

Developing a Bereavement Intervention for Family/Friends Following Resident Death: SPA LTC

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Background

- Family and friends of residents in long-term care (LTC) may experience grief when the service recipient they are supporting dies.
- Grief-related reactions may be complicated due to loss of purpose, self-identification, and contact with LTC staff, family and other residents
- Typical bereavement follow-up in LTC includes offering condolences to family and friends via sympathy cards, and organizing rituals to commemorate the deceased
- While important, these practices do not address the psycho-social challenges known to impact bereaved family or friends of former LTC residents

Objective

To develop an evidence-informed intervention for bereaved family and friends of former residents that addresses common psycho-social challenges and is feasible and acceptable for facility staff to implement.

Methods

A review of the published and grey literature identifying the risks associated with bereavement following prolonged caregiving and proposed interventions

A scan of exiting materials and protocols currently being practiced to address bereavement post caregiving across the health sector in the Toronto and Hamilton Area

Consultation with key informants in LTC via 8 focus groups at 4 LTC sites in Southern Ontario

Findings

- 74 organizations were located within the Hamilton and Toronto areas that provide bereavement support to adults; 32 identified as being appropriate for bereavement associated with prolonged caregiving.
- 3 organizations were associated with hospices that had developed follow up protocols for former family members including the provision of written materials upon death and a telephone follow up call.
- The approximately 90 LTC staff consulted via focus groups had limited awareness of available bereavement services. While the development and distribution of written materials in pamphlet form was recommended, a follow up phone call was viewed as unfeasible. Input was also provided on when and how the materials should be distributed.

Implications and Next Steps

Three informational pamphlets were developed:

- an educational pamphlet providing information on the signs and symptoms of grief after prolonged caregiving;
- a pamphlet describing the logistical details that bereaved caregivers may have to manage after the resident has died;
- a directory of available grief support resources in the Toronto and Hamilton metro areas. The pamphlets are currently being reviewed by 11 former caregivers participating in a larger study on palliative care in LTC. Initial results suggest the pamphlets would have been welcomed by family members and friends at or immediately following time of resident death.



Planning Ahead

Grief may surface suddenly, even when you feel you are adjusting to life without your relative or friend. This often happens during holidays, events and anniversaries.

Being prepared for these periods, can help you cope better when they happen. You may want to:

- Plan to be with close family or friends
- Plan a ritual to honour the person who has died
- Take time for yourself



Taking Care of Yourself

It is important that you take care of yourself while you grieve.

- Spend time with family and friends: This will help prevent isolation and provide support to you in coping with your loss.
- Reach out for help and support: Specially right after your relative or friend's death.

Reaching Out for Help

Sometimes our feelings of grief are overwhelming. These feelings may give us trouble in our daily lives.

- After 6 months, you may want to seek help if:
 - Your interest in life has not returned
 - You see no hope for the future
 - You are preoccupied with anger or guilt



Next Steps...

Refer to the pamphlet *Resources for Bereavement, Grief and Loss* to learn about services and resources to help you understand and cope with your grief.

Refer to the pamphlet *What to Do After a Death* for a list of formalities you may need to complete following the death of a family member or a friend.



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Grief and Loss

"Our grieving is as individual as our lives." - Elisabeth Kubler-Ross

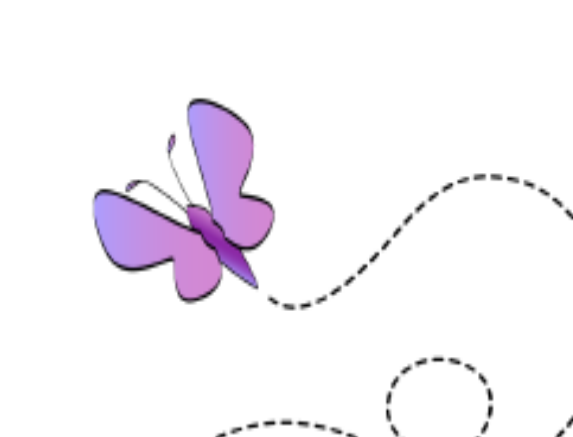


Knowing what to expect when your family member or friend dies can help you understand your feelings, and move forward in healing and life.

What is Grief?

There is no "right" way to grieve. Grief is a natural way we learn to live without someone we cared about after their death.

Grief can be intense and uncomfortable. We sometimes try to avoid our grieving through distractions and keeping busy.



