



Bereavement Information

On behalf of the Regina Qu'Appelle Health Region, we extend our condolences to you and your family. This booklet contains information that may be helpful to you.

Someone you care about has died. Family members often feel numb, exhausted and confused in the first hours of grief. Yet, it is during these early hours that you make many decisions required by law, custom, or your own wishes. Some of you may have discussed these decisions in advance with your loved one. Others may not have had the chance to do so. For some, this will be the first time you are involved with making these arrangements. Others have had previous deaths in the family and are familiar with the experience, although this does not make it any easier.

Whatever your situation may be, we hope the information in this booklet is of some help to you, in the first hours and days of your bereavement when you make necessary arrangements, and later on as you carry on without your loved one.

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When Death has Occurred: Practical Tasks for Families

This list of tasks is not meant to include everything to be done after a death, but rather it suggests some of the details that families must consider. There will be further tasks over the weeks and months that follow.

Suggestions on the day of the death:

- Select and contact a funeral home if you have not already done so. You may want to ask friends or family to recommend one. A list of funeral homes can be found in the telephone directory. Once you have contacted the funeral home of your choice, they make arrangements with the hospital to transfer your loved one.
- If possible, you may spend time with your loved one, saying goodbye, touching him or her.
- Identify a person who can call friends and family to tell them the death has occurred and if/when you want people to contact or visit you.
- An autopsy is a medical examination of the body to determine the exact cause of death. Autopsies rarely delay the funeral process. The doctor may request permission from you for an autopsy/post-mortem. If this is the case, you are asked to sign a consent form. Please contact the Coroner's Office at (306) 787-5541 or toll free at 1-866-592-7845 for the final report. The report usually takes 3 to 6 months. Because it is a medical report, we suggest you review it with a doctor who helps you fully understand the report.

In the days following the death:

- Give the funeral attendants clothing you wish your loved one to be buried or cremated in.
- If desired, visit the funeral home with support people to confirm your wishes regarding the funeral or memorial service, casket, and burial or cremation.
- Choose a date and discuss choices for the service with funeral home staff and family.
- Write the obituary and send it to appropriate newspapers. The funeral home may do this for you. There is a cost to print these in the papers.
- Contact a minister or other person to preside over the funeral service.
- Contact your employer to discuss bereavement leave options and plan for time off.
- Contact the employer of your loved one and ask that colleagues be informed.

Adapted From: 'Transitions in Dying and Bereavement: A Psychosocial Guide for Hospice and Palliative Care' (Victoria Hospice Society and M. Cairns, M. Thompson & W. Wainwright)

**Grieving is as natural as
crying when you are hurt,
sleeping when you are tired,
eating when you are hungry,
or sneezing when your nose itches,
it is nature's way of healing a broken heart.
Don't Take My Grief Away by Doug Manning**

Documents You May Require

Compiling the following documents/information helps ease organization and planning in the days and weeks ahead. Please note this list is not exhaustive and there may be other resources available to you.

The Funeral Director provides you with information and guidance for many of the items listed below.

- life insurance policies
- certificate of marriage
- social insurance number
- most recent copy of will
- bank account information
- safety deposit box key and location
- certificates of birth for deceased and dependants
- real estate, property titles, mortgage information
- auto registration
- military service papers
- income tax forms (past 5 years)
- investments, stocks, bonds, RRSP's
- pension plans (private and government)
- death certificate - provided by funeral home

Cancel: Saskatchewan Health Services Card, insurance cards, loyalty cards, utilities, and credit cards

Possible Benefits/Financial Assistance Available

Automobile Insurance - death benefits may be available where death has occurred as a result of an automobile accident.

Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada - In Regina call (306) 780-5945 and request contact with the District Estate Officer of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada.

Canada Pension Plan (CPP) - Call 1-800-277-9914 to determine if you are eligible for any of the following benefits:

- Death benefit is a one time lump sum benefit payable to the deceased contributor's estate
- Survivor Pension provides a monthly benefit payable to a surviving spouse or common law partner of a deceased contributor
- Allowance for Survivor is available to low income widows between the ages of 60 and 65
- Children's Benefits are paid monthly for a child of the deceased contributor

Compassionate Travel - reduced airfares may be available for compassionate reasons. Check with airlines regarding rates.

