
A GUIDE TO UNDERSTANDING GRIEF



Hulse, Playfair & McGarry

Funeral, Cremation and Celebration of Life Services
Services de Funérailles, de Crémation et de Célébration de la Vie



Hulse, Playfair & McGarry respects that you are grieving and will support you with the utmost integrity and compassion. Our knowledgeable staff will help you celebrate, honour, and remember. We will provide your family and friends with comfort, a warm place to share your grief and provide professional attention to the smallest detail.

Hulse, Playfair & McGarry is proud to be locally owned and operated. We strive to be our community's standard of excellence.

"To alleviate the sorrow of parting is to render a service to the community.

To this principle our efforts are respectfully dedicated."

The McGarry Family is proud to carry on the standards established by Charles H. Hulse - W. Keith Playfair

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PREFACE

We offer this booklet as an informative guide to provide comfort and to assist you through your grief.

There are no answers to the pain involved with grief.

Information, however, can often be a powerful tool in coping with a loss.

We offer support to one another in many ways – by our touch, actions and words. Here, we present educational material about the grieving process. We hope you will find it beneficial as you learn to re-adjust to the change in your life.

From all of us at Hulse, Playfair & McGarry



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What is grief?

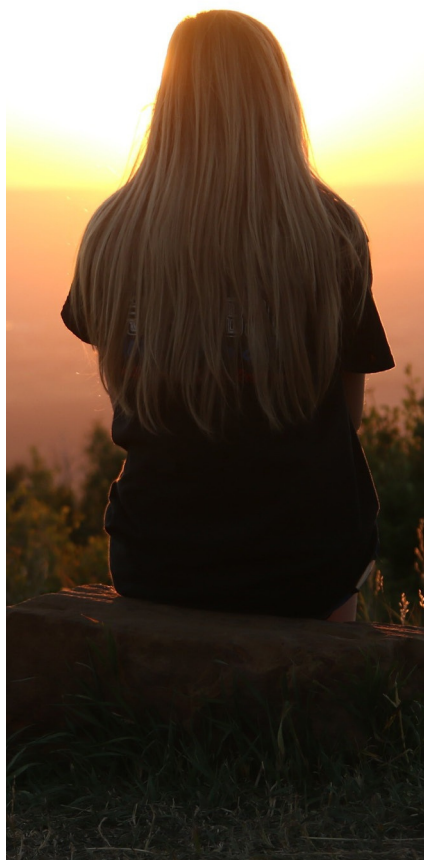
You have just experienced a death and have been propelled into a grief experience. The depth of emotions you are feeling could not be fully anticipated or described. Grief is a normal, natural reaction to a loss. It is nature's way of acknowledging the pain of separation. You will react in your own unique way.

Grieving is a long-term process which can require months or even years to resolve. It may be hard to imagine this now, but grief does have an end. You will come to accept the separation from the deceased and adjust to an environment from which that person is missing.

The following sections are designed to help you understand how you might feel during the months ahead.

*To every thing there is a season,
And a time to every purpose under
heaven;
A time to die,
A time to break down,
A time to weep...*

Ecclesiastes



WHAT MAY I EXPERIENCE?



Are my feelings normal?

Many people experience mental, physical and emotional symptoms that cause them concern during the time following a death. Knowing what to expect can alleviate some of the anxiety.

The grieving experience may be likened to a roller coaster with its ups and downs and unexpected twists and turns. Emotions and experiences move in this pattern without any rhyme or reason. Just when you think you have overcome a hurdle, a new one takes you by surprise. There is no

logic to this agonizing process. Grief does not respect anyone's desire or need to feel in control.

It is most important, therefore, to give yourself permission to feel, time to experience your unique response and the opportunity to pass through it, no matter how deep the pain. You are not 'losing your senses' – you are a normal person in bereavement.

