



**NORTH  
YORK  
GENERAL**

## **GOING ON FROM HERE**

A Guide for Living through Loss of a Baby  
Perinatal Bereavement

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## GRIEF IS LIKE A RIVER

My grief is like a river  
I have to let it flow, But I  
myself determine  
Just where the banks will go.

Some days the current takes me  
In waves of guilt and pain,  
But there are always quiet pools  
Where I can rest again.

I crash on rocks of anger — My faith  
seems faint indeed, But there are  
other swimmers Who know that what  
I need

Are loving hands to hold me When the  
waters are too swift, And someone  
kind to listen When I just seem to drift.

Grief's river is a process  
Of relinquishing the past.  
By swimming in Hope's channels  
I'll reach the shore at last.

Cynthia G. Kelley  
TCF, Cincinnati, OH

## INTRODUCTION

Many bereaved parents who lose a baby describe their grief as a lonely, painful experience. For most people, there may be no greater loss than to be separated from your baby about whom you dreamed would have meaning *in*, or give meaning *to*, your life. As you undergo the pain of this loss, you begin a personal journey towards understanding the meaning of that loss and its effect upon your life.

The grief experience challenges us on many different levels emotional, spiritual, physical, and social. Each grief experience is as unique as the person having it and for the recently bereaved, most reactions are normal. It is something for which we may have no past experience or preparation. Coping with the loss of a baby can be both difficult and exhausting. Whether your baby died when you were pregnant for a short time or longer time, was a stillbirth, or lived for a while, will have little bearing on your need and right to grieve.

This guide was developed out of a caring interest to provide you with support and information as you are experiencing *your* grief. We hope that this will be helpful as you begin the process to feel, express, understand, and come to terms with your loss.

While this guide may give you some answers, it may also leave you with more questions to explore. We invite you to pursue support *from*, and conversations *with*, family, friends, your religious leader, staff from this facility, and the community, as you try to make some sense of how your life is changing.

The names and phone numbers of important resources are

included at the back of this booklet; use them when you feel ready.

Please know that you have our sincerest sympathy, and highest regard as you go through these changing times. If we can offer additional help or support, please feel free to call us.

## **UNDERSTANDING GRIEF**

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. You may think of it as a type of journey where you resist, yet get carried along in the first part; feel the unpredictable and rough current in the second part; and eventually journey towards renewed living and a sense of control.

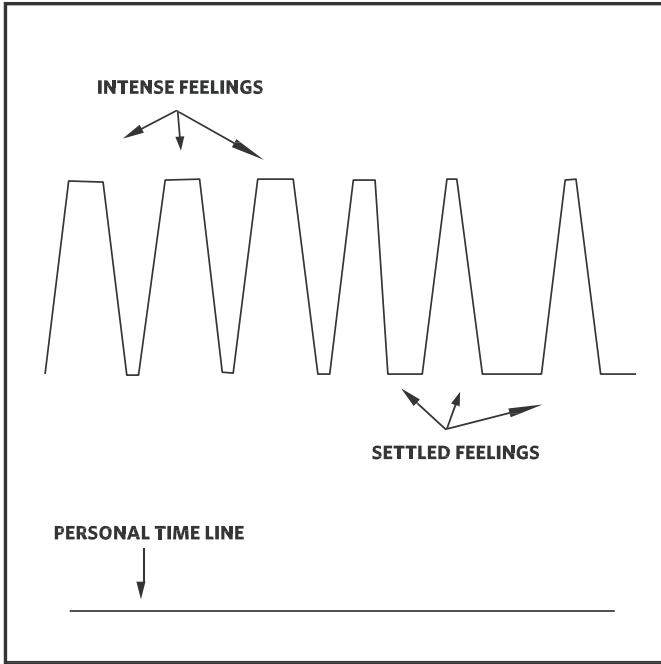
Grief is never the same for any two people, and your experience of grief will most certainly be longer or shorter, calmer or more intense, than most of the people you know think it should be.

