

GRIEVING LOSS

suicide & substance use



Canadian Mental
Health Association
Thames Valley
Addiction and Mental Health Services

Association canadienne
pour la santé mentale
Thames Valley
Services de santé mentale et de traitement des dépendances

WHAT IS GRIEF?

Grief is everything we think and feel inside following any type of loss. When our loss involves suicide and/or substance use, many people react differently than with, for example, a death resulting from an illness or accident.

The stigma associated with both suicide and substance use related deaths remains significant and misunderstood. The resulting grief can be an extremely dark place for the loved ones left behind who try to piece together unanswered questions. The emotional impact it has on survivors of suicide and/or substance use loss can be very complicated, especially when it feels like the death could have somehow been prevented. Stigma can lead to increased isolation at a time when survivors need the most support.

Typical of all grief that follows a sudden loss, people may initially feel shock, disbelief, and numbness, which may last for some time. In addition to inevitable feelings of sadness, overwhelming guilt, confusion, rejection, shame, fear/anxiety and anger are often prominent. These painful experiences may be further complicated by the effects of trauma.

No matter the reason for grief, every person reacts differently; grief is a uniquely individual experience with no specified time frame for healing. There are no orderly, predictable stages and there are no rewards for speed. Grief never goes away completely and you will never “get over it”, but it does soften over time with active mourning. It is possible to learn how to integrate grief into our lives.

This booklet is an information resource provided by the Bereavement program at CMHA TVAMHS. Some content is from CMHA National. Resources are available at shop.cmha.ca.



WHAT SHOULD I LOOK OUT FOR?

Grief after an unexpected death may be complicated and complex. There are often many factors to consider such as; family dynamics, who to share what information with, who can be trusted to know the whole truth, your relationship to the deceased individual, the unanswered questions and the asking “WHY”.

There are many possible scenarios that may hinder and compound the grieving process. Often people feel alone or want to be alone. Isolation may be an intentional choice to get away from others. Isolation may be an intentional choice for a period of time, however, if you feel that you or someone else is struggling to cope, manage basic needs, experiencing suicidal ideation or symptoms of PTSD (flashbacks, panic attacks/anxiety) that significantly impacts day to day functioning, it may be wise to consider additional professional support.



WARNING SIGNS TO PAY ATTENTION TO:

- ▶ Isolating self for an extended period of time may increase the anxiety, depression, fear, crying, despair and prevent healthy healing.
- ▶ Health concerns from lack of proper nutrition, exercise and sleep.
- ▶ Some may want to run away from their life as it is now.
- ▶ Some people may have thoughts of their own suicide that may stay in their mind and gradually become a plan to die by suicide (the pain of the loss is so deep and the broken heart gets tangled with intense despair) **SEEK HELP!**
- ▶ Some people may feel they do not care about life anymore.
- ▶ Many people can be affected by a suicide death. Remain alert to family and friends who may be experiencing thoughts of suicide.
- ▶ Some may cope by increasing their substance use.

WHAT CAN I DO ABOUT IT?

There are several options available depending on your situation.



Talk to your doctor and get advice if you are feeling overwhelmed, and struggling to cope with the intense emotions after the loss.



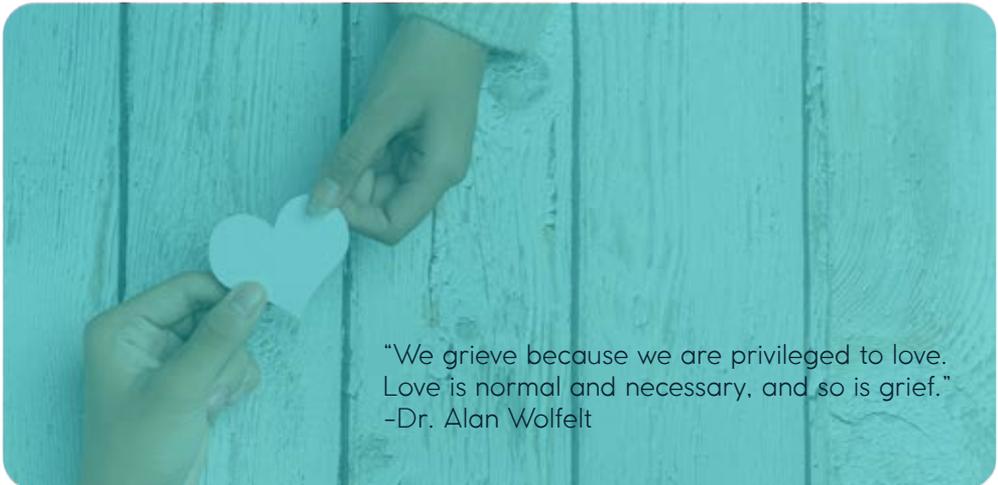
Talk with a trusted friend, family member, spiritual advisor, or someone you know. The more you share your story and concerns with someone else the less likely your emotions get pushed down inside.