The phases of grief are not necessarily separate and do not happen in a specific order. The following is only a guideline as to what you may experience:





I am outside myself...Watching myself perform. I try to do the right things but I feel numb – as if I have switched off my feelings.”

– Grieving Spouse

Pining or Yearning – *“I search for him everywhere. I look into the face of everyone I meet.”*

After a few months, the numbness wears off, yet you continue to feel the presence of the deceased. You think you see him coming through the door; you may search for her in every room and you hold on to clothes and trinkets that belong to them. There is nothing unusual or wrong with this. Universally, as human beings, we try to recover what we’ve lost. Our heads are filled with memories and it is important to talk about the experience, the grief, your loss – again and again. This helps to make it real.

Shock or Numbness – *“This can’t be true. I don’t believe it.”*

This is the most immediate response after a person close to you has died. The shock acts as a buffer so that you are not overwhelmed. Nothing seems real, and it may seem that you are not reacting at all. This sense of unreality may occur in the future.

“The first few days I feel as though

Emotional Upheaval –

“I just can’t bear it. I can’t stop crying. I feel so alone. Why me? What am I going to do? I should have done more.”

This is a time when everything seems to have lost its meaning. The reality of death has set in and your grief seems to shake every



part of you. Crying is a normal healthy response to release tension and feelings, rather than lock them inside.

Anger – *“Why me? Why do I have to deal with this?”*

Perhaps you haven’t recognized anger in yourself before. It is a common response to hurt and when someone dies, you are hurt. You may feel anger toward God, the physicians, nurses, the funeral director, family, even the person who died. These feelings need to be expressed to an empathetic listener.

Loneliness –
“Without him, life is not the same. I don’t know if I can go on.”

It is true, that life will not be the same and the feeling of aloneness is real. But you will come through and this acute emptiness will pass as you become involved with activities and people.

Guilt – *“I should have said or done...”*

Most of these feelings can be erased by realizing that the decisions made in the past were based on the information you had at the time. You are now looking at your decisions in retrospect, with new information you did not have before. It is helpful to discuss these feelings with others.

Anxiety or Panic – Either is a natural by-product of grief. Each can



result from not knowing what to do and not understanding what is happening. You may find a bereavement support group of assistance. Telling your story to others often relieves pressure and stress.

Other emotional reactions you might experience are bitterness, resentment, self-pity and feelings of being overwhelmed or abandoned.

Physical Reactions – Survivors often find themselves ill after a death. It is a good idea to see your family physician and have a thorough check-up. You are in a vulnerable state and your body may find it difficult to maintain its healthy balance. Any of the following may occur – tightness in throat, difficulty breathing, chest pains, nausea, fatigue, weight loss or gain, sleep disturbances, loss of interest in sexual relations, decreased sense of sexuality and, occasionally, taking on the physical symptoms of the deceased.

Mental Reactions – As your mind attempts to handle your loss, you may experience confusion, lack of concentration, disorganized thinking, a sense of disorientation, insecurity, memory loss, change in self-esteem and perhaps dreaming or having hallucinations of the deceased.



You are not losing your mind. Try to be patient; your ability to concentrate and focus will return. It takes time for your body to find its new balance.

Spiritual Reactions – As you try to find a meaning in your loss, you may ask “*Why did this happen?*” You may feel angry at God; you may question, abandon or change your belief system. You might become more religious than in the past. Any of these feelings may come in waves of greater or lesser intensity and are normal expressions of grief.

Reorganization and Healing There is no magic formula to speed up the grieving process; it must run its course. Life will never be the same; it will be changed. As a result you will be changed, too. When someone you love dies, your role changes. You have lost a sense of who you are in the world and as you progress through your grief you will redefine who you are, regain confidence and realize strengths and resources within yourself. Others who care about you can support you and help you to heal. You will be able to organize and plan once again; your self-respect will return, and you will search for new interests. You will always be influenced, however, by the relationship you had with the deceased.

