

## **SUPPORT FOR GRIEF & BEREAVEMENT**

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While we experience loss in many ways throughout our lifetime - loss of employment, health, friendship or companionship - often the most devastating loss can be the death of someone you love. After any significant loss, you may experience all kinds of difficult and unexpected emotions, such as shock, anger, and guilt. It may feel like the sadness will never let up. While frightening and overwhelming, these feelings are normal. Accepting and feeling them is a necessary part of working through the grieving process. There is no right or wrong way to grieve—but there are healthy ways to cope. You can get through it. Grief that is expressed and experienced has potential to strengthen and enrich life.

Elisabeth Kübler Ross pioneered work in coping with grief and loss and developed the concept of “stages” of grief. She described them as denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. The grieving process has also been described as initial distress, followed by waves of distress and intense yearning, followed by disorganization and loneliness, and finally a period of reorganization and nostalgia. But for most people, the process of grief does not follow these linear stages. Rather, grief can feel more like a roller coaster ride, full of ups and downs, highs and lows. The ride tends to be rougher in the beginning, with the lows and highs being more extreme. The difficult periods typically become less intense and shorter as time goes by. But it takes much time to work through loss. It is important to remember that there is no time period at which you should be “done” with grieving. Even many years after a loss, especially at special events such as a family wedding or the birth of a child, we may experience strong feelings of loss.

### **Get Support: Connection is Protection**

The single most important factor in healing from loss is having the support of other people. Sharing your loss makes the burden of grief easier to carry. Accept support wherever it comes. Connecting to others helps you heal.

- **Turn to friends and family members** – Lean on the people who care about you, even if you feel you need to be strong and self-sufficient. Rather than avoiding them, draw loved ones close and accept the assistance they offer. Often times, people want to help but don't know how. See the list of suggestions for how people can help you at the end of this document. Allowing others to help you has mutual benefits and provides the gift of intimacy.

- **Draw comfort from your faith** – If you follow a religious tradition, embrace the comfort its mourning rituals provide. Spiritual activities meaningful to you – such as praying, meditating, or going to church/synagogue/mosque – can offer solace. If you're questioning your faith in the

wake of the loss, talk to a clergy member or others in your religious community. It's also OK to take a break from worship or other faith activities for a while.

- **Talk to a therapist or grief counselor** – An experienced therapist can help you work through intense emotions and overcome obstacles to your healing. Contact a mental health professional with experience in grief counseling
- **Consider joining a support group when you're ready** – Grief can feel very lonely, even when you have loved ones around. Sharing your sorrow with others who have experienced similar losses can help. A word of caution regarding support group participation. Sometimes support groups are most effective when some time has elapsed between your loss and joining a group. If your feelings are particularly intense, seeing a professional individually, especially soon after the loss, may assist you in initially processing the intense feelings and allow you to benefit more from subsequent support group involvement. See resources at the end for referrals to support groups.

## **TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF**

When you're grieving, it's more important than ever to take care of yourself. The stress of loss can quickly deplete your energy and emotional reserves. Looking after your physical and emotional needs will help you get through this difficult time.

- **Express your feelings in a tangible or creative way.** In addition to expressing your thoughts and feelings to trusted friends and loved ones, write your thoughts and feelings about the loss in a journal. Write a letter to your loved one saying the things you never got to say; make a scrapbook or photo album celebrating the person's life; or get involved in a cause or organization that was important to them.
- **Look after your physical health.** The mind and body are connected. When you feel good physically, you'll also feel better emotionally. Combat stress and fatigue by getting enough sleep, eating real food, and exercising. Try not to use alcohol, food or drugs to numb the pain or lift your mood.
- **Don't let anyone tell you how to feel, and adjust expectations of yourself.** Your grief is your own, and no one else can tell you when it's time to "move on" or "get over it." Let yourself feel whatever you need to without embarrassment or judgment. It's normal to be angry, to yell at the heavens, to cry or not to cry to laugh, and to find moments of joy.
- **Put off major decisions** Wait a while before making major changes such as moving, remarrying or changing jobs. You need time to adjust to the changes you are experiencing before knowing how they will impact you.