Department of National Defense (DND) - Call 1-800-267-0325 to determine if you are eligible for benefits if your loved one was a member of the Canadian Forces or RCMP.

Old Age Security (OAS) - Call 1-800-277-9914. The estate is eligible to receive the last full cheque in the month of the death.

Organizations - some fraternal organizations such as the Knights of Columbus or Masonic may provide financial support to special need families of their members.

Saskatchewan Ministry of Social Services Client Service Centre Death and

Funeral Benefits - if the deceased was receiving social assistance and you are working with a funeral home, the funeral director assists you with exploring eligibility. Otherwise, contact 1-866-221-5200.

RCMP - Call 1-800-267-0325 if the deceased was a member of the RCMP.

Veteran Affairs Canada (DVA) - Call 1-877-228-2250 for the The Last Post Fund to inquire about eligibility for funding for funeral and burial expenses of veterans.

Workers' Compensation - Contact a claims adjustor.

10 Facts about Grief and Grieving

1. Grief is Normal

Grief is not a disease. It is the normal, human response to a significant loss. People may encourage you to "be strong" or "not to cry" but how sad it would be if someone we cared about died and we did not cry or we carried on as if nothing had happened. I would like to think that someone will miss me enough to shed a tear after I am gone. Wouldn't you? When you lose someone special from your life you are going to grieve. Our grief is saying that we miss the person and that we're struggling to adjust to a life without that special relationship. Admittedly, saying that grief is NORMAL does not minimize its DIFFICULTY. It may be one of the most challenging experiences of your life. But you are not crazy, or weak, or "not handling things". You are experiencing grief and after a significant loss that is a normal response.

2. The Worst Kind of Grief is YOURS

A loss is a very personal matter. Your loss seems like the worst possible thing that could have happened to you. Sometimes people ask if it is more difficult to lose a spouse than to lose a child. Others question if it is worse to lose someone after a long lingering illness or if they die suddenly and unexpectedly from a heart attack or in an accident. While these circumstances make each loss different, they are not important to you right now. The worst kind of loss is yours. When you lose a significant person from your life, whatever the relationship, it hurts and nothing takes away from your right to feel the loss and grieve the absence of that person from your life.

3. The Way Out of Grief is Through It

Grief is painful. Loss is one of the most difficult human experiences. There is no easy way around it. We may try to avoid the pain. We may attempt to get over it as quickly as possible. But most often it simply does not work that way. Helen Keller

said, "The only way to get to the other side is to go through the door." We need to find the courage to go through this experience of grief. Learning this is a major key to recovery.

4. Your Grief is Intimately Connected to the Relationship

Every relationship holds a special and unique significance to us. To fully interpret our grief response we need to understand what the relationship brought to my life and therefore what has been lost from my life. We may grieve the loss of a parent differently from the loss of a friend. Each made a different contribution to our lives. What we have lost is not the same and so we grieve differently. Two individuals, both experiencing the loss of a spouse, may grieve quite differently because of the differing circumstances (the duration, level of happiness) of the relationship.

5. Grief is Hard Work

A grief response is often referred to as "grief work". It requires more energy to work through than most people expect. It takes a toll on us physically and emotionally. This is why we often feel so fatigued after a loss or why we may feel very apathetic towards people and events. The problem is often compounded by people's expectations of us to be strong or pull ourselves together or to get on with life.

6. Your Grief Will Take Longer than Most People Think

How long will grief last? It is finished when it is finished. The first few months may be particularly intense. The first year is difficult: especially the first Christmas or Hanukkah, the first birthday, anniversary, Mother's Day, Valentine's Day, "a year ago today day" and many other times that remind us of our loss. All are difficult days and we need to anticipate them, know they are normal and be compassionate with ourselves. Some writers describe the second year of grief as the lonely year when the realization of the life without the deceased becomes even more of a reality. Take your time. As John Donne says, "He who has no time to mourn, has no time to mend." Grief always takes longer than people expect.