“As long as I live, I will be sorry Robby is dead. This is a fact. That is something I carry always. There are times, especially the good times,

when I miss him still. But there are still good times..."

– Harriet Sarnoff Schiff on the death of her son.

Healing from a loss is an exhausting process and requires reflection and peace. It marks the end of the more painful part of grieving, although you may still have ups and downs. Recovery means learning to be secure in the belief that you can take care of yourself. It means that you can share your memories of the deceased in a celebratory rather than a painful manner.

This means saying good-bye to the deceased, forgiving yourself and others and adjusting to a changed life with new purpose

and meaning. This may bring a mixture of excitement and fear - excitement to be alive and begin anew - fear of the unknown journey ahead, of losing again. But you know that all relationships will change or end. This is the reality of living.

Courage is not the absence of fear, but the mastery of it as you affirm life. Special occasions, such as birthdays, holidays and anniversaries may bring back your grief. This is a normal and predictable part of the grieving process. These times should be seen as opportunities to continue to express thoughts and feelings in a special way that honour the memory of the one who died.



CHILDREN'S GRIEF



Sometimes well-meaning adults try to 'spare' children or protect them from the pain of facing difficult experiences. Death is one of these. Children do learn of death, however, such as through the loss of a family pet. They 'play dead' and see it regularly on TV. It is impossible to shield them from it and they should not be spared knowledge about the death of a family member or friend. No amount of secrecy can hide the

message that something important and threatening has happened. They need your words and actions to match the feelings they see adults experience.

We cannot ignore children's grief or try to suppress it. We cannot tell them how to feel, but must take their grief seriously. Children may grieve for a long time as their grieving is often done intermittently. Children's understanding of death is based on their developmental maturity, individual personalities, life experiences and how the significant adult approaches the subject. This is best done in an open, straightforward manner showing love and caring. When we try to protect children from the truth, we only intensify their feelings of confusion, guilt and their fears of the future.

Children generally have the same questions. They need to be honestly answered:

"Did I cause this to happen?"

It is important not to dismiss this question since children often tend to blame themselves for the death, believing their negative feelings

made the deceased go away. It might be expressed as “It’s my fault. I said I wished he would die and now he’s dead”.

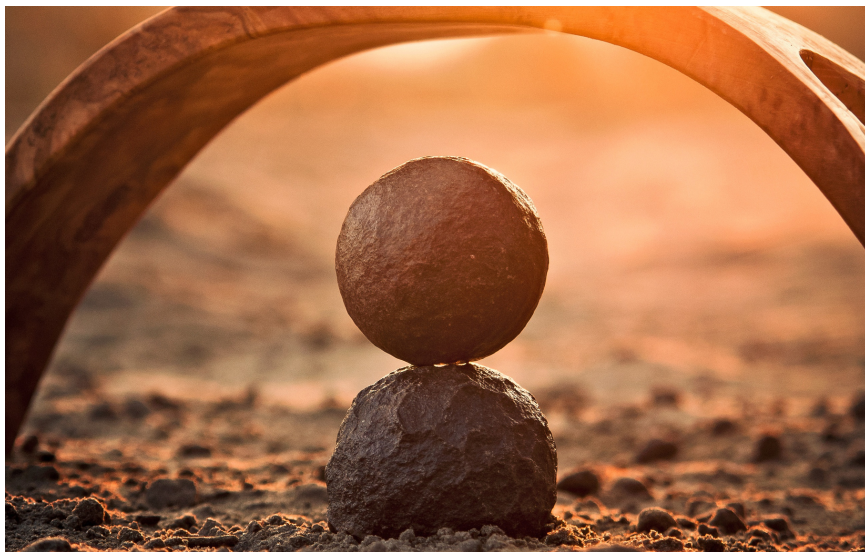
“Will this happen to me?”
and
“Who will take care of me now?”

These require sensitive, straightforward responses. The truth can be presented without being frightening or harsh. This is best done in a quiet familiar place, using correct medical terms. It helps children understand the reality, as usually their fears and fantasies are far worse when they are not told what has happened

or are given evasive or misleading information.

