

COPING WITH DEATH

*Coping with the
Death of a loved one*



Alberta Northwest
PALLIATIVE CARE
SOCIETY

205-10134 97th Ave. Grande Prairie, Alberta T8V 7X6

Tel: 780-897-0066

admin@abnwpalliative.ca

You are in our thoughts...

All of us at the Alberta Northwest Palliative Care Society extend our deepest and most heartfelt sympathy to you and your family.

Losing a loved one is one of life's most difficult experiences. Grief can leave you feeling tired, irritable, overwhelmed, and unable to focus. Many people describe feeling shocked, numb, lonely, deeply sad, or unsure how to function in the days that follow.

In the coming hours and days, you may be asked to make many decisions – some necessary, others personal. This can feel overwhelming during a time of emotional strain. Please be gentle with yourself. The feelings you are experiencing are normal.

You are not expected to navigate this alone.

At ABNWPCS, we offer compassionate grief and bereavement support for individuals and families. Our Grief Support Program provides a safe space to talk, reflect, and process your loss at your own pace.

We also invite you to visit our Grief Corner, a quiet and comforting space with resources, reflection materials, and information to support you during this time.

If you are at Hospice, we encourage you to reach out to a staff member, speak with the resident chaplain, or contact us directly at ABNWPCS. We can connect you with someone who will listen and walk alongside you. Your family may feel devastated, disorganized, and confused right now. These feelings are part of grief.

We are here for you.

Matters of Immediate Consideration

At this time of loss, you may feel disorganized and overwhelmed. You may be called upon to make sudden arrangements and decisions. Some are required by law, while other decisions depend on you and your personal circumstances

Staff are available to assist you with any immediate calls you want to make to notify family, close friends, or neighbors. At your request, they can also notify your clergy, and assist you to call the funeral home.

Confirmation of Death

A doctor will confirm that your loved one has died and will complete a Medical Certificate of Death that states the patient's name, age, date of death, and cause of death. This form will be forwarded to the funeral home or transfer service, which will then issue a Proof of Death Certificate.

A Death Certificate may be needed as proof of death for some benefit claims

You may request a copy of the Death Certificate from the Registry Agency available about three months after the death.

How to obtain a copy of a Death Certificate

To obtain a copy of the Official Death Certificate, contact:

780-427-7013 (Edmonton)

310-0000, then 780-427-7013 (toll-free)

Monday to Friday 8:15-4:30

Or go online to

<https://www.servicealberta.ca/Death-certificates-how-to-apply.cfm>

Ordering a death document from outside Alberta

1. Complete the form

<https://www.registryconnect.ca/apply/alberta-death-certificate.html>

Don't complete the Statutory Declaration for Proof of Identity portion of the form at this time.

2. Go to a Notary Public or Commissioner for Oaths

Take the completed application and your accepted ID to a Notary Public or Commissioner for Oaths to complete the Statutory Declaration for Proof of Identity portion of the forms.

3. Mail your application

Mail the original completed application and Statutory Declaration for Proof of Identity to Registry Connect. Photocopies/faxes are not accepted.

Mail

Registry Connect Suite 207, 236 - 91 Street SW Edmonton, AB T6X 1W8
Canada





Notifications: Family, Friends and Others

You may want to notify members of the family, close friends or a neighbour before you leave the hospice. Staff involved in the care of your loved one may assist you with any immediate calls. If you wish, they will notify your clergy or other resource person to assist you. Our Society is also available to offer support and comfort and assist you with some of the difficult decisions you will have to make during the next few hours.

Funeral Arrangements

Calling the funeral home should be one of the first things you do. You may want to choose a funeral home near your own home or one which has been recommended by others.

Funeral Homes

Grande Prairie

Bear Creek Funeral Home & Cremation Centre 780-830-7742

Oliver's Funeral Home & Crematorium 780-532-2929

Beaverlodge

Beaverlodge Funeral Services 780-354-2988

Families without any Financial Resources

Social Services Departments across Alberta provide assistance and payments for burial in cases where the family of the deceased lacks financial resources. The funeral services provided will be limited, yet dignified, with burial in common ground.

Let the Funeral Director know that you are planning to request financial assistance from Social Services. To have eligibility assessed contact:

Funeral-Alberta Human Services – Government of Alberta at

<http://www.humanservices.alberta.ca/AWonline/AISH/7258.html>

Or by phone at:

Alberta Supports Contact Centre

Phone:

780-644-9992 (Edmonton Area)

Toll Free

1-877-644-9992

Fax:

780-422-9681

Email:

hs.ascc@gov.ab.ca

Hours of Operation:

Monday to Friday, 7:30 a.m. to 8:00 p.m





For Spouse of the Deceased

If you or your spouse were receiving Old Age Security, contact Service Canada, Income Security Program to discuss the possibility of new, increased benefits.