Grief Across Cultures

You may have unique cultural beliefs and rituals around death and grief. This may include how to handle the deceased person's body.

It is important to let staff know about these beliefs and rituals so they can honour them.

It may help to talk to a spiritual or cultural leader to discuss common practices in your culture or religion.

Reactions to Grief

There is no "right" way to grieve.

Common reactions following the death of a friend or a relative may include:

- Physical/Psychological Reactions:
 - Low appetite
 - Poor Sleep
 - Difficulty focusing
 - Low energy
 - Seeing or hearing the person who has died

- Emotional Reactions:
 - Anger
 - Intense sadness
 - Numbness
 - Anxiety
 - Relief

- Social Reactions:
 - Social withdrawal
 - Lack of enjoyment
 - Longing for the person who has died



What if I am More Relieved than Sad?

You have dealt with many losses before your relative or friend died such as:

- Seeing their health decline
- Watching them age
- Selling a family home
- Living separately from them

Given this, you may initially feel relief for a "timely" death and an end to your relative or friend's suffering.

With time however, the absence of your relative or friend will likely settle in. This may lead to many of the reactions described under "Reactions to Grief."

How Long Do People Grieve?

People can feel profound grief for six months and up to two years.

- During this time you may have:
 - Bad days, where you have low energy and are just trying to get through your day
 - Good days, where you have more energy and feel positive

Having a bad day after just starting to feel better does not mean you are slipping back into intense grief. Overtime, the good days tend to outweigh the bad days.

Finding Out About Benefits

You may be eligible for a Survivor's Pension, Allowance for the Survivor, and/or CPP Death Benefit. You can either ask about these when you call Service Canada OR visit the following web sites:

- Survivor's Pension:
 - Link: http://www.esdc.gc.ca/en/cpp/survivor_pension.page

- CPP Death Benefit:
 - Link: http://www.esdc.gc.ca/en/cpp/death_benefit.page

- Allowance for the Survivor:
 - Link: http://www.esdc.gc.ca/en/cpp/oas/allowance_survivor.page

Next Steps...

Refer to the pamphlet *Grief and Loss* to learn about self-care and common experiences related to grief.

Refer to the pamphlet *Resources for Bereavement, Grief and Loss* to learn about services and resources to help you understand and cope with your grief.



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What to Do After a Death

A guide on legal, financial and governmental formalities.



The following is a list of some things you may need to do once you learn about your relative or friend's death.

Transferring the Body

When a family member or friend dies in long-term care, their body must be transferred.

If you have pre-selected a funeral home, crematorium or transfer service, you or the long term care home can call them immediately to retrieve the body.

If a funeral home or crematorium has not been chosen, a family member or executor will need to select one immediately.

If you are unsure how to select a funeral home, crematorium or transfer service, you can contact the Bereavement Authority of Ontario at:

- Phone: 647-483-2645 or 844-493-6356 (toll-free); Email: jmf@thebao.ca

Consulting A Will

If you know there is a will, check to see who is listed as the executor. This person will be responsible for carrying out the deceased person's wishes.

If you are not sure if there is a will, you can contact the estates division of the local Ontario court in the area the person lived, to check if a will has been filed.

Provincial

- Ministry of Health:
 - Cancel and return OHP card; Phone: 1-800-387-3445

For more information on will and legal issues following the death of someone, contact:

- Law Society of Upper Canada:
 - 1-855-947-5255 (toll-free) or 416-947-5255 (GTA)

- Legal Aid Ontario:
 - 1-800-668-8258 (toll-free) or 416-979-1446 (Toronto)

- Ontario Ministry of Finance:
 - Notify if enrolled in Guaranteed Annual Income System Program, GAINS; Phone: 1-866-668-8297

Notifying Federal and Provincial Agencies

When someone dies, there are a number of organizations that need to be informed. Most of these organizations will require a death certificate, which can be obtained online at:

- Link: <https://www.ontario.ca/page/how-get-copy-ontario-death-certificate-online>

- Phone: 1-800-461-2156 (outside Toronto) or 416-325-8305 (Toronto only)

- Canada Post:
 - Return incoming mail to senders; Phone: 1-866-607-6301

- Citizenship and Immigration Canada:
 - Cancel a valid passport; Phone: 1-800-567-6868

Ministry of Community and Social Services:

- Notify if the deceased was receiving any benefits from the provincial government; Phone: 416-325-5666 or 1-888-789-4199 (toll-free)

- Ministry of Transportation:
 - Cancel driver's license and registration; Phone: 1-800-387-3445 (toll-free) or 416-252-2999 (GTA)