If the death of a parent or friend is sudden and unexpected such as an accident, heart attack, suicide or homicide, the shock will be great, but the child still needs to know the facts. Often having a close friend or a family member with you may be helpful. It is most important to be clear and honest. An evasive response may cause feelings of hostility and mistrust. Not knowing the truth may hinder the child from working through the feelings.





Children need the facts as well as the opportunity to work through their feelings. Ensure that they do not confuse death with sleep or ‘going away’. At times, children may appear as if they do not hear your words or are unaffected by what has happened. They may cry briefly and return to playing. This does not mean they don’t feel the loss, but that their grieving may be more readily expressed through play or fantasy. Children may not always respond immediately to a parent’s questions; they may share their feelings with each other rather than with adults.

Give children all the support they need. Just as adults, children may show physical signs of grief – bowel and bladder changes, headaches, stomach aches, rashes, eating or sleeping disturbances. Children may regress to behaviour that had been given up prior to the death, or may exhibit intensified fear of the dark, of going to new places or of the surviving parent leaving. All this is part of the normal grieving process.

What should you do? - The most important thing is to understand and accept these reactions as normal and share this acceptance with the child. Be a good listener and observer; in speaking try to use the child’s language. Convey any information in a caring, loving manner. Be sensitive and supportive, while using all appropriate opportunities to deal with the subject. Children will indicate to you when they have heard enough. Remember, children not only need to work through their grief, but also have to continue with the ‘growing up’ process.

PERSONAL GUIDELINES



For most, the weeks and months after a death are a difficult time of adjustment. It is important to take the time necessary to care for yourself, even if there are others you need to care for such as children.

The following are suggested guidelines:

- Try to avoid any major changes in the first year (moving, selling the house, job change.)
- Try to use nature's sedatives – fresh air and exercise. This will increase your energy and help you to recover from sadness.
- Try to maintain good nutrition and regular meal patterns even though you may not feel hungry or want to cook. It is important for your health.
- Try to be aware of your personal safety when at home. For example, check and use locks, security system, automatic light devices.
- Try to maintain a regular sleep routine.
- Try to write about your feelings and experiences. This will help to externalize your feelings.

Keeping a journal can be helpful.

- Try to set a goal for yourself, as simple as it may be, that is new and interests you.
- Try to notice the good and peaceful moments you have. Remember the good times as well as the bad.
- Try to focus on the people who love you and need your love.
- Try to find a support group for persons with similar losses.

"Even more amazing than the wonders of nature are the powers of the spirit."

- Helen Keller

Sharing experiences can help you feel less alone. Because you have loved the person who died, you will, step by step, want to reinvest in life.

Welcoming life again can be a sharing experience as well as a very individual process, one of recovery and growth.

IN CONCLUSION



We realize there are many areas we have not covered in this booklet but hope that those discussed will provide you with ideas and suggestions as you need them. You are always welcome to contact us at any of our locations with your concerns or questions.

What your life becomes will depend to a large extent on you. The choices you make in the next months may affect the rest of your life. Be patient and gentle with yourself as you learn new ways of living. Give yourself permission to tell and retell your story, to need others and to experience all your feelings. Reach out and ask for help if you are having a difficult time coping.

Remember that grief teaches us to live one day at a time and in so doing you will work through this difficult time and survive.





Memorial Tree Planting

Hulse, Playfair and McGarry plants a tree on behalf of each and every person whose funeral is in our care. The seedlings are planted and cared for by the specialists at The Rideau Valley Conservation Authority. The trees are planted in the spring of each year in different locations around the Rideau Valley as part of the Authority's "Trees for Tomorrow" program. Since 2001 Hulse, Playfair and McGarry has planted almost **30,000 trees** which is the equivalent of 30 Acres of forest in the Rideau Watershed.



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