
BEREAVEMENT SERVICES

Things to Remember

When Supporting
a Grieving Person

VICTORIA  HOSPICE



We have chosen the image of the labyrinth as a metaphor for the journey through grief. A labyrinth is not a maze, as there are no dead ends and no wrong turnings. There is only one way – forward. So it is with grief. The only way through is forward, with many turns and going back and forth over what seems like the same territory. We journey to the centre of our grief, to the centre of ourselves, and then slowly return to re-enter the world.

Each person's experience on the journey of grief will be different. This is a reflection of our personal style, our relationship with the person who died, our internal and social resources, and our past history of coping. As you journey through your own grief process, there will likely be unexpected turns and insights.

Be genuine by being yourself

Your connection with the bereaved person should be a continuation of your usual relationship with them. If you are a close friend, they will want and expect caring contact from you. A bereaved person will not want anyone to assume an unfamiliar intimacy now. Your sensitivity and dependability can make a difference to how understood and supported they feel.

Acknowledge the loss as soon as you can after you get the news

Send a sympathy card with a note of personal condolence. Don't let fear that you won't say or do the right thing hold you back from talking with the bereaved person. Simply say that you are sorry to hear of the death, mention the person by name, be willing to listen to what the bereaved person may say. Ask how you can be helpful, offer some assistance in a way that feels comfortable for you.

Get good information about grief so that you understand the normal responses and phases of grief

Grief is a natural and necessary process that helps the bereaved person to adjust to life without the person who died.

Be willing to open the subject and to mention the name of the person who died

Rather than filling conversation with other topics, let the bereaved person talk with you about the death and their feelings. If there are silences, let these be shared moments of quiet without rushing into the gap.

Listen to the bereaved person

Allowing them to talk and to repeat their story will help them to process their thoughts and feelings. Sharing memories of times spent with the person who died can be very comforting for you and the bereaved person.

Accept that you cannot take the pain away

The death of someone important is painful. Trying to ‘cheer up’ a bereaved person denies the significance and depth of their grief. You can help by allowing the expression of feelings – guilt, sorrow, anger, sadness – without judgement. These feelings are healthy and normal aspects of grief.

Reach out to offer support

Be there by making regular contact over time. Many bereaved people find it hard to reach out or are concerned about being a burden on friends and family. Your initiative in keeping in touch will be appreciated.

Be patient

Mourning takes lots of time and grief never entirely goes away. The bereaved person will have ups and downs as they move through their grief. Be flexible in how you offer support as the needs of the bereaved person will change with the grief process.

Understand that everyone grieves in their own way and at their own pace

How a person grieves is a result of their personality, their past history of loss and the relationship that they had with the person who died. Accept the bereaved person’s evaluation of the significance of the loss and the depth of their feelings.

Remember that there is no right way to grieve

Avoid criticizing how someone is grieving; you cannot know what is best for them. Most often a person’s strengths, coping mechanisms and network of family, friends and acquaintances are sufficient to sustain them through their grief. However, if you are concerned, encourage them to take care of themselves by getting help also from their doctor or a counsellor.

Expect that your own grief may be triggered.

These feelings may be related to this loss or to a loss that happened in your own past.

You may want to share things that have been helpful to you when you were grieving.

Be sensitive in how and when you share suggestions or your own feelings. Ask yourself: Does the bereaved person want to know, will it feel helpful to them now?

Offer practical help

In the days after the death has occurred

- help with answering the phone,
- make lists of what needs to be done,
- bring a meal,
- do errands and shopping,
- take care of the children,
- be a chauffeur to appointments.

In the months following the death

- bring and share a meal,
- spend time to listen,
- help with garden chores or household maintenance,
- offer some holiday baking,
- share a regular walk or outing,
- offer expertise you may have,
- remember anniversaries, birthdays and special holidays.

When the bereaved person is ready

- help build a bridge to the future,
- include them in social gatherings with new people,
- accompany them to new activities,
- encourage their growing independence,
- welcome their new friends in your social circle,
- continue to remember the person who died and talk about them.

Resources

Victoria Hospice offers bereavement support by counsellors and volunteers for individuals and families. Our services include telephone support; counselling; a variety of bereavement support groups, including drop-in and walking groups; education; and referrals to other local resources and services.

For additional information, visit our website at www.victoriahospice.org or call us at **250-370-8868**.

If the grieving person you are supporting is in crisis, encourage and help them to visit their family doctor or emergency department, or to contact the following::

- **Central Vancouver Crisis Line: 1-888-494-3888**
- **Provincial Suicide Intervention Line: 1-800-784-2433**



BEREAVEMENT SERVICES

Victoria Hospice Bereavement Services are made possible through the generosity of our community. We charge no fees for individual or family counselling and support. There are fees for some of our groups and training.

We encourage your donation. Your gift will provide direct care for individuals and families today, as well as help us to meet the need for end-of-life care tomorrow. To discuss making a gift or including Victoria Hospice in your legacy plans, or to find out more about fundraising activities, contact:

Victoria Hospice Fund Development
4th Floor, Richmond Pavilion
1952 Bay St., Victoria, BC V8R 1J8

Phone: 250-519-1744

Email: donate@victoriahospice.org

www.victoriahospice.org

If you or someone you know has concerns or questions about grief,
please contact us.

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Phone: 250-370-8868

Email: bereavement@victoriahospice.org

The Bereavement Services office is open
Monday through Friday (excluding holidays).

All of our bereavement pamphlets and brochures
(including this one) are available in print form
as well as electronically through our website:

www.victoriahospice.org

Please visit our website for links
to other sources of information and support
about grief and bereavement.