7. Grief is Unpredictable

You may experience a wide variety of feelings and reactions, not just those generally

associated with grief like sadness, crying, depression etc. Some of your responses may seem quite uncharacteristic. "This isn't like me," you may think. Grief is unpredictable. We cannot present it in a neat predictable package. Just when you think you have it figured out something comes along to surprise us. In an unexpected moment, suddenly, without warning you find yourself missing the person again. In fact the one predictable thing about grief is that it is unpredictable.

8. There may be "Secondary Losses" to Deal With

The death of any individual, difficult as that may be by itself, may also precipitate many other changes in your life. For some it may mean the loss of financial security, a home, or even their independence. For some it may mean the loss of a role: e.g., the role of being a parent to a child who dies. For others it may be the loss of our hopes and dreams of "living happily ever after" or enjoying retirement together, or having dad walk me down the aisle. There may be many losses - environment, status, alteration of relationships - because of the death. Each one has its own impact and each loss needs to be mourned.

9. Grief Comes and Goes

We have said that grief is not a disease. If you have a sore throat, it is painful for a few days, then the pain eases off and gradually disappears. Grief does not work that way, however. Our healing process is different from a sickness model. Sometimes, at first, we do not feel the pain of grief because we are in shock and are numb. Often the pain is more intense some months after the event. Even then grief is not unlike a roller coaster. One day we feel pretty good, the next we find ourselves in the depths of despair. Just when we think we are getting over it we may have another devastating setback. This can be discouraging to those who do not know what is happening. Most have not learned that grief comes and goes and takes much longer than most people expect. We need to realize that this is the way grief works itself out and trust that the process, difficult as it is, is helping us work towards reconciliation.

10. Effective Grief Work is Not Done Alone

Society has unrealistic expectations about mourning and often responds inappropriately. Most people do not understand what is normal in grief, expecting us

to get over it quickly and expressing these expectations in a way that seems less than sensitive. Many people mistakenly believe that grief is so personal we want to keep it to ourselves. People mean well, but they are not being helpful. Sometimes when people are using clichés or expressing unrealistic expectations we feel like shutting ourselves away. Often they feel uncomfortable with our grief and so, shortly after the funeral is over, the person or the loss is not mentioned. There sometimes seems to be a conspiracy of silence. People are afraid to say or do the wrong thing so they say and do nothing which is possibly the worst thing. Grieving people need to talk. Not everyone will be willing or even able to respond to you. In fairness, not everyone can. Accept that and try to find a support group or a counsellor who can help. Or talk to someone who has been through a similar experience. I believe in the power of shared experiences, and often others who have been through the deep places can be a real help. Grief is about coping with the loss of a relationship and often in a helping relationship, relief can be found.

Reprinted by permission from the Grief Journey Website (address below). For further information, contact Dr. Bill Webster at the centre for the Grief Journey, 2-3415 Dixie Road, Box 201 MISSISSAUGA, Ontario, L4Y 3J8, or on the internet at www.griefjourney.com.

Normal Responses to Grief

Most people who suffer a loss experience one or more of the following:

- Feel tightness in the throat or heaviness in the chest

- Have an empty feeling in their stomach and loss of appetite
- Feel guilty at times
- Feel restless and look for activity but find it difficult to concentrate
- Feel as though the loss isn't real, that it didn't actually happen
- Sense the loved one's presence, like finding themselves expecting their loved one to walk through the door at the usual time, hearing their voice, or seeing their face
- Wander aimlessly, forget and don't finish things
- Have difficulty sleeping, and frequently dream of your loved one
- Assume mannerisms or traits of your loved one
- Experience an intense preoccupation with the life of your loved one
- Feel guilty or angry over things that happened or didn't happen
- Feel intensely angry at the your loved one for leaving
- Feel a need to take care of other people who seem uncomfortable around them, by politely not talking about their feeling of loss
- Need to share and remember things about your loved one
- Feel mood changes over the slightest things
- Cry at unexpected times

Remember these are all natural and normal responses.