Though you may be affected by the loss of your baby for the rest of your life, healing can be an outcome of grief, which occurs through the generosity of time. What is certain is that through grief, you will change. Your values too may change, as you will see life from a new and different perspective. This healing journey is a tribute to the preciousness of life, and to the baby you have loved and lost.

## **HOW LONG GRIEF LASTS**

The grief journey varies in duration and intensity. There is no predictable time frame for your grief, nor can you hurry the process. What is sometimes the case is that you *may* feel in less pain by the end of the first year, and may find that you have put together some of the pieces of your life by the end of the second year. Allow yourself whatever time you need

for your grief. You may continue to have intense feelings of grief over many years. The time *in between* these periods of strong feelings will lengthen, allowing you to feel more settled. As well, the *amount* of time that you experience these intense feelings will decrease.



## NORMAL RESPONSES TO LOSS

When you lose your baby, you may feel like you have lost an important part of your present or your future. It is a time when it may seem like your life is falling apart. You may experience a wide range of emotions you have never known before. Or, you may feel an *intensity* of emotions that makes coping more difficult.

Experiencing new or very strong emotions for the first time may be frightening for you as you find yourself in “uncharted waters.” The following emotional responses



can give you an idea of what to expect and how to help yourself. You may be able to identify which ones fit for you, though they may occur in any order.

**Shock**            *“I just don’t believe it.” “I feel completely numb.”*

Some people experience a sense of shock upon learning of a baby’s death. You may need a few minutes, or days, or weeks, for the reality of the loss to take hold. Disbelief and denial are reactions related to shock and can provide a helpful safeguard. When you are ready, the shock will ease. Your experience can be likened to a roller-coaster ride of emotions.

*Sometimes just knowing what to expect can be a comfort to you.*

**Anger and Hostility**    *“Why couldn’t they fix him “Why me?”*

Anger is related to our feeling of helplessness which is never greater than when a baby dies. You may be angry with the medical staff, family, God, friends, or even with yourself. You may find yourself reacting with anger to situations that never bothered you before. These feelings can be both surprising and uncomfortable. They may also be directed towards people who innocently ask about your baby, unaware of your loss.

*Expressing these feelings by writing, drawing, or talking about them may take away some of their power.*

**Emotional Release**    *“I can’t stop crying.” “I feel out of control.”*

At the point when bereaved people begin to feel the painful feelings associated with loss, a wide range of emotions are expressed. Tensions may be eased through the normal reaction of crying, however, you should not be “forced” to cry if you do not feel the need to do so.

The verbal expression of feelings, while seeming to be overwhelming, is only part of the normal grief process. Feelings that are not vented in any way may appear later in the form of physical complaints, such as stomach aches and migraines.

*Find a good listener, express yourself through the arts, or write in a journal or diary to give vent to your feelings.*

**Sadness**     *“Life will never be happy again.” “It’s wrong to laugh.”*

This could be one of the saddest times of your life. You may feel overwhelmed and helpless at times. Sadness is a feeling which you turn inwards, and is highly personal. It often gives way to other feelings such as anger and hostility which are directed towards others as you try to make sense of what has happened to you.

You are right. No one has ever felt these feelings exactly as you do. Thinking of your baby can make you feel intensely 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.*

**Loneliness**

*“Without her, I can’t go on.”*

Bereaved people often feel isolated. You may have never felt this lonely before. Evenings, weekends and quiet times can be the most difficult *after* friends and family return to their daily routine. You may feel especially lonely if you are with people who are expecting a baby or who have small children. You may have other powerful feelings too.

*Look for who is in your support system. It could be family, friends, a spiritual leader, colleagues, your doctor, or a support group. Consider accepting their kind words and offers of companionship.*

**Guilt**

*“If only I’d been there.”      “I should have...”*

The bereaved often express the “should haves, would haves, and could haves.” “If only” may dominate your thoughts. We may accuse ourselves of not doing the right thing, or not doing enough. The sense of guilt, which comes with grief, may be your attempt to find someone to blame for unresolved feelings and issues. These feelings are normal feelings that bereaved people have. Most of us do the best we can, considering our human limits.

