appointed as an administrator by the Court, usually with the help of a lawyer.

If you cannot find the Will, check with the person's lawyer or Notary Public. In some cases, you will need to ask for a search of the Wills Registry through Vital Statistics (either by mail or online).

For help settling the person's estate, you might want to hire a lawyer. If you cannot afford a lawyer, contact Access Pro Bono or the Lawyer Referral Service.

There are specific tasks that are completed by the executor. We briefly describe some key ones here for your information.

Find a more detailed contact list of federal departments and provincial ministries to notify of the death by searching this title online:

[‘After a Death Checklist – Government of B.C.’](#)

Probate

‘Probate’ is a legal process where the Court approves to recognize the Will as the Last Will and Testament of the person. Probate is needed to acknowledge the executor as the legal representative for the estate. It also allows the executor to proceed with distributing the estate.

You don't always have to apply for probate. It depends on the type of assets in the estate. It is best to check with a lawyer or notary to see if probate is needed. To go to probate, you complete a number of forms and submit them to the Probate Registry of the Supreme Court. A lawyer or notary can help with this.

To find a lawyer

Access Pro Bono



604-878-7400

1-877-762-6664

Lawyer Referral Service



604-687-3221

1-800-663-1919

Medical Services Plan

Notify the Medical Services Plan (MSP) of the death. You will need the person's BC CareCard or BC Services Card for their personal health number. You do not need a copy of the Death Certificate. Just call MSP or visit any Service BC office. They will tell you what to do with the card.

Bank accounts and bill payments

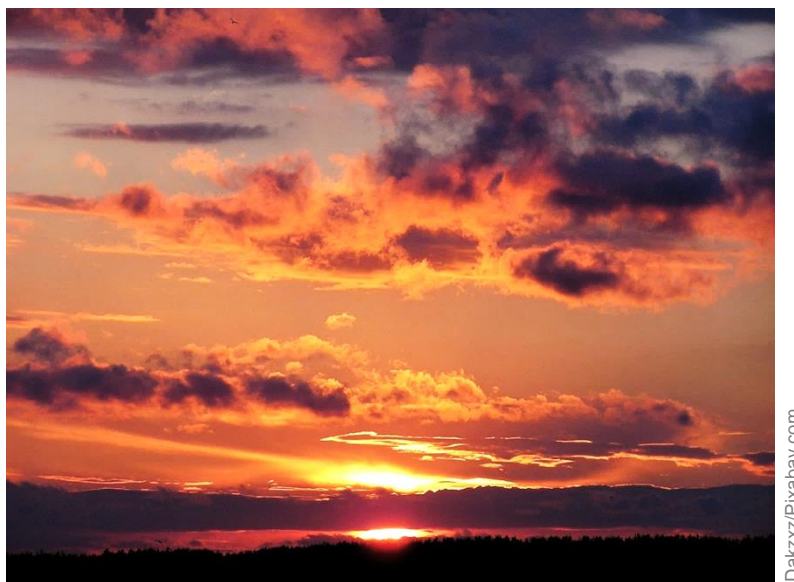
Deposit any benefit cheques to the person's account. Simply endorse the cheques with '*to the estate of [the person's name]*'.

In order for the bank to release the person's monies, contact each bank where there are accounts and make a written request. Some banks freeze all the person's accounts until the estate is settled. They might release small amounts of money to the survivor.

For joint accounts, the account can be transferred to the surviving person once you have the Death Certificate.

The bank can use the person's monies to pay for the funeral expenses when the funeral home or memorial society sends the invoice directly to the bank. Check with the bank to make sure there is enough money in the account to pay for the funeral arrangements.

Review bill statements to make sure they are paid. Some loans and credit cards are life-insured. Contact the companies to find out.



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Licensing and vehicle registration

Take a copy of the Death Certificate and the driver's license or BC Services Card to any licensing office.

Vehicles owned and insured by the person should be transferred to the estate, to the surviving spouse, beneficiary, or to a purchaser as soon as possible. Remember, if the plan is to sell the vehicle, the proceeds come under probate. To transfer the vehicle, take the vehicle registration, a copy of the Will, and the Death Certificate to an Autoplan broker.