“Certain manifestations of grief are typical, common and normal. Although grief is as individual as you are, some feelings and reactions are universal. The intensity will vary, and they'll happen in no particular order. You may experience all, some or none of them; they may happen only once or many times, sometimes several years after your loved one's death. Respect your own feelings and reactions. Take time to look, listen, experience and understand them. They are nature's way of getting your attention.”

(Understanding Grief: Martha M. Tousley, 2003).

How Children of Different Ages Cope with Grief

Children, like adults, experience grief in many different ways and are undoubtedly affected by any significant loss. Any child old enough to love is old enough to

grieve. It is very important to acknowledge that children do grieve, and should be encouraged to do so. Allowing children to grieve helps them make sense of the feelings that may be evoked by a death and validates that they are not alone in their experience and that they will be okay. Children at all developmental stages experience grief at different levels. The following is a brief explanation of how children of different ages cope with grief:

Infants and Toddlers

Children younger than 4 can sense something is wrong as they experience the grief of their caregivers. The absence of a parent can cause a strong physical reaction and more upset behaviours such as crying, thumb sucking, eating more or less, and change in sleep pattern. Children need stability. Try to avoid multiple caregivers at this time. What one does in terms of comfort, holding and cuddling is more important than what one says.

3 to 6 Year Olds

Children think of death at this age in very concrete terms. It is very important to answer questions simply and honestly and avoid half truths. Avoid euphemisms such as “passed on” or “gone to sleep”. One explanation for death is to say “The doctors could not make him/her better. Her body stopped working, she is not breathing, her heart stopped and she cannot eat, drink, or feel anything anymore.” Children often express their grief in play and they grieve in spurts where they may be sad one moment and playing the next. Be sure to explain to the child that the death was not their fault as they may feel that something they did or said may have caused the death. Be prepared to repeat what happened over and over again. Children at this age do not understand the finality of death and may think of it as temporary or reversible.

7 to 11 Year Olds

A clearer understanding of death develops and older children in this group may have an “adult” understanding of death. These children continue to express their grief

primarily through play. Death may be seen as an attacker that takes life and that they may have caused the death and are being punished for it. Between ages of 9 and 11 a more adult concept of life develops. They are more in tune with their own feelings and are able to understand more what the loss means to others. Children at this age not only need support but can benefit from being allowed to provide some support to others.

Adolescents 12 to 17

Adolescents understand death cognitively but are only beginning to grapple with it spiritually. Teens' normal self centeredness can result in them focusing exclusively on the impact of the death on themselves. They need to resolve this first before they can consider the impact on others. They may feel life has been unfair and be angry. Spiritually, they search for meaning and answers to questions such as "Why". At this age, intimate relationships with peers are strong. Adolescents may find it difficult to participate in grief support with family so seeking other avenues such as support groups, a counsellor or a peer who understands may be helpful. It is normal for them to reach out to someone other than their family. This should not be discouraged.

Normal Signs and Symptoms of Children's Grief

Physical Reactions

- increased or decreased appetite
- headaches, stomach aches
- tightness in throat
- heaviness in chest
- increase or decrease in activity
- restlessness
- inability to sleep
- increased need for sleep
- numbness
- shaking or chills

Behavioural or Social Reactions

- regressing to an earlier stage such as bed wetting, thumb sucking, whining, tantrums
- clinging, need for increased assurances
- withdrawal, passivity
- aggressive behaviours (hitting, demanding)
- hyperactive or restlessness
- "perfect" child - being overprotective or responsible
- self destructiveness or recklessness
- acting silly/joking that does not fit situation
- drop in school grades and participation

Mental Reactions

- sense of confusion or inability to concentrate
- preoccupation - thinking about loss
- difficulty in making decisions
- increased nightmares or sleep disturbances

Feelings / Emotions

- numbness
- sadness
- anger
- withdrawal
- fears/worries
- anxieties
- hopelessness
- self blaming, guilt
- yearning and pining
- helplessness

Spiritual Reactions

- feeling lost, empty or abandoned
- feeling judged, condemned by God or higher power
- questioning right to be alive
- questioning religious beliefs
- feeling presence of person who died
- feeling dislocated – do not belong
- feeling disconnected - not cared for
- extreme pessimism or optimism
- needing to be forgiven
- needing to forgive
- needing connected to loss

This list represents some common reactions that have been observed among grieving children. The most important thing you can do is talk to your child and encourage them to express their grief and ask questions. Try to maintain as much routine and structure in the child's life as possible. Ensure that other caregivers and environments such as the schools are aware of what has happened. Encourage communication with school in terms of child's grief and coping. Seek out other resources and supports if needed as listed in back of this booklet.