*Recognize that feelings of guilt are often tied to a sense of deep regret about your baby dying.*

**Confusion**

*“I can’t seem to concentrate on a thing.”*

Grief is one of the main causes of stress. 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 “losing it” or “going crazy.”

This state of confusion is temporary. It is your mind’s attempt to make sense out of something that seems so senseless. In order to feel more “in control,” begin by making decisions on small matters first, such as food and clothing, and gradually go on to larger matters. By taking these small steps, you will begin to reassure yourself that your ability to think, concentrate, and make decisions will return.

**Isolation**      *“Why bother? No one could possibly know how I feel.”*

The grieving person often tends to withdraw from social situations. Relationships seem awkward and you may feel that you are no longer accepted. You may avoid others, feeling like a burden or you may want to protect others from your pain or bitterness. You might be used to being in the position of the giver, and now resist the new role of receiver of support.

Keeping an emotional distance from others may extend your normal feelings of grief.

*Eventually, you will find the balance between your need for personal grief time and for support from others. Trust yourself here and those around you — don’t expect too much, too soon.*

**Preoccupation**      *“I can’t get him out of my mind.”*

Despite efforts to think of other things, people who are grieving may find it difficult to shift their minds away from the baby who has died. It may be almost impossible for you to think about anything else because a woman's body holds reminders of the baby who is no longer there. Dreams may sometimes be accompanied by a sense of the presence of your baby.

Sometimes you may feel the need to hold on tightly to your thoughts of your baby, fearing that by not thinking of your baby all of the time, you may risk forgetting them.

*Give yourself time to remember as well as a way to honour your baby — perhaps by making a donation, or framing a special photograph. Move forward at a pace that is comfortable for you.*

**Depression** *“Life is not worth living.” “What’s 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 supports.

Depression is not just feeling sad. It is a combination of emotions and physical reactions which can go on for a long time. Depression, panic, a desire to run away, and suicidal thoughts may occur.

*If you are experiencing any of these, it is time to consult a professional.*

**Lost** *“We had plans for him.” “How do I go on without her?”*

The death of your beloved baby 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 holds 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.*

# 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/increase in energy
- increased sensory awareness
- change in self care
- numbness
- palpitations/breathlessness

## Spiritual Beliefs

- spiritual confusion
- questioning belief system
- shattered faith
- loss of hope
- search for meaning/purpose
- support from Higher Power/God

## Behavioural Reactions

- disoriented to time and place
- searching and yearning
- blaming others
- apathy

## Thought Processes

- impaired self esteem
- repeated review of events
- sense of detachment
- difficulty concentrating
- increase/decrease of dreams

## Associated Feelings

- emptiness
- despair
- hopelessness
- helplessness
- bitterness
- euphoria



# WHY GRIEF IS DIFFERENT FOR EACH PERSON

Your ability to cope with the death of a baby is affected by what your expectations were as well as your personal experiences. Your adjustment is dependent on many factors and a wide range of issues within each factor. Some of these include your:

- Previous loss history
- Support systems
- Spiritual resources
- Coping abilities
- Gender expectations
- How the death occurred: perinatal loss, genetic complications, accidental or natural loss
- Personality
- Age
- Attitude
- Cultural and religious beliefs
- Family dynamics

One of the things you have probably figured out is that grief is a maze of feelings, reactions and experiences. Although grief has been described in terms of stages, phases, or tasks, the important thing to remember is that not every one goes through every experience. The reactions that you do have usually do not occur in such an organized or predictable way. They may happen separately, all at once, briefly, daily, deeply or in a recurring manner.

We hope that it is a comfort to you to learn about normal grief reactions, and know that others have survived similar experiences of loss. There are also differences between how people grieve depending on their cultural and religious background, their experiences with loss, societal expectations, ages, or level

of understanding.

*Take the time to ask questions if you are confused, and to respect different styles of expressing grief while learning to live with loss.*

Whether or not the grieving person is male or female, a child, teen, or adult, may also influence how grief is experienced. What is clear though is that there is no “blueprint” for grief, which is as different as each relationship. Some very basic differences are described briefly here.