If transferred to the estate, the executor must give written permission to anyone who will be driving the vehicle. If the vehicle is not transferred and an accident happens, insurance might not cover the damage.

If the person's death is a result of a car accident, the estate could get benefits from ICBC.

Real estate

Every situation is different. It is best to speak with a lawyer or legal aid for advice on managing real estate. Any jointly owned property generally passes to the surviving owner. Property insurance must be changed to the surviving owner within 30 days.

WorkSafeBC

If the person's death is a result of a workplace accident, there might be monies available for funeral expenses. The family might be eligible for survivor benefits and possibly a benefit for dependent children.

If the person was being paid a full pension from WorkSafeBC, contact the nearest WorkSafeBC office to notify them of the death.

Crime Victim Assistance Program

If the person died as a victim of a crime, the immediate family might be entitled to some monies from this program.

Old Age Security (OAS)

If the person was getting OAS benefits, their benefits must be cancelled. Contact Service Canada as soon as possible. Have the person's social insurance number (SIN) ready. Ask how to return the person's OAS Identity Card.

The last benefit payment would be for the month the person died. Any monies received after the month of the death have to be returned or repaid. Send unopened envelopes back with 'deceased' marked on the envelope.

Canada Pension Plan (CPP) benefits

As with OAS, if the person was getting CPP benefits, their benefits must be cancelled. Contact Service Canada as soon as possible. Make sure you have the person's social insurance number (SIN). The last benefit payment would be for the month the person died. Any monies received after the month of the death have to be returned or repaid. Send unopened envelopes back with 'deceased' marked on the envelope.

If the person contributed to the CPP...

- The executor/administrator can apply for a one-time benefit payment called a 'Death Benefit'. If there is no estate, other people can apply for the 'Death Benefit' (the person or group paying funeral expenses, the surviving spouse/common-law partner, or the next-of-kin – in this order). These monies can be used to pay for the funeral arrangements.
- If the person had a legal spouse or common-law partner, the partner can apply for a 'Survivor's Pension'.
- If the person had dependent children, the legal guardian can apply for 'Child Benefit'.
- Complete and send in the applications to Service Canada within 60 days of the death. Visit a local Service Canada office and/or check the Service Canada web site for details.

About grief and loss

Everyone grieves in their own way. There is no set time limit on grieving.

People experience grief both emotionally and physically. There is no right or wrong way to feel. Here we summarize some common reactions and give suggestions for what might help.

For more, see the Table: 'You Are Absolutely Normal'.

Your mind

After the death, you might go through a period of shock and feeling numb. There might be times when you can't believe the death has happened. When the shock is gone, you might be overcome with sadness.

It is normal to feel a range of emotions including feeling confused, worried, anxious, angry, irritable, guilty, overwhelmed, hopeless, helpless, or feeling nothing at all. You might have periods where you have trouble focusing or concentrating. Some people find it hard to carry out every day activities.

You might find yourself thinking often about the death. Certain rooms or places can bring back memories. You might find yourself staying away from these places. Events and dates can remind you of the death, especially during the first year. All are normal!

What might help:

- Be patient with yourself.
- Tell yourself it is okay to do what feels best for you at the time.
- Express your feelings to those you trust.
- If your distress is intense and interfering with your everyday life, talk to your doctor or another health professional.
- Try to stay in contact with those people who are important to you and supportive towards you.
- Let family and friends know how they can help you. You might find they contact you less as time goes by. If you need help or support later, it is okay to ask.

Your body

It might be hard to look after yourself during this time. You might have no appetite or eat differently. You might have an upset stomach. You might find it hard to sleep, sleep too much, or have disturbing dreams.

What might help:

- Try to eat healthy foods, drink water, and rest even if you don't sleep.
- Take time to go for a walk.
- See your family doctor regularly, especially during the first few months after the death.

Your spirit

When people are grieving for someone, it can cause them to feel confused. Questions of spirituality and faith can come to mind. For some people, their faith is challenged, for others it is a comfort or a new journey. You might question the justice and fairness of life. Looking after your spirit is part of the healing process.