If you are between the ages of 60 and 65, and your spouse did not receive Old Age Security, in some cases you may be eligible for Old Age Security Benefits specifically referred to as the “Allowance for the Survivor”

Service Canada: 1-800-277-9914

Grande Prairie And Area Council On Aging

Office General Phone

- (780) 539-6255

Program Contact Details

- Outreach: (780) 539-6255

Email

- info@gpcouncilonaging.com

Practical Concerns

Personal Checklist

Listed below are items you might find helpful to gather together in a folder. They will assist you with some of the more concrete tasks that need to be completed in the first few weeks

- Alberta Health Care Card
- Group Medical Benefit Card
- Birth Certificates for the Deceased and Dependents
- Marriage Certificate
- Death Certificate; Funeral Directors & Certified Copies
- Social Insurance Number
- Bank or Credit Institution Passbooks/Statements
- Credit Cards
- Safety Deposit Box Keys
- Stocks, Bonds, Certificates, Investment Documents
- Recent Pay Stub from Employer
- Recent Contracts Entered Into
- Land and Mortgage Documentation
- Real Estate and Property Title Deeds
- Care Ownership Registration and Insurance Policies
- Previous Two Years' Income Tax Returns
- Association and Club Memberships and Subscriptions
- Lawyer (to administer the estate and probate the Will)
- Household Bills (utilities, etc)
- life insurance

Termination of Coverage or Entitlement to Benefits

One of the tasks that you need to tend to, following the death of your loved one is the termination of coverage by government departments. You may also be entitled to collect personal benefits

Financial Assistance

You may be eligible for financial assistance from some of the following sources:

Canada Pension Plan

If the deceased has paid into the Canada Pension Plan (CPP), contact the CPP office. The CPP death benefit should be applied for as soon as possible after the death occurs. A lump-sum death benefit is payable to the estate of a deceased person who contributed to the Plan for at least the minimum qualifying period. The spouse and dependent children of the deceased may also be eligible for Survivor's Benefits under the plan. The telephone number is: 7-800-277-9914

Veteran Affairs Canada

Veterans receiving a Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) pension or allowance may qualify for grants to be applied toward the cost of a funeral. Assistance with cemetery costs may also be provided. All branches of The Royal Canadian Legion have a welfare officer who can provide further information and assistance with claims. The funeral director can also assist you in contacting the local VAC office

Royal Canadian Legion Branch 54

9912-101 ave, Grande Prairie, AB

780-532-3110

The Last Post Fund

The Last Post Fund provides for a dignified burial of any veteran in need who served in the Armed Forces of Canada or any of Canada's Allies during a major war. Call Toll Free 1-800-465-7113

Life Insurance

If the deceased had life insurance, contact the insurance agent or local representative for assistance with claim forms.



Employer

Check with the Human Resources Department to determine whether the deceased was enrolled in a pension plan, has life insurance, or was eligible for some type of termination pay at time of death. If the deceased was a union member, inquire with the union as well, since some private benefits programs exist in conjunction with respective union dues.

Other Insurance Coverage

If insurance was in the deceased's name, notify the insurance companies in writing.

Settling the Estate and Other Affairs

After the funeral or service is over, you will have to deal with the final legal and financial matters relating to the deceased's affairs, as well as your own.

Contacting your lawyer can help you with such complicated details as locating the Will, having the Will probated, gaining access to safety deposit boxes, closing out bank accounts, or accessing joint bank accounts so you can get immediate cash until more money becomes available to you.

The lawyer can also advise you in all matters related to the estate. If you are concerned about legal fees, ask! Most lawyers will give you an estimate of what the maximum fee will be.

The lawyer may feel that you can deal with some of the matters yourself, and will advise you how to do so. If you do not have a lawyer, and are concerned about choosing one, you might want to call:

Law Society of Alberta

Suite 500

919 11th Avenue SW

Calgary, Alberta

T2R 1P3

Tel: 403.229.4700 | Toll-free 1.800.661.9003

Office hours: Mon – Fri 8 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.

The Law Society maintains a referral service for those wanting help in choosing a lawyer. If you choose a lawyer from the referral service, mention that you obtained his or her name from the referral service when you phone for an appointment. A free half-hour interview will be provided. You can request a lawyer near your home and/or one who can speak your particular language.