*Please ask staff for some reading material. You may also find more information at your funeral home, local library or bookseller.*

### **Men**

- Tend to use activities and tasks as outlets for their emotions.
- Generally deal with feelings internally through solitude.
- Often try to understand their loss initially on an intellectual level.

### **Women**

- Usually manage grief by talking about their feelings.
- Rely on established relationships to share the pain of their loss.
- Repeat and review their experiences with renewed emotions.

## **Teenagers**

- A loss can interfere with the normal drive towards independence.
- Though conflict is a normal phase of adolescence, a death may cause exaggerated guilt responses and acting-out behaviour.
- Stable adult support is helpful, as are strong peer relationships.

## **Children**

- Have different levels of understanding death depending on age.  
Benefit from seeing parental grief and expression of feelings.
- Need simple, age-appropriate explanations of death and rituals.
- Require extra support for their sense of security and stability.

Grief can be a very troubling, overwhelming experience, regardless of your age or gender. Most of this is normal and to be expected. However, if there are long periods of intense feelings, or none at all, often with physical distress, it may signify that your grief is no longer following the natural course of healing. Seek out a caring professional who, together with you, will help evaluate whether yours is healthy grief or if extra support would be helpful.

Perhaps the biggest barrier to finding help may be the way you feel about needing it. Asking for help when grief becomes complicated is not a sign of weakness, but of

courage and strength.

*Refer to the back of this guide for a listing of Bereavement Services.*

## **How the Death Occurred**

How your baby died and the special qualities of your relationship affect how you will grieve your loss. Your experience will likely be different depending on whether the death occurred by natural or accidental causes, suddenly, or from birth or genetic complications.

## **Understanding Your Relationships**

Your grief is affected by many different factors, including maternal age, health, family issues, and the circumstances of your baby's conception and loss. You may have sacrificed a great deal

to have this baby. Your baby might have been conceived through

extraordinary circumstances, unexpectedly, or perhaps been unplanned. You may have hoped that this baby would add greater meaning to your life, marriage, or family.

Perhaps you have felt that other family members are disappointed in you, or that you have let them down.

Whatever the circumstances of your baby's death, you will likely experience at least temporary changes with your body and your emotions. Relationships may be strained for a short time while people find the most appropriate way to support you through this tragedy.

## HELPING YOURSELF IN TIMES OF GRIEF

Being in a situation of intense grief may make you feel helpless and vulnerable. You don't know how "to be" since your life has changed so dramatically. It may be useful to find areas where you can have some control to strengthen yourself for the journey that lies before you.

**Accepting Help**     *"I didn't realize that so many people cared."*

This may be very hard to do, as it may go against how you want to see yourself. However, admitting to yourself, your family and friends that you need support can lessen your pain and loneliness.

Help may be offered to you in many different ways. Consider allowing others to share your grief by letting them give you their support — spiritual or practical, such as making a meal or helping with childcare.

*If you lack support, then make obtaining it your first goal. Talk with your partner, family or friends about your baby and share your feelings as often as you need to, as repetition is a necessary and healing part of grief.*

**Advice of Others** *“My friends don’t agree on what I should do.”*

Well-meaning friends and family may give you advice. They may make statements which seem like judgements, yet be unaware of your needs, such as the time you need to adjust. Their intentions may truly be in your interest, but their advice may not.

*Ask family and friends to be patient with you as you struggle to find yourself during a confusing time. Allow your heart to guide you.*

**Decision Making** *“I couldn’t even decide what was for dinner.”*

Sometimes we might be tempted to make hasty decisions during periods of crisis or loss. Making major life-altering or financial decisions should probably be delayed until you have time to feel more settled and can seek sound advice.

When possible, changes such as moving, new employment, or relationships should be delayed until you feel ready. Since your coping mechanisms are decreased, put off activities that will add more strain, such as taking a long trip. Try not to let others make decisions for you, such as doing what you need to do to mourn your baby.

Regretting decisions made in haste may complicate your reaction to your loss and interfere with your healing.