What might help:

- Be flexible and gentle with yourself and others.
- Get help and support from your spiritual or religious leader.
- Create rituals that remember and honour the person who died (such as lighting a candle, laying a flower at the grave, writing a note or letter to the person, planting a tree, etc.).

Everyday life

This might not be the best time to make major decisions. Dealing with the person's personal belongings can be very emotional. There is no time limit on when this must be done.

What might help:

- Try to put off major decisions. If you must make a big decision, don't make it on your own. Get advice from someone you trust or a professional.
- If you can, wait until you feel ready for change.
- Deal with personal belongings when you are ready. Do a little at a time.

You are 'absolutely normal'

These are examples of 'normal' reactions to grief and loss. You might experience one, a few, or none of these. Reactions can appear in ways you might not expect.

Changes in your sleep

- sleep too much
- disturbed sleep
- disturbing dreams
- not sleeping at all

Changes in appetite

- not feel hungry
- eat for no reason

Changes in your emotions

- lonely or depressed
- short-tempered/irritable
- cry for no apparent reason
- feel panicked over little things
- angry for being left alone
- angry with the 'health care system' for not doing enough
- angry with yourself for not taking more heroic steps
- become emotional from triggers or reminders of the loss

Changes in your behaviour

- find it difficult to make decisions or hard to trust the decisions you do make
- buy things you did not need
- consider selling everything and moving
- go to the store every day

Changes in your thinking

- feel like you are losing control
- find you cannot concentrate on written material
- not able to remember what you just read
- find yourself obsessed with thoughts of the deceased
- forgetful, confused, unusually absent-minded
- forget why you went somewhere
- feel guilty about things you have, or have not, done

Changes in your feelings towards others

- feel no one understands what you are going through
- call friends and talking for a long time or want to hang up after only a brief conversation
- feel people should call more often or not call you at all
- feel people should involve you in activities more often or leave you alone
- avoid social functions you usually enjoyed

Changes in your body

- headaches
- upset stomach
- feel weak and exhausted
- feel more aches and pains

If you are not feeling better over time, or your grief is getting worse, talk to a health professional right away.

Taking care of yourself

Give yourself permission, time, and space to grieve.

- Acknowledge your broken heart.
- Allow yourself to cry if you are able. It may provide some comfort and relief of built up emotions.
- Reflect on your imagined guilt and 'if only' thoughts.
- Feel free to protest the 'why' of death.
- Try not to escape into loneliness.
- Laughter does not mean you are disrespectful to your loved one's memory.

Listen to yourself.

- Use your own awareness of your level of grief and healing. Do not measure yourself by how others grieve and heal. It is different for everyone.
- Understand and accept your limitations.
- Respect the way your partner and/or your family grieves. Respect the time it takes for them to heal.

Talk to others.

- Tell those around you what you need from them: practical help, emotional support, sharing of time.
- It might be helpful to talk about your experience to people who you think will understand.
- Talking with others can be a way to keep your loved one's memory alive.
- Accept the support people around you with all their imperfections and occasional unwanted advice.
- Recognize that seeking professional counselling and/or attending a grief support group does not mean you are weak or inadequate.

Take part in meaningful activities with those special to you.

- Try activities that give you some measure of comfort.
Suggestions: spirituality, religion, poetry, music, art, gardening, exercise, walks, meditation, reading, volunteer work. One or more of these might help relieve your grief and help you make meaning of your experience.

Making it through the first year and beyond

Your life will never be the same, as you are changed by this intense experience. However, it is possible to work through it and find a 'new way' to be 'normal'.

Do not be afraid of your feelings – Do not run away from them

You will experience many unfamiliar feelings during the first year of grief. Let yourself express them.

At any time, you might experience periods of crying, intense pain, isolation, exhaustion, panic, fear, distorted reality, depression, anxiety, loneliness, emptiness, anger and/or guilt. You are not going crazy. Many people who have these experiences worry about this. It is normal.

Grief is a process. It is hard work, but the only way to deal with it is to go through it. Learn to flow with your feelings of grief. Even though these feelings might be painful, they are not permanent. Your sense of reality and your concentration will come back. You will function again, just as well as you did before, perhaps even better.

