

Bereaved Families of Cape Breton

Grief Challenges

When you are grieving the death of someone important to you, there are many challenges you will face. This information is not intended to solve your problems or provide answers, but it is hoped that understanding and being prepared for some of the challenges ahead will help you.

- **Unpleasant Memories**
Particularly in the early days of grief, you will find you are frequently thinking about all the circumstances around the illness and death. Thoughts about how the person looked or acted, about things you did or didn't do, about the last words spoken, about how you heard the news are all common. Later, you will find that memories of other times return.
- **Certain Rooms or Places**
This happens when you need to protect yourself from additional stress, when you fear your response to the place will be too intense for you to handle. Take your time, the courage required to go there will usually come when you are ready to deal with it. You can occasionally test yourself to see if it is getting any easier.
- **Visitations**
Many people find that they hear, see or feel the presence of the person who has died. This may be comforting or not. Why this happens is not important nor does it need to be explained. Others may find it hard to believe, but you know what you have experienced.
- **Personal Effects**
This task should be done in your own time. You may want to delay going through the person's belongings because you simply do not have the energy to do it, you do not know what to do with things or you want to keep reminders around. Sometimes it is easier to have a family member or friend help you. It may help to group the items into boxes: some to keep, some for family or friends, some for charity and some to store until you know what you want to do with them.
- **Special Dates, Times of Year**
Plan ahead for birthdays, anniversaries and other special dates: decide what you will do, where you will go, who you want to be with. It often helps to be with people or even talk to someone special on the phone. Don't feel you have to do it alone – let others know.
- **Problem Solving Alone**
Decision-making can be difficult, particularly when you partner has died; no one to discuss plans with, to share decisions or consequences. Your memory, concentration and perspective are impaired with grief, leaving you with little confidence at this time. Avoid unnecessary major decisions in the beginning, but if you do have to make them, consult with someone objective. The following approach may help you tackle decision-making:
 - Identify the problem and your goal exactly

- List a variety of solutions
 - List the advantages and disadvantages to each solution
 - Review the information gathered, looking for oversights
 - Make your choice
 - Follow through
- **Financial Dilemmas**
A major task after someone has died is dealing with financial affairs. You may not understand or even be aware of all aspects of the estate, but it is up to you to locate and apply for all existing sources of income. Check wills, life insurance policies, employer compensation, unpaid bonuses or sick benefits, death benefits, government pensions, benefits or income assistance, Pharmacare or veteran's benefits, retirement funds, bank accounts, stocks, bonds, mutual funds and unpaid loans. You may need help with paying bills, investing new or existing monies and planning your financial future. Don't be afraid to ask for help at your bank or seek the services of a qualified accountant. Not having certain skills does not make you stupid.
 - **Illegitimate Schemes and Crooks**
Hopefully, you will not have any dealings with disreputable individuals, but it is important to check credentials and trust any bad feelings you have about people. Your lawyer or the Better Business Bureau can advise you. If you need any services, use a well-respected firm. Real estate and life insurance agents who pressure you to buy or sell do not have your best interests at heart. Phony charities and con artists may contact you after the death announcement in the paper. Also be cautious with unknown "friends" of your spouse or those claiming debts without proper proof.
 - **Nurturing Yourself**
This includes looking after both your physical and emotional health: maintaining good health habits, creating new interests and supports and dealing with your grief. Avoid excessive drug and alcohol use; have regular check ups; get as much exercise and sleep as you can; and watch your diet. Treat yourself as you would a cherished friend. You will have new responsibilities and relationships; you may rediscover talents and abilities. Improve your social environment: join new groups, make new friends, find ways to do old and new activities with others. Improve your physical environment: make some changes around the house and garden, rearrange things to suit your present lifestyle.
 - **Looking Ahead**
In the early days of grief, it is painful to think about your future without the person who has died. As you begin to make necessary plans, you may feel guilty about going on with life. Later, as you heal, it becomes possible to plan and look forward to a future for yourself. There will be a gradual process of healing for you, re-channeling energy from grieving into living. As you face each challenge, you take one step closer to finding purpose and balance in your new way of life.

Adapted from: Beyond Grief, Carol Staudacher