*Take the time you need to make good decisions for yourself.*

**Acceptance**      *“I was afraid that accepting meant forgetting him.”*

Time alone does not heal grief. You must also take steps to accept and deal with it. This involves courage and openness to change. Accepting your feelings, even the uncomfortable ones, will help you learn about yourself and the meaning of your loss. It is hard

to get over the fact that you were not in control of the events leading up to the loss. You may not be able to control the feelings of grief which overwhelm you now at unexpected or unwanted times.

*The work of grief requires effort on your part. The way out of grief is to go through it.*

**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.

Although our minds slowly accept the fact that a baby has died, a woman’s body may need more time to adapt. She may experience painful breasts ready with milk, a stomach that is still swollen from carrying a child, stretch marks, stitches, and hormonal changes as evidence of having carried a child.

*Mourn your loss while accepting its reminders. Do what you can to take the best care of yourself physically, emotionally,*

*and spiritually. Be kind to yourself. Consult your doctor for physical support.*

### Rest

- Try to resume normal sleep routines.
- Maintain rest patterns — even if you are unable to sleep.
- Avoid increased work activity.

### Nutrition

- Try to eat small amounts of what you can, when you can.
- If eating alone is difficult, try changing where you eat.
- Strive for a balanced diet at least some of the time.
- Have healthy snacks available.

### Exercise

- Maintain your regular routine with minor changes.
- Keep activities simple — a brisk walk or a familiar sport.
- Do not over-extend yourself.

### Healthy Choices

- Use caution with drugs and alcohol. Grief is not “cured” by medications, as they tend to mask rather than deal with pain.
- Alcohol is a depressant.
- Be careful about driving: poor concentration, distractibility and “blinking out” can put you or others in danger.

### Make allowances for yourself

- Don't expect yourself to function as you usually do.
- Renew old activities or find new ones that give you enjoyment.



- Read, write, or find other things that give you comfort.
- Attend to the possessions of your loved ones in your own time.

### Reach Out

- Talk or listen — let others be around you.
- Get support and guidance from your spiritual leader or counsellor.
- Attend a support group with others in similar situations.
- Seek a professional consultation if you are unsure how you are doing.
- See a doctor if physical symptoms concern you, or continue.

# THE JOURNEY TOWARDS HEALING

At a time that only you can identify, you will begin to feel that things have changed for you. You are ready to look towards the future. This journey towards renewed living may include the following:

**Re-engagement**     *“I now know the meaning of true friendship.”*

With time, effort, airing of feelings, and a lot of support, the bereaved person re-enters life. You may begin making the painful adjustments, re-establishing old relationships, and forming new ones. You may develop new skills and patterns. You may even have periods of happiness. Energy returns for the tasks of life, and it becomes possible to remember your loss with less pain.

No, you will never be the same, but you may feel more trusting of yourself and others.

*Allow yourself to appreciate the positive aspects of your life, in a time-frame which you define.*

**Resolution**     *“It’s time for me to go on.”*

There is no formal end to your grief journey, since you carry your loss experience with you as you move forward. You become able to find comfort in memories of the past which no longer prevent you from imagining a future. Your ability to adjust and adapt increases.

By experiencing deep emotion and accepting it, you can

grow in warmth, depth, and wisdom. Other relationships and opportunities can be explored. You may find that your experience at this point includes:

- Finishing unfinished business
- Seeking and providing forgiveness
- Spiritual connectedness
- Wisdom
- Compassion
- Creativity

*Expect to experience a range of feelings that provide you with a sense of healing and change.*

## **REMEMBRANCES AND SPECIAL OCCASIONS**

Holidays and other special occasions such as birthdays and anniversaries may be especially difficult in the first year following the death of your baby. These times, as well as the anniversary of the actual day of the death, can be especially demanding and sad. The weeks and days leading up to these occasions are often filled with apprehension and dread as the bereaved person *anticipates* what their feelings and reactions may be like on the given day.

Special occasions and holidays may be painful as you think about the hopes and dreams you had for your baby, and are now reminded of the sorrow you felt in the earliest stages of your loss. There may be a renewed sense of isolation, loneliness and despair. Because of this, it is valuable to set limits for yourself, and to prioritize what is important for you and your family.