How Do I Get Through This?

Understanding Grief

We have been told that the death of a loved one may bring about profound changes. Grief is our normal response to life's losses as well as a natural part of the cycle of change. It is not an event but a process which takes time to unfold. Often, with the initial shock, people don't feel the full impact of the loss right away. It may come sometime later, when all the activity surrounding the funeral or service is over, and the initial shock has worn off.

People have different ways of expressing their feelings around death. You may feel the need to cry or talk about your feelings. Some people become focused on "doing something", while others prefer to work it through alone. There is no right way to grieve. Do what you need to do. While every individual experiences loss differently, a number of reactions may be experienced as part of grief. Some people experience these feelings in a matter of days – for others, these feelings can come and go, on some level, throughout life.

Shock – "I just can't believe it"

The first actual announcement that a death has occurred is often shocking. The impact of the tragedy may take a few minutes, or days, or weeks, or even longer to realize. This sense of shock may occur even if you are "prepared" for the death. The sense of unreality of the death may even reoccur in the future

Emotional Release – "I can't stop crying."

Tears may be one reaction to death and may ease the tension and strain of grieving. Tears are okay.

Guilt – "I should have..."

Frequently, survivors recall things that they think could have been done for the person who died. These feelings of guilt are common, and frequently are tied to our sense of regret when someone dies. Sometimes people even experience guilt stemming from situations that were beyond their control, for example in the case of traumatic, sudden death.

Anger – “Why me? It’s not fair!”

You may feel anger toward the health care team, family, friends, or the deceased for leaving you alone, or anyone you think might have been able to prevent the death, and even toward the Creator. These feelings can be both surprising and uncomfortable. Disclosing these feelings may be helpful.

Sadness – “Life will never be happy again.”

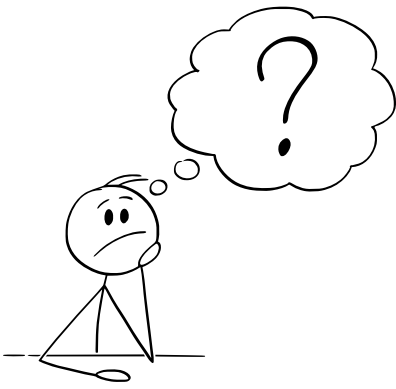
Sadness is a feeling which you turn inwards and is highly personal. A feeling of weariness may develop from depression and frustration. Sometimes, people can’t imagine how they will go on living. At times, suffering in silence seems easier than sharing with others. No one has ever felt these feelings exactly as you do. Memories of your loved one may be both joyful and sad, but in time, the sadness will lessen. Be patient with yourself. The expression of sadness is not a sign of weakness but an indication of strength.

Depression – “Life is not worth living. What is the point?”

Bereaved people often feel deep despair, unimaginable loneliness, and a sense of hopelessness – nothing feels worthwhile. Your life has changed and you feel that you cannot adapt. These feelings are most intense if you are on your own, or have limited family or social supports. Depression is not just feeling sad. It is a combination of emotions and physical reactions which can go on for a long time. Prolonged depression, panic, a desire to run away, and suicidal thoughts may occur. If you are experiencing any of these, it is time to get help and consult a professional.

Loneliness – “I just can’t bear it. Without him/her, I can’t go on.”

Bereaved people often feel isolated. Quiet times can be most difficult after friends and family leave and return to their daily routine. Anxiety and loneliness can create emotional pain. The strain of grief can even cause physical distress. If you find that physical symptoms continue for any period of time, you may want to contact your family doctor.



Confusion and Preoccupation – “I feel like I’m going crazy!”

It may be difficult to concentrate on anything because of constant memories of the deceased. Your mind is bombarded by a storm of emotions and thoughts. This could result in you experiencing confusion, memory loss, having trouble concentrating or making decisions. It might feel like you are “going crazy.” This state of confusion is temporary. In fact, continual preoccupation with the loss may cause us to worry about our own stability, and feel that we are losing control. Not knowing what to do and not understanding what is happening can result in panic. Give yourself time to remember as well as a way to remember – perhaps by creating a Memory Book, or framing a special photograph. Move forward at a pace that is comfortable for you.

Lost – “I don’t know how to go on alone.”

The death of a loved one may involve the death of your dreams, and the loss of your future as you thought it would be. You may feel completely lost. This feeling is often accompanied by intense anxiety over what the future hold for you. Part of the healing process is to regain a sense of self and purpose. You will either need to work towards this, or it may happen without you even being aware of it.