Call Reach Out at 1-866-933-2023. Reach Out is a 24/7 mental health and addictions support line. The staff answering the phone have many resources to share with you – including those specifically about grief and bereavement.



Contact the Bereavement Counsellor at CMHA TVAMHS at 519-434-9191 ext 2244 or grief@cmhatv.ca. This program provides one on one grief counselling specifically for suicide and substance use losses. Closed support groups are held three times a year and more resources relevant to your unique situation are provided.



"We grieve because we are privileged to love.
Love is normal and necessary, and so is grief."
-Dr. Alan Wolfelt

COPING WITH GRIEF



Be prepared for triggers (a normal part of the grieving process); events, situations or feelings that may catch you off guard. A trigger occurs when you are going about your life and when you least expect it you are caught off guard with tears and the need to catch your breath. Holidays, anniversaries, birthdays and other special occasions can be difficult. It may be helpful to plan ahead and think about new traditions or celebrations that support healing.



Reach out for help. Loved ones and others may want to give you privacy and may not feel comfortable asking you how you are doing. Do not be afraid to ask for their support.



Draw from the strength you used to get through past stresses and difficult time in your life.



Picture someone you respect and admire who influences you. Remember how they got through their difficult times. Draw from their strengths.



Consider waiting before making major life decisions. You may feel differently as your feelings of grief lose their intensity. Dramatic changes may add to the stress you are experiencing.



Offer support to others who are grieving. Reaching out to others may help your own journey.



Make a new beginning. Life will never be the same as it was before this loss, but it is important to start to re-engage in life when you feel ready. Over time the feelings of grief will become less intense. Return to interests and activities you may have dropped and think about trying something new.

HOW CAN I HELP A LOVED ONE?

Many people feel they do not know what to do or say when a loved one is experiencing a loss. If the loss also affected you, you may be working through your own experiences of grief. One of the most important things you can do is to simply be there for your loved one. Grief can feel overwhelming, but support and understanding make a huge difference.

Here are some tips for supporting a loved one



Understand that a loved one needs to follow their own journey and express their feelings in their own way; there is no timeline for experiences with grief.



Ask your loved one what they need and regularly remind them that you are there for support if they are not ready to talk with others yet. Remember to offer practical help, too. For example, they may need help with getting groceries or making phone calls.



Ask if your loved one wants to talk about the loss. It is common to avoid the topic and focus on feelings instead, but many people find sharing thoughts, memories and stories helpful and comforting.



Remember that grief may be bigger than the loss. For example, someone who loses a partner may also experience a lot of fear or stress around financial security and other important matters.



Include your loved one in social activities. Even if they often decline, it is important to show that they are still an important member of your community.



Help your loved one connect with support services if they experience a lot of difficulty.



Take care of your own well-being and seek extra help for yourself if you need it.

DO YOU NEED MORE HELP?

mental health
addictions
crisis services

REACH OUT

519-433-2023 | 1-866-933-2023

reachout247.ca

Coordinated Crisis Support in London,
Middlesex, Oxford, & Elgin Counties



648 Huron St. London, ON

Walk-in Mental Health &
Addiction Crisis Supports



519-601-8055 | 1-844-360-8055

Supportive Listening from
trained volunteers.



**Our program is generously funded by donations.
Contact donate@cmhatv.ca for more information
or to make a contribution**

Bereavement Counsellor at CMHA TVAMHS
grief@cmhatv.ca | 519-434-9191 ext 2244



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