Thinking about these special days in advance of their occurrence can help you maintain the energy you need to get through these trying times. You may also:

- ✓ Do things you feel you are able to do; delegate what you can.
- ✓ Share your feelings with others — both happy and sad.
- ✓ Remember that family and friends don't know what is going on in your mind — communicate your wishes, needs, and emotions.
- ✓ Recognize the memory of your baby through a special act — perhaps a memorial donation, or taking part in a volunteer opportunity.
- ✓ Engage in spiritual activities which offer you comfort.
- ✓ Establish a meaningful ritual you can anticipate every year.
- ✓ Make changes that are comfortable for you, particularly around traditional tasks.
- ✓ Realize that every holiday and special occasion is both different and new. They are unlike holidays of the past, so keep things the same, or change them, whichever is easiest for you.

Most bereaved people report that when that “*special day*” arrives, it’s truly not as difficult as they anticipated. If you are anxious, the amount of planning you do in advance may help that day pass gently.

## REFLECTION

The word *grief* is taken from the Latin *gravare*, which means to “bur- den” or “make heavy.” Indeed, in grief we do carry a heavy burden that loads us down until we gather the strength, over time, to lessen it and eventually leave it behind. This is the process.

Though it is often difficult and sometimes painful to imagine it happening, gradually you do begin to rebuild your life. The love endures and the pain lessens, as does your dependency on others. You are changed in countless ways, but you move forward, having found a way to make peace with your loss experience in a way maybe only you understand. You emerge a survivor.

People who experience the loss of a baby may feel out of control. Our aim has been to try and address that feeling by helping you to understand what you might expect now that your baby has died. Our goal for this guide has been to let you know that:

- A wide range of feelings and reactions are normal.
- You are not alone.
- Help is available to support you through this difficult time.

Please let us know if we can offer any further assistance.

# RESOURCES

## Funeral Homes

Humphrey Funeral Home

1403 Bayview Ave. .... (416) 487-4523

Jerrett Funeral Chapels

Toronto Chapel

1141 St. Clair Ave. W..... (416) 654-7744

Willowdale Chapel

6191 Yonge St. .... (416) 223-6050

Scarborough Chapel

660 Kennedy Rd.....(416) 266-4404

Kane Funeral Home

6150 Yonge St..... (416) 221-1159

McDougall & Brown

Scarborough Chapel

2900 Kingston Rd. .... (416) 267-4656

Eglinton Chapel

1812 Eglinton Ave.....(416) 782-1197

Morley Bedford

159 Eglinton Ave. W. .... (416) 489-8733

Murray E. Newbigging

733 Mt. Pleasant Rd. .... (416) 489-8811

- Immediate Cremation or Burial A Basic Service  
 2966A Eglinton Ave. .... (416) 226-2480
- Ogden Funeral Home  
 4164 Sheppard Ave. E..... (416) 293-5211
- The Simple Alternative  
 275 Lesmill Rd. ....(416) 441-1580
- Trull Funeral Homes  
 East Chapel  
 1111 Danforth Ave. ....(416) 465-4661
- North Chapel  
 2704 Yonge St. ....(416) 488-1101
- Hong Kong Funeral Home  
 8088 Yonge St. ....(905) 889-1734

**Jewish Funeral Homes**

- Benjamin’s Park  
 2401 Steeles Ave. W..... (416) 663-9060
- Hebrew Basic Burial  
 3429 Bathurst St. ....(416) 780-0596
- Steeles Memorial Chapel  
 350 Steeles Ave. W. ....(905) 881-6003

## Bereavement Supports

Listed here are the names and phone numbers of agencies and organizations which offer individual, family, or group support. If you are unsure which one is most appropriate for you, discuss it with your family doctor or call to find out more specific information.