- **Plan ahead for grief triggers.** Anniversaries, holidays, birthdays and milestones can reawaken memories and feelings. Be prepared for an emotional wallop, and know that it's completely normal. Have coping strategies in place. If you're sharing a holiday or event with others, talk to them ahead of time about what would be helpful to you, such as whether or not you want to acknowledge your loved one, set a chair at the table, etc.

### **Continue A Project Your Loved One Started**

Consider completing something your loved one was building, continuing their passion project or meaningful activities for them. This can help address feelings of things left “unfinished.”

### **Common Symptoms of Grief**

While loss affects people in different ways, the following symptoms are common during grieving. Remember that almost anything you experience in the early stages of grief is normal—including feeling like you’re losing touch, in a bad dream, or questioning your religious beliefs.

**Shock and disbelief** – Right after a loss, it can be hard to accept what happened. You may feel numb, have trouble believing that the loss really happened, or even deny the truth. When someone you love has died, you may keep expecting them to show up, even though you know they’re gone.

**Sadness** – Profound sadness is probably the most universally experienced symptom of grief. You may have feelings of emptiness, despair, yearning, or deep loneliness. You may also cry a lot or feel emotionally unstable.

**Guilt** – You may regret or feel guilty about things you did or didn’t say or do. You may also feel guilty about certain feelings (e.g. feeling relieved when the person died after a long, difficult illness). You may feel guilty for not doing something to prevent the death, even though there was nothing more you could have done.

**Anger** – Even though loss of loved ones is unavoidable, you may feel angry and resentful. You may be angry at yourself, God, the doctors, or even the person who died for abandoning you. You may feel the need to blame someone for the injustice of the loss.

**Fear** – You may feel anxious, helpless, or insecure. You may have panic attacks. The death of a loved one can trigger fears about your own mortality, of facing life without that person, or the responsibilities you now face alone.

**Physical symptoms** – We often think of grief as a strictly emotional process, but grief often involves physical problems, including fatigue, nausea, lowered immunity, weight loss or weight gain, aches and pains, and insomnia.

## When to Seek Professional Help

Don't hesitate to contact a grief counselor or therapist if you have prolonged feelings that are overwhelming or are disruptive to your ability to perform your normal daily activities and self-care. You may:

- Feel like life isn't worth living
- Wish you had died with your loved one
- Blame yourself for the loss or for failing to prevent it
- Feel numb and disconnected from others
- Have difficulty trusting others since your loss

## NATUROPATHIC SUPPORT

### Sleep Support

Many people experience problems with sleeping following a loss. These include trouble falling asleep, or awakening during the night and having difficulty returning to sleep.

- **Alpha Stim** – Alpha Stimulation is a machine that sends alpha waves through your brain as cranio-electric stimulation. Dr Green has a unit available for her patients to use free of charge anytime at Emcura Clinic.
- **Melatonin** 3-12mg nightly may help you fall or stay asleep. Stress hormones do over-ride melatonin, so if even a higher dose doesn't seem to help, then you may consider adding;
- **Cortisol Manager** by Enzymatic Therapies/Integrative Therapeutics or **Cortisol Calm** by Pure Encapsulations -2 tabs at bedtime to calm stress hormones if you are waking 3-5am and cannot fall back asleep.
- **Homeopathic Ignatia 30C** 2 pellets dissolved under tongue away from food. This homeopathic is specific for insomnia from grief. It may also be used during the day if feeling completely overwhelmed by grief.
- **Calms Forte by Hylands** - 1-2 tablets chewed before bed away from food. This homeopathic combination can help ease the mind as you try to go to sleep. You can repeat the dosage if you wake in the middle of the night and cannot fall back asleep.

- **Rescue Sleep**—1-2 sprays orally as needed to help with sleep. This is a combination flower essence that can help slow down the mind when racing thoughts are present and help you sleep.
- **Glycine Powder**—3000mg of the powder in water before bed to help decrease anxiety and support you staying asleep throughout the night.

### **Stress Support**

- **Adaptogens** are herbs that help reduce the negative effects of stress on the body.

