



UNDERSTANDING YOUR
GRIEF
10 THINGS
TO KEEP IN MIND



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Will I feel like this forever?

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When you are grieving it helps to know what to expect. These 10 thoughts provide an overview of many of the feelings and reactions that are a necessary part of grief. Your experiences might not match those listed here, but many of them may resonate with you.

1. Grief affects your entire life

When someone close to you dies, the feelings of loss and grief can be overwhelming. You may feel as though your whole world has been shattered and you might find that your sadness is affecting all aspects of your life.

You may find yourself wondering anything will ever be the same again.

This may help...

- It's important to remember that the death of someone very close to you is a profound and life-transforming event. Allow yourself to be open to seeing grief as a journey – a personal pathway between how things were and how they will be.

2. Grief is a natural process

We feel sad when someone close to us dies because we feel we have lost a deep connection with someone who was a significant part of our world.

It may be comforting to think of grief as a consequence of living and loving. Grieving is a normal part of life and a natural response to the loss of a deeply meaningful relationship.

This may help...

- Understanding the phases of grief can help you connect with and recognize the feelings you're experiencing.

3. Everyone grieves differently

After the death of a loved one, some people find comfort in openly expressing their sadness, while others may choose to control their emotions.

There is no right or wrong way to grieve. How you deal with your grief is influenced by your personality, your previous experience with loss, and the unique relationship that you had with the person who died.

This may help ...

Sometimes other people try and rush you through your grief, but remember: there is no "normal" schedule for the way we grieve. Everyone grieves in their own way and in their own time.

4. Your social connections may change

When you are grieving, you may especially want emotional support from others in your social circle.

However, sometimes people are uncomfortable with grief because of their own experiences and feelings about death. You may be disappointed to discover that some of your friends are not capable of providing the understanding and support that you want and expect from them.

Remember that all of the relationships in your life will be altered in some way after a major loss. Some will grow stronger, while others may fall away. During the grieving

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process, it's normal for you to look at, change, or sometimes end certain relationships.

This may help ...

- Grieving might present an opportunity seek out new connections. You may find, for example, that the company of other bereaved people is particularly comforting.
- You may need to deliberately distance yourself from some relationships if you find that they can't provide you with the support you need in the moment.

5. Children grieve, too

Understand that grieving a death may be a time of heightened emotions and low energy for you and your family. Children can be frightened by what they don't understand, but they are also remarkably intuitive and sensitive to the moods and behaviour of the adults around them.

When a family member dies, children will look to the important adults in their lives for guidance on how to grieve. They may not talk about their thoughts and feelings of loss unless you do.

This may help ...

- Keep it simple. You can help children work through their feelings by engaging them in straightforward, heartfelt conversations about death and grief.

6. Grief can change you

When you are actively grieving, you can feel very different from your usual self. The feelings of intense sadness and pain can affect otherwise normal things in your day-to-day life. Everyday situations may seem foreign, your reactions may seem unreliable, and you might even begin to question your overall sanity.

This may help ...

- Grieving can bring a level of intense emotions that you may never have experienced before. Remember: you are directing most of your energy and attention towards adjusting to your loss, so responses like fatigue, forgetfulness, and irritability are a normal result. Understand that this is part of being human, and be kind to yourself.

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7. The grieving process is unpredictable

You may be part-way through the day and managing your grief relatively well. Then, suddenly and without warning, you are overwhelmed with sadness that washes over you like a wave.

The path of grief is never predictable. Your emotions can fluctuate day to day, hour to hour, or even minute to minute.

This may help ...

- It's important to keep in mind that grief is a journey full of ups and downs. As you pass through phases of your grieving, try to recognize that there will be bad days and choose to value the good days as breaks or rests along the pathway.



8. Grieving has no timelines

You may find that your grief journey is taking longer than you expected. Maybe you're frustrated by your progress and thinking you ought to be better than you are by now – whenever “now” is. Perhaps you're also feeling pressure from the people around you to heal quickly and be back to being who you were before.

It's certain that the loss of your loved one will continue to be part of your life. While the intensity of your sadness may recede with time, you will always experience moments when you think about, miss, and grieve for the person who died.

- Despite what you may hear about “getting over it” or “the first year,” there are no set timelines for grief. Quite simply, it takes as long as it takes.



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9. Self-care is all-important

There are things that you can do to help yourself at this challenging time.

- Seek out good and reliable information about to help you to understand your responses and your journey.
- Be gentle and patient with yourself as you grieve.
- Do what you can to keep some normal routine for physical health and social contact. Support may come from a variety of sources: family, friends, bereavement groups, chat rooms, religious communities, and others.
- If you are concerned about yourself and your grief, seek professional help.

10. Grief can be a spiritual journey of healing

The death of someone significant in your life may raise questions of meaning and purpose for you and prompt spiritual reflection. Profound change in life also gives an opportunity for growth and learning. Spiritual and/or religious beliefs and practices may be a source of strength, comfort and support when facing painful, difficult and life changing experiences. Spiritual and/or religious beliefs can help put an experience into a context that can be comforting and reassuring. Being a part of a community of like-minded people can help you feel less isolated and alone. Spiritual and/or religious practices can be a source of strength and comfort. These can take a variety of forms from walking in nature to meditation to prayer.

This may help ...

- Make efforts to re-connect with the things that give you comfort, and be open to discovering new ways to evolve in spirit and soul.
- Symbolic actions - such as planting a tree in memory of the deceased person, or ritual actions such as lighting a candle to commemorate a special date, can help us through difficult times. Symbolic actions and rituals engage us from the heart space rather than the brain, which can be very healing.



Many different bereavement services and supports are offered throughout the region. These include counselling; a variety of bereavement support groups, such as drop-in and walking groups; education; and referrals to other local resources and services.

For more information, contact the Champlain Hospice Palliative Care Program at 613-683-3779 or visit our website at www.champlainpalliative.ca.

You can also visit the Champlain Health Services directory at <http://www.champlainhealthline.ca/>

Content courtesy of Victoria Hospice Society

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The heart, like the mind has a memory. And in it are kept the most precious keepsakes. *—Henry Wadsworth Longfellow*