- Bayview Community Hospice.....(416) 385-8885
- Benjamin In..... (416) 663-9060  
Counselling, professional referrals and bereavement groups for members of the Jewish Community.
- Bereaved Families of Ontario..... (416) 440-0290  
One-to-one support for bereaved parents; support groups for children, parents, and grandparents when a child has died. Also support for all ages of bereavement.
- The Centre for the Grief Journey..... (905) 624-8080  
Individual, family, and group support
- Chinese Family Life Services of Ontario ..... (416) 979-8299  
Bereavement counselling
- Circle of Care ..... (416) 635-2860  
Counselling, especially for seniors
- Rosar-Morrison Funeral Home..... (416) 924-1408
- Humphrey Funeral Home-A.W. Miles Chapel  
Adult self-help support groups, referrals, lending



- library.....(416) 485-6415
- Jerrett Funeral Homes..... (416) 223-6050  
Bereavement follow-up, individual counselling
- Jewish Family and Child Service..... (416) 638-7800  
Individual and group bereavement support
- North York General Hospital  
Mental Health Program..... (416) 756-6642
- Spiritual & Religious Care..... (416) 756-6311
- Child and Adolescent Ambulatory Health Services  
.....(416) 632-8703
- North York Public Health Nurse..... (416) 338-7600  
Home support for referrals.
- Survivor Support Program..... (416) 595-1716  
One-to-One and group support for suicide loss

**Specialized Support for Perinatal Loss**

- Pregnancy & Infant Loss Network ..... (905) 472-1807

**Web Sites**

- <http://www.aarp.org/griefandloss>
- <http://www.centerforloss.com>
- <http://www.willowgreen.com>

Other areas for support include your community hospital, religious leader, children’s school or child care, or medical professionals.

## THE GRIEVING PERSON'S BILL OF RIGHTS

1. You have the right to experience your own unique grief.  
No one else will grieve in exactly the same way you do. So, when you turn to others for help, don't allow them to tell you what you should or should not be feeling.
2. You have the right to talk about your grief.  
Talking about your grief will help you heal. Seek out others who will allow you to talk as much as you want, as often as you want, about your grief.
3. You have the right to feel a multitude of emotions.  
Confusion, disorientation, fear, guilt and relief are just a few of the emotions you might feel as part of your journey. Others may try to tell you that feeling angry, for example, is wrong. Don't take these judgmental responses to heart. Instead, find listeners who will accept your feelings without condition.
- 4 You have the right to be tolerant of your physical and emotional limits. Your feelings of loss and sadness will probably leave you feeling fatigued. Respect what your body and mind are telling you. Get daily rest. Eat balanced meals. And don't allow others to push you into doing things you don't feel ready to do.

5. You have the right to experience grief “attacks.”

Sometimes, out of nowhere, a powerful surge of grief may overcome you. This can be frightening, but is normal and natural. Find someone who understands and will let you talk it out.

6. You have the right to make use of ritual.

The funeral ritual does more than acknowledge the death of someone loved. It helps provide you with the support of caring people. More importantly, the funeral is way for you to mourn. If others tell you that rituals such as these are silly or unnecessary, don't listen.

7. You have the right to embrace your spirituality.

If faith is a part of your life, express it in ways that seem appropriate to you. Allow yourself to be around people who understand and support your religious beliefs. If you feel angry at God, find someone to talk with who won't be critical of your feelings of hurt and abandonment.

8. You have the right to search for meaning.

You may find yourself asking, “Why did he or she die? Why this way? Why now?” Some of your questions may have answers, but some may not. And watch out for the clichéd responses some people may give you. Comments like, “It was God's will” or “Think of what you

have to be “thankful for” are not helpful and you do not have to accept them.

9. You have the right to treasure your memories.

Memories are one of the best legacies that exist after the death of someone loved. You will always remember. Instead of ignoring your memories, find others with whom you can share them.

10. You have the right to move toward your grief and heal.

Reconciling your grief will not happen quickly. Remember, grief is a process, not an event. Be patient and tolerant with yourself and avoid people who are impatient and intolerant with you. Neither you nor those around you must forget that the death of someone loved changes your life forever.

Taken from Alan Wolfelt, Ph.D., *How to Reach Out for Help When You Are Grieving*