Share your feelings with others

Talking about your feelings can be an important coping tool. Initially, you might find yourself feeling the need to tell the story of your loved one's death over and over again. Telling the story sometimes helps. You might feel some relief each time the story is told.

Find a creative outlet

It can be very helpful to direct your energies to something physical, such as needlework, painting, building a patio, or doing some other project. Some people say that doing activities help to relieve some of their feelings of grief. They say it gives them a sense of control when they finish the activity or project and this helps reduce their feelings of powerlessness.

At some point, you might want to read about grief. This can give you information and help you understand your emotions.

Try keeping a journal of your thoughts and feelings. It can also be a good outlet.

Make use of support groups

As time goes on, you might want to share your feelings with people who have had a similar experience. There can be an instant bond among people who have lost someone. People who are newly bereaved, hurt, and confused often find support groups very helpful.

Do not try to live up to other people's expectations

Many people might tell you how you 'should' grieve. Remember, there is only one 'should' in grieving and that is you 'should' go with your own feelings and timetable. Learn to deal with things as you are able. Don't allow yourself to be pushed to do things before you are ready. You will know when something is right for you.

Do not take what people say too seriously

You may hear all kinds of comments while you are in grief. For example, "Hold your chin up," "They are in a better place" or "It will get better soon." Sometimes these comments hurt; sometimes they may make you angry. Most people mean well and are not intending to hurt you. They just don't know what to say or they might not be comfortable with the subject themselves.

Try not to use substances to help cope

The painful experience of grief can be difficult to deal with. Drinking alcohol or taking medications as a way to cope actually only delays the grieving process.

If you think you are drinking too much or taking too much medication, reach out to people you trust and talk to your doctor. Seek out a professional counsellor to help you through this difficult time.

If you think your doctor is giving you too many prescriptions for medication, get a second opinion from another doctor.

Helping children through grief

Children grieve differently from adults. They can switch from being very sad one moment to playing and having fun the next.

Most children will be okay if they get the support they need. It is hard to find the energy to help your children when you are grieving too.



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How you can help

- Tell your child about the death as soon as possible.
- Simply explain what has happened using words they can understand. Telling children the person 'went to sleep', 'was taken away', or 'gone to a better place', can confuse or frighten them. It is best to use the word 'dead'.
- No matter how old, children need structure to feel secure. Keep family routines.
- Tell them it is okay to feel sad, mad, worried, happy, lonely, guilty, etc. Help them work through their feelings. Tell them it is okay to cry.
- Let them know it is okay to ask questions. Don't worry if you don't have the answers.

The following pages look closer at children at different ages, how they might react, and suggestions for how you can help them.

While the reactions are common to certain ages, not all children experience things at the same age. Many strategies are helpful at any age.

For more information, refer to the 'Suggested Books on Bereavement for All Ages' resource.

Under 3 years

At this age, children sense something has happened.

They might do any of the following:

- Be more afraid to be separated from you.
- Be more irritable.
- At about 2 years, start to understand endings and what 'no more' means.

How you can help:

- Keep to your daily routines as much as possible.
- Give comfort with words, hugs, or things that give comfort like a favourite blanket.
- If you need help to care for them, ask family and friends.



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3 to 5 years

At this age, children don't have a clear understanding of death.

They might do any of the following:

- Think of death as a monster or ghost.
- Believe that it was their thoughts and behaviours that caused the death.
- Feel frightened and responsible when they see adults around them upset.
- Express their feelings through play.
- Tell everyone about the death, even strangers.
- Have stomach aches or headaches. Maybe start doing things they had stopped, like wetting the bed, sucking their thumb.
- Not understand that death is permanent.

How you can help:

- Explain what you are feeling and why. They look to you to learn how to grieve.
- Answer questions simply and honestly. Explain that death is not like sleeping and that the person is not coming back.
- Reassure that the death is not their fault.
- Hold them and play with them often.
- Be prepared to repeat yourself often.
- Prepare them for any rituals. They might want to draw a picture or write a letter to the person as a way of saying goodbye.
- Keep the person's objects or photographs visible, rather than put away or out of view. They can give comfort and pleasure. They can also help start a conversation.