Children's Understanding of Funerals and Cremation

I Wrote Your Name Into My Heart

Author: Jason Graham

I wrote your name on the sand...but the waves washed it away.

I wrote your name on the sky...but the wind blew it away.

I wrote your name in my heart...and forever it'll stay.

Often, one of the first opportunities for you and your child to express grief is at the funeral. Funerals can seem strange and confusing to younger children. It is important to prepare children with an age-appropriate explanation. Children are naturally curious about everything, including death. Encourage your child to ask anything they want about the funeral and be prepared to answer in honest words your child understands. Follow your child's lead and give only as much information as your child wants to know.

Understanding Cremation

Cremation takes place in a building called a crematory or crematorium. There is a special stainless steel vault called a cremation chamber or retort. The body is placed in a sturdy cardboard container or a casket and slid into the cremation chamber and the door is tightly sealed. A gas jet creates a white-hot heat in the chamber. Because

the body is primarily made up of fluid (water) the intensity of the heat reduces the body until only teeth and bone fragments remain. This takes about 2 to 3 hours after which the cremains are collected in a metal box. The cremains are placed in a processor and refined down to the consistency of course sand to allow for scattering. The white or greyish cremains are sealed in a bag which weights about 5 pounds (similar to a 5 lb or 2 kg bag of sugar). Family may request the cremains to be placed in an urn for burial or scattering.

Explaining Cremation

You need to decide how much you want to share with the child in your care. Take care to choose words that the child understands, which depends on age, developmental level, personality, and vocabulary. Remember children cope better with what they know and cannot cope with what they do not know or have never been told. Often their imagination can conjure up images much scarier than reality.

Including Children in the Funeral

Children who are included in funeral planning are encouraged to view the body (if culturally appropriate) and attend the funeral and are compassionately guided through all these steps are best prepared to begin their journeys toward healing. Simple ceremonies such as lighting a candle next to a photograph, placing a letter, picture or special memento in the casket, or releasing a helium balloon with a message attached to the person who died, can be effective rituals of farewell. Children are very creative with these kinds of activities so seek their input. Children who mourn need our honesty, our love, and our acceptance of their many thoughts and feelings - and questions and concerns - if they are to heal.

Be Available in the Coming Weeks and Months

Death may be the most difficult thing in life to understand, even for adults. The child in your care may have lingering questions for months, even years, after the event of the death itself. Remain available to your child as time passes. Support your child in

their unique grief journey. The child who was not curious at the time of the funeral may have questions about it later on.

The Language of Funerals

Remember to use simple, concrete language when talking to children about death. Here are some suggestions for explaining funeral terms:

Burial: Placing the body (which is inside a casket - or urn if the body was cremated) into the ground.

Casket: A special box for burying a dead body.

Cemetery: A place where many dead bodies and ashes are buried.

Columbarium: A little building at a cemetery where ashes are stored. Kind of like a grave that's above the ground.

Cremains: What is left of a dead body after cremation. Looks like white or grey ashes or dust.

Cremation: The dead body is put in a special, metal container that gets very hot inside. The heat reduces the body to teeth, bone fragments and ashes.

Dead: When a person's body stops working. It does not see, hear, feel, eat, breathe.

Funeral: A time when friends and families get together to say goodbye and remember the person who died.

Grave: The hole in the ground where the body or cremains are buried at the cemetery.

Obituary: A short article in the newspaper that tells about the person who died.

Scattering: When the dead person's cremains are lovingly emptied onto the ground or water (or sometimes in the air) at a place that was special to him or her.

Urn: A special container that holds the cremains.