Common adaptogens include: ashwagandha, ginseng (Panax, Siberian or American ginseng), astragalus, schizandra, holy basil, licorice and rhodiola. These herbs are typically

taken long-term, on a daily basis, to promote energy, vitality and well-being. Please discuss the use of herbs with your Naturopathic Doctor in order to find an adaptogen that is safe & best suited for you.

- **Kali Phos 6x**—4 pellets dissolved under the tongue up to 4 times a day to help decrease stress
- **Massage, Reflexology & Reiki** – Take time to receive healing bodywork that feels good to you.

### **Anxiety**

- **Alpha Stim** – Alpha Stimulation is a machine that sends alpha waves through your brain as cranio-electric stimulation. Dr Green has a unit available for her patients to use free of charge anytime at Emcura Clinic. For anxiety, 20 minutes is recommended whereas for depression and insomnia, 40-60 minutes is recommended.

- **Calm Forte** by Hylands - This homeopathic combination eases distress and is safe to combine with conventional medications

- **Theanine** (200mg, as needed for anxiety) - This calming amino acid (protein,) found in green tea helps the nervous system relax without sedation.

- **Chewable GABA** by Now brand - 1 tab as needed for racing mind/anxiety. This is a quick acting “natural Ativan”. Consult a Naturopathic Doctor first if epileptic or have tics.

- **Essential oil of Lavender** – can be used directly on the skin, in a room diffuser, or 10 drops in a bath. **CalmAid** by Nature’s Way is an oral lavender capsule with extensive research showing that 2 caps daily with food improves anxiety.

- **Rescue Remedy** (4 drops as needed) - This Bach Flower Essence is a safe remedy that does not interfere with any medications. Just 4 drops in a small glass of water—or placed directly in the

mouth—can help you feel centered and relaxed. **Walnut Flower Essence** is for helping ease major life transitions.

## **Depression**

It is normal to experience mild-to-moderate depression following the loss of a loved one. Allow yourself to experience your feelings and move through them. Some people find that buried or medicated grief is more difficult to resolve and may take longer to heal.

- **Exercise** - Research studies have shown that physical exercise is often as effective as prescription anti-depressant medications. While you may not feel that you want to exercise, once you start, the benefits will be evident. Your mood, sleep and energy levels will improve.
- **Essential oil** of rose, frankincense, neroli, sandalwood, grapefruit or cardamom.(4 drops in diffuser, 8-10 drops in a bath)
- **Rescue Remedy** (4 drops as needed) -This Bach Flower Essence is a safe remedy that does not interfere with any medications. Just 4 drops in a small glass of water—or placed directly in the mouth—can help you feel centered and relaxed.
- **Walnut Flower Essence** is for helping ease major life transitions. •
- **Wild Rose Flower Essence** is to help decrease feelings of apathy and resignation. It can help bring back the will to live and enjoy life.
- **5HTP** - This protein precursor to serotonin can help boost serotonin quickly (in 1 -3 days) and is wonderful as a short-term anti-depressant. Consult your Naturopathic Doctor for dosing and safety information because it cannot be combined with many medications (especially psychiatric medications).
- **Relaxation exercises**—Studies show that relaxation exercises may be a good first line treatment for depression.

## **RESOURCES**

### **Suggested Reading for General Grief**

*The Wild Edge of Sorrow: Rituals of Renewal and the Sacred Work of Grief* by Francis Weller – Beautifully written grief guide that encourages growth and learning from our hardest emotions.

*How to go on Living When Someone You Love Dies* by Therese Rando. A foundational book that's still at the top of the list.

***The Healing Power of Grief: The Journey Through Loss to Life and Laughter*** by Gloria Lintermans & Marilyn Stolzman, PhD, LMFT. A step-by-step grief recovery guide to provide the mourner with the tools needed to successfully navigate the painful, emotional ups-and-downs of grieving. A valuable *Healing Power of Thought* workbook is included, a daily roadmap for healing and recording important, positive progress all along the way.