6 to 8 years

At this age, children are changing in the ways they think. They feel free to express their emotions. They are starting to understand what 'dead' means.

They might do any of the following:

- Ask questions that might shock you, such as what happens to the body or about being dead.
- Feel rejected and unloved.
- Have bursts of anger at home and at school.
- Blame someone for the death.
- Remain fixated on the death, their health, or the health of people close to them.
- Complain of headaches or stomach aches.

How you can help

- Keep regular routines.
- Spend time each day with your child.
- Explain why you are not around.
- Use drawings and short stories as ways to help explain death and why it happens.
- Use simple and honest language.
- Give reassurance.
- Tell them it is normal to feel sad.
- Let their teachers know about the death.
- Help them with what to say when other children ask questions.

9 to 11 years

At this age, children are more likely to think concretely and practically. They understand death is final. They know everyone dies sometime.

They might do any of the following:

- Ask lots of 'why' questions. Get upset or worried when not given enough information.
- Try to hide their feelings.
- Have difficult behaviours such as act out, misbehave, be extra clingy, or sulk when they don't get their way.
- Take out their frustrations on others, especially other children.
- Get into trouble at school.

How you can help

- Continue with regular daily routines.
- Take time to answer their questions.
- Give clear explanations about death and dying.
- Encourage them to take part in family rituals.
- Get them to help with daily activities and with funeral arrangements (such as writing the obituary or seating guests at the funeral).
- Share your feelings.
- If you are not able to manage their behaviour, ask other parents, teachers, or school counsellors for help and advice.

12 to 14 years

At this age, children begin to take abstract concepts and think, reason, and problem-solve systematically. They begin to have insight and compassion.

They might do any of the following:

- Think they know all there is to know about death and dying.
- Talk to others about their feelings and not you.
- Either withdraw from usual activities or push limits and boundaries.
- Try to be like the person who died.

How you can help

- Continue to reassure them that you love them and care about them.
- Let the school know of the death.
- Check in with them regularly to see if they have any questions or concerns.
- Be respectful of their need for privacy.
- Maintain routine. Set reasonable limits.
- Watch for alcohol or drug use and for changes in their interests or circle of friends.
- Ask if they would like help finding support such as counsellor, teen support group, or online resources.
- Explain family rituals and what to expect.
- Ask if they would like to choose a memento from the person's belongings.

15 to 17 years

At this age, children think ahead about death. They imagine how death might affect them now and over time.

They might do any of the following:

- Begin to grieve before the person dies.
- Talk about how the person won't be around at important events in the future.
- Offer to play a role in planning the funeral or other rituals.

How you can help

- Talk about how they would like to share the news of the death with others, such as friends and teachers.
- Help them learn how to respond to offers of condolence.
- Ask if they would like to invite anyone to the funeral services.
- Let them know it is okay to grieve in their own way.
- Encourage them to talk about their feelings with you or someone else.
- Encourage them to write down their thoughts.
- Watch for signs of depression.
- Talk with them about your own past and present experiences with dying and death, how you coped, and who supports you.
- Help them locate materials and online resources that explain the grief process in a straightforward way.



Melody

"The melody that the loved one played upon the piano of your life will never be played quite that way again, but we must not close the keyboard and allow the instrument to gather dust. We must seek out other artists of the spirit, new friends who gradually will help us to find the road to life again, who will walk the road with us."

Rabbi Joshua Loth Leibman

Added Resources

Available online at patienteduc.fraserhealth.ca

Scan QR Code
to resource

Grief Counselling and
Support Services Resource List

tinyurl.com/dj6mah3e



Suggested Books on Bereavement for all ages

tinyurl.com/58d8npc7



After a Death Checklist – Government of B.C.

tinyurl.com/7m4pex4k



Added Resources

Cremation and Funeral Services

connect.health.gov.bc.ca/funeral-homes



A QR code (short for 'quick response' code) is a type of barcode that you scan with your smart device's camera. Once scanned, it takes you to that web page.

www.fraserhealth.ca

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