Viewing: The time when people can see the body of the person who died and say

goodbye.

The above information on children and grief was adapted from the following sources:

Bereavement Magazine January/February 1999 - www.bereavementmag.com
1-888-60-4-HOPE (4673)

Healing the Bereaved Child: Grief, Gardening, Growth Through Grief and Other Touchstones for Caregivers, Alan D. Wolfelt, Ph.D. (1996)

Helping Children Cope with Grief -

www.funeralplan.com/griefsupport/children.html

Helping Children Cope with Grief - www.griefjourney.com - Dr. Bill Webster

How to Help a Grieving Child - www.fernside.org/grownups/how.html

"When we honestly ask ourselves which person in our lives means the most to us, we often find that it is those who, instead of giving much advice, solutions, or cures, have chosen rather to share our pain and touch our wounds with a gentle and tender hand. The friend who can be silent with us in a moment of despair or confusion, who can stay with us in an hour of grief and bereavement, who can tolerate not knowing, not curing, not healing and face with us the reality of our powerlessness, that is a friend who cares."

Henri Nouwen

Additional Support with Your Grief Experience

You need not be alone with the work that lies ahead of you. The Greystone Bereavement Centre specializes in providing grief education, support, individual and group counselling and activities to support you and your family. Listed below are some of the groups and activities offered. Pre-registration is required for all groups. For more information contact: Greystone Bereavement Centre at (306) 523-2780 or check the website at www.rpci.org/gbc

Adult Bereavement Group: This group is held twice annually (spring and fall). It is a 5 week program designed to help adults who are grieving. Different aspects of the grieving process are examined through guided discussions, group sharing, and education by trained facilitators. Participants are divided into small groups based on type of death loss (spouse or partner, parent, child).

Daytime Support Group for Loss of Spouse: This group is held twice annually (spring and fall) follows the same format as the Adult Bereavement Group and is held during the day. It is designed for loss of a spouse or partner.

Young Adult Support Group: This group is designed for young adults aged 18 to 30 years of age who have had a recent death loss. Group is held as often as need arises. Minimum of 6 participants required to run this program. Group held once a week for 6 weeks. The time the group meets is determined by participants' schedules or needs.

Childhood/Teen Grief Group: This 6 week group program is for children and teens aged 5 through 18 years of age. It provides youth the opportunity to learn about the grieving process and to share in mourning the death of a family member or friend in a caring, accepting and confidential manner. Three different age groups are offered at the same time, as well as a group for parents. Age appropriate activities and guided discussion are facilitated by trained volunteers.

Caring Hearts Camp: This weekend camp is for children and teens who have recently experienced a loss due to death of a family member.

List of Websites You Might Find Helpful:

Center for Loss (Alan Wolfelt) www.centerforloss.com

Fernside Online (children and bereavement) www.fernside.org

Grief and Bereavement www.growthhouse.org

Grief Journey (Bill Webster) www.griefjourney.com

Living With Loss Magazine www.bereavementmag.com

Survivors of Suicide www.survivorsofsuicide.com

Willowgreen Resources www.willowgreen.com

Young Child's Understanding of Death www.dougy.org

Additional Resources in the Regina Area

The Compassionate Friends (306) 761-0974 Regina Chapter of an international self help organization offering support, friendship, and understanding to bereaved parents and surviving siblings. Helps parents positively resolve their grief and tries to foster physical and emotional health within the parents and siblings.

EFAP (Employee/Family Assistance Programs) contact your employer for details.

HealthLine 1-877-800-0002 or online at www.healthlineonline.ca provides free health information and support telephone services to anyone in Saskatchewan including crisis intervention, support, self care advice, and referrals. Available 24 hours per day.

Minus One Club (306) 525-3279 provides a social life for people who are widowed, divorced, separated, or single and are over 21 years of age.

Survivors of Suicide (306) 545-1207 is a self help organization for family and friends of suicide victims. Meets monthly at the Albert Scott Community Centre.

Victim Services – Provides support when there is police involvement with a death. Contact Regina Police Services at (306) 777-8660 or the RCMP at (306) 780-5461.

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