- Ontario Ministry of Finance:
 - Notify if enrolled in Guaranteed Annual Income System Program, GAINS; Phone: 1-866-668-8297

Federal

- Service Canada:
 - Cancel OAS and CPP benefits. Check if you qualify for a Survivor's Benefit, or CPP Death Benefit; Phone: 1-800-277-9914

- Canada Revenue Agency:
 - File a final income tax claim; Phone: 1-800-959-8281

- Veterans Affairs Canada:
 - Cancel a Veteran's Pension
 - Check if you qualify for death benefits; Phone: 1-866-522-2122

- Canada Post:
 - Return incoming mail to senders; Phone: 1-866-607-6301

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Informational Web Sites

Family Caregiver Alliance: The web site below offers some specific information for family or friends who supported someone with a chronic illness before they died. It is an American site so some of the information may not be applicable.

- Link: <https://www.caregiver.org/grief-and-loss>

Bereavest: The web site below discusses the difference between grief and depression, and provides some helpful warning signs of complicated grief which may require professional support. It may be helpful if you are concerned about your symptoms and wondering if you should reach out for professional help.

- Link: <http://www.bereavest.org/educate-mental-health-depression-grief-and-bereavement>

Help Guide: The web site below discusses all types of grief including the grief associated with losing someone to death. This site offers helpful tips for coping with grief and loss, and offers some myths and facts about grief.

- Link: <http://www.helpguide.org/articles/grief-loss-coming-to-terms-grief-and-loss.htm>

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Resources on Bereavement, Grief and Loss

Hamilton, Niagara, Halimand, and Brant (HNHB): The link below lists bereavement support groups and services in the HNHB area. On the website, you can click on a program to learn more about:

- Type of service
- Eligibility
- Fees (if any)
- Contact information
- Link: <http://www.hnbbhealthline.ca/listServices.aspx?id=10868>

Bereaved Families of Ontario: Bereaved Families of Ontario is a not-for-profit organization that can connect you to other agencies for individual or group support. All programs are run by volunteers who have grieved the death of their own relative or friend.

- Link: <http://www.bereavedfamilies.net>

By clicking the "Affiliates" section, you can find the specific organization that services your city.

People may find some resources more helpful than others. If you find that one resource is unhelpful, try another one.



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What are Grief and Bereavement?

Grief is a natural way we learn to live without someone we cared about after their death.

Bereavement is a period of grief after the death of a family member or friend.

Bereavement Resources

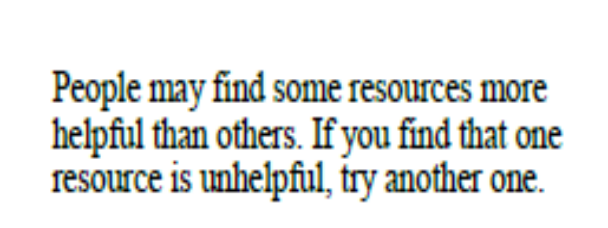
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The Care Guide:

The link below contains a list of hospice and palliative care services in Ontario that provide bereavement support. You can search this site by city or town.

- Link: http://www.thecareguide.com/index.php?module=links_setProvincalListONHP

Self-Help Books on Grief and Loss

Healing After Loss: Daily Meditations for Working Through Grief. Martha W. Hickman (2011). This book includes a series of small quotes and meditation exercises that can be used every day to cope with grief related emotions. It is written by a grief survivor. It is also available in audio form.

Life After Loss. Dets. B (1992). This book offers some practical information including helpful things to do and eat when grieving the death of a family member or friend.

Good Grief. Granger Westberg (2010). This book identifies the emotional and physical reactions you might experience at different stages of grief.

How to Go On Living When Someone You Love Dies. Therese A. Rando (1991). This book is written by a psychologist who has counselled many adults through grief. The book provides tips for finding effective professional and self-help support and for coping with grief.

Understanding Your Grief: Ten Essential Touchstones for Finding Hope and Healing Your Heart. Alan D. Wolfelt (2003). This book is written by a grief counsellor. The book is designed to be read in short segments with each page or two offering a thought provoking idea, question or exercise to consider.

Healing A Spouses Grieving Heart: 100 Practical ideas after your husband or wife dies. Alan D. Wolfelt, Ft. Collins, CO. Companion Press. This book is specifically geared towards dealing with the loss of a spouse in older age. Simple and brief tips on how to move through your grief are offered.

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