



Grief: Coping with Challenges

The death of someone important to you brings many changes in your life. As you are adjusting and responding to these changes, there are challenges you will be faced with. These could be about the death and the circumstances at the time, or about your grief and how you are coping. Here are some explanations and practical suggestions regarding common challenges.

Decision-Making:

Decision-making can be difficult when you are grieving. This is especially true when your person who was your main support has died. You do not have the usual person there to discuss plans, share decisions and consider consequences. Your memory, concentration and perspective may be affected by grief. You may want to postpone major decisions, if you can—until you are feeling better able to handle them. If you must make major decisions, consult with an objective professional. The following guidelines may help you tackle decision-making.

- identify the problem and your goal precisely
- list a variety of solutions, as many as you can think of
- list the advantages and disadvantages of each solution
- outline the steps necessary for each solution
- consult an expert or trusted advisor who can be objective
- review all the information gathered, looking for oversights
- make your choice
- follow through step by step

Financial Affairs:

Settling the estate can be a complex and tiring. Learning unfamiliar skills for dealing with financial affairs may be overwhelming when you are actively grieving. You may need or want help with paying bills, investing money, and planning your financial future. Be cautious and take your time with all financial decisions. The following suggestions may be helpful:

- legal advice and assistance may be helpful with the estate or other issues
- ask your bank for help
- seek the services of a qualified account or financial planner to assist you
- always use a well-respected individual or firm





Memories of Recent Events:

Particularly in the early days of grief, you may find that you are frequently thinking about the circumstances of the illness and death. Recurring thoughts, about how the person looked or acted, about the care given, about what you and others did or didn't do, about how you heard the news, are all common and natural. Repetition seems to help us come to terms with difficult or stressful times. Although these memories are pervasive now, memories of other times will return. The following strategies may help with coping.

- go over memories as often as you need to
- talk to someone about your thoughts
- get the information you need to understand what happened

Certain Rooms and Places:

There may be certain rooms or places that you wish to avoid as they are associated with the death or the person who died. The courage required to face these places may return of its own accord. However, if your discomfort is intense and is interfering with your day-to-day life, you may wish to seek counselling help. The following strategies may help with coping.

- at home, sleep or eat elsewhere for a while, or rearrange the furniture
- away from home, if you need to go somewhere that is uncomfortable, get someone to accompany you or meet you

Looking After Your Health:

When you are grieving, your eating and sleeping patterns may change, as well as your general health. Fluctuations in energy are often part of grieving. Grief increases your risk for illness due to stress, fatigue, poor nutrition, indifference, etc. There is also a tendency to return to old patterns of coping, some of which may not work as before. It is important to look after your physical well being as this can influence emotional healing after a loss. The following points are important to remember.

- have a regular check-ups and consult your doctor about any concerns
- be careful of medications and alcohol as they mask rather than deal with the pain
- low energy is to be expected: pace your activities and responsibilities
- regular exercise can help

Sleep

Many bereaved people, though they may feel exhausted, have trouble going to sleep or staying asleep through the night. Others find that they sleep more, to avoid the pain or due to exhaustion. Some helpful hints for sleeping are included here.

- give yourself permission to sleep differently for a while
- hot milk or herbal tea may help you get to sleep: sleeping pills can be a temporary or occasional assist
- avoid stimulation (alcohol, coffee, television, exercise) prior to bedtime: take time to unwind with a bath, relaxation exercises, light reading, or gentle music
- use a pillow or stuffed animal for comfort, to hold or rest behind your back
- if unsuccessful getting to sleep or returning to sleep, after 30 minutes, get up and do something pleasant and relaxing for a short period





Changes in Relationships:

You may find that other people have changed the way they relate to you since the death. Your own needs and responses may have changed also. Your energy for and interest in social activities may be limited. Some suggestions for finding the support that you want are offered here.

- spend time with people who are comfortable and welcoming
- let people know what helps you (small groups, familiar people, quiet activities, etc.)
- Consider joining a support group for bereaved people

Dreams and Visitations:

Many people have vivid dreams about the person who died, or hear, see or feel their presence. Often this is comforting, but occasionally it is not. You may be shy to share these experiences with others, but it is important to believe that your experience is real.

Some bereaved people have these experiences, some people long for a sense of presence and do not have it. Some helpful strategies are listed below:

- if you are distressed about a dream or visitation, talk to a friend or family member, counsellor or spiritual advisor
- keep a journal or diary of your thoughts, dreams and experiences
- talk to a trusted friend or family member

Personal Effects:

Dealing with the personal belongings of the person who died can be very emotional. You may want to delay it because you do not have the energy, you are not up to the decisions, or you are comforted by the familiar presence. There is no particular time when this must be done, so do it when you feel ready. Doing it a bit at a time may make it manageable. Here are some helpful hints.

- ask for help from friends or family members
- sort things into categories: things to keep, things for family and friends, things for sale or charity, things to decide about later

Eating:

Your appetite and eating patterns are likely to change for a while; you may have no appetite or feel constantly hungry. Mealtimes can be difficult reminders of your loss. Food preparation, shopping, and nutritional meal planning may be new skills for you and may be things that highlight your loss. Here are some suggestions for dealing with nutrition and mealtimes.

- if eating alone is difficult, change where you eat or where you sit at the table, accept invitations to meals, have people in for take-out
- try to eat regular healthy meals; avoid snacking on 'junk food'
- use ready-made nutritionally-designed meals from the freezer or deli section; stock up on healthy snacks
- consider regular dinner/lunch dates with family or friends, i.e., the first Thursday or every Monday
- recreation and seniors centers often have cooking classes, sharing kitchens, etc.