***Understanding Your Grief: Ten Essential Touchstones for Finding Hope and Healing Your Heart*** by grief educator, Alan Wolfelt, PhD This compassionate book explores the mourner's need to acknowledge the death and embrace the pain of the loss. Explores the many factors that make each person's grief unique and the myriad of normal thoughts and feelings the mourner might have. Questions of spirituality and religion are addressed. Journaling sections encourage readers to articulate their unique thoughts and feelings.

***Remembering with Love: Messages of Hope for the First Year of Grieving and Beyond*** by Elizabeth Levang. Reassurance and compassion for those struggling with a loved one's loss.

***Grieving the Loss of Someone You Love: Daily Meditations to Help You through the Grieving Process*** by Raymond Mitsch & Lynn Brookside. Thoughtful daily devotions shares wisdom, insight and comfort that will help hurting people through and beyond their grief.

***When Things Fall Apart*** Pema Chodron. Short inspirational readings.

***Tear Soup: A Recipe for Healing After Loss*** by Pat Schwiebert—This beautifully illustrated book is for people of all ages, to help with grieving of all ages. It can help you create your own recipe for grieving.

**Parents Who Have Lost a Child: *The Grieving Garden: Living with the Death of a Child*** by Suzanne Redfern & Susan Gilbert. (2008) Writings from 20+ grieving parents, Cathartic and comforting; grieving parents may well find it invaluable.

**www.CompassionateFriends.org** — A national, self-help organization for those grieving the loss of a child. Has 600 chapters throughout the U.S. Tollfree 877-969-0010.

**For Children: *Sad Isn't Bad: A Good-Grief Guidebook for Kids Dealing with Loss*** (Elf-Help Books for Kids) by Michaelene Mundy.

**www.KidsAid.com** is a safe place for children to help each other deal with grief and loss. It's a place to deal with feelings in our e-mail support group, to share and view artwork and stories, and for parents and kids to ask questions and find answers.

## **Online Support Groups**

<https://refugeingrief.com/>

<https://whatsyourgrief.com/> .

## **Comforting Music**

**Transitions: Music for Comfort and Solace in Times of Grief and Loss** by Steve Halpern, PhD

(2002) . Instrumental pieces to foster healing by renowned music therapist and internationally acclaimed composer.

**The Redwood Sidthe** by Clarelynn Rose (2001). Beautiful and soulful acoustic guitar solos skillfully blend Celtic, Folk and New Age.

**Reflections on Grieving** CD+booklet by therapeutic harpist, Tami Briggs. (2005) The music selections correlate with the various stages of grief mentioned in the booklet and were inspired by Tami's playing at the bedside of hospital and hospice patients, and families who are experiencing grief and loss.

## **Audio Tapes**

**Calming Guided Imagery** by Gail Evo, Beaumont Integrative Medicine. Allow yourself to be guided by Gail's beautiful voice down a path to relaxation and a deep sense of wellbeing.

**Ease Grief** by BelleRuth Naparstek. In this guided imagery recording, BelleRuth's soothing voice takes you on a journey back to their aching hearts, where you discover that everything lost is still alive there. Designed to help you tolerate, experience and then move beyond the pain of loss, it's a favorite in grief support groups. (48min.) Available at [www.healthjourneys.com](http://www.healthjourneys.com)



## How May I Help?

When grieving, it can be difficult to know what to say when people ask, “How may I help?”. The grief may feel so heavy or overwhelming it can be difficult to think about the other things that need to get done or to come up with a list of items. It can also be difficult to provide directions to people in how to help.

Here are a list of ideas that might help you identify what you need. Circle ways that people can help you. When someone asks, “How may I help?”, share this worksheet with them.

Bring meals

Help me with grocery shopping

Call me once a week to check in

Babysit

Run errands

Help me with funeral arrangements

Help me write cards

Take phone calls

Help with housework

Look after my pets

Help me clean and sort through belongings

Attend a support group with me

Stay with me so I'm not alone

Help me with garden/farm chores

Help me with transportation

Help me get organized

Go to a movie with me

Do a fun activity with me

Go on a walk with me

Help me make a scrapbook