Relief – “I feel lighter, they would’ve wanted it this way.”

If the death has followed a long illness, you may feel a sense of relief that the suffering is finally over. This does not mean a lack of love for your loved one, and will not lessen your times of sadness, loneliness and tears. It is okay to feel relief. You can strike a balance between your feelings of loss and honoring your loved one’s memory.

Checklist – Signs and Symptoms of Grief

In addition to the roller-coaster of feelings, there are a number of other reactions related to grief. They may occur at any point in the bereavement process – early on, or much later, even when you might think that you are no longer experiencing the effects of grief. Although there is a wide range of grief reactions, some common ones are listed below:

Physical Reactions

- Exhaustion, sighing
- Change in appetite
- Susceptibility to illness
 - Sleeping problems
 - Lack of strength
 - Headaches
- Lack of or increase in energy
- Increased sensory awareness
 - Change in self-care
 - Numbness
- Palpitations or breathlessness

Behavioral Reactions

- Disoriented to time and place
 - Searching and yearning
 - Blaming others
 - Apathy

Thought Process

- Impaired self-esteem
- Repeated review of events
- Detached from surroundings
 - Difficulty concentrating
- Increase or decrease of dreams

Spiritual Beliefs

- Spiritual confusion
- Questioning belief system
 - Shattered faith
 - Loss of hope
- Search for meaning/purpose
- Support from Higher Power/God

Associated Feelings

- Emptiness
 - Despair
- Hopelessness
- Helplessness
- Bitterness
- euphoria



Getting Through the Crisis

Grief “Work”

It is often difficult to come to grips with the full reality of what has happened. Some people say that viewing the body of the deceased and discussing the death with friends, helps them to begin accepting the permanency of the loss.

Support

As soon as you are able, you might want to accept the sympathy of people. Their warmth and support may be helpful at this critical moment, and throughout the grief process. Being with friends, sharing your feelings with them, is one way to allow others to show they care.

Hasty Decisions

Sometimes we might be tempted to make hasty decisions during periods of crisis or loss

Memories

Your own memories of the person who died are important. By remembering the past, good and bad, you may eventually be able to move on.

Consulting Professionals

Feel free to contact your clergy, faith leaders, family doctor, and or local grief support services. They can all be excellent resources.

Caring for yourself – “I don’t have time to think about myself”

All of the practices that make sense for maintaining good health are more important to remember now. There is a strong relationship between high levels of stress, such as that which is endured when a loved one has died, and your body’s ability to resist illness

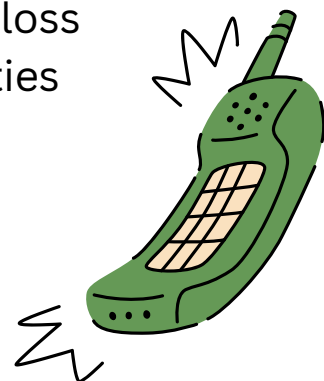
Do what you can to take the best care of yourself physically, emotionally and spiritually. It is important to remember to get enough rest, eat nutritious food, exercise and share your feelings with someone you can trust and feel comfortable talking to.

When to Seek Professional Help for Grief

If you recognize any of the symptoms of complicated grief or clinical depression, talk to a mental health professional right away. Left untreated, complicated grief and depression can lead to significant emotional damage, life threatening health problems, and even suicide. But treatment can help you get better.

Contact a Grief Counselor or Professional Therapist if you:

- 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 for more than a few weeks
- Are having difficulty trusting others since your loss
- Are unable to perform your normal daily activities
- In emergency situations, please dial 9-1-1



Community Resources

If the intensity of the grief does not lessen over time, you may consider seeking help from a professional or support service.

The following are some free resources that can refer you on to counselling and other support services in your community.

Alberta Northwest Palliative Care Society

Phone: 780-897-0066

Website: abnwpalliative.ca

Clergy/Churches

There are many clergy and church groups who connect with individuals during a time of grief and loss. Please reach out.

AHS Mental Health – ICAT Mental Health Team

587-259-5513

1-866-332-2322

9728 101 Avenue

Grande Prairie, Alberta

T8V 5B6

AHS Health Link

8-1-1

Employee Assistance Program

Ask your supervisor or Human Resources Department if you have an Employee Assistance Program (EAP). Often these services include grief counselling at no cost to employees and sometimes support family members as well.

WellSpring Alberta

wellspringalberta.ca

Contact info

+1 866-682-3135

info@wellspringalberta.ca



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