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If you have questions or you need help, please call Supportive Care, London Regional Cancer Program at 519-685-8622 and ask to speak to a Social Worker.

### Resources

*Pathways through Loss and Transition*, is a booklet available to help you understand your grief and help you on the journey. You can order this booklet at [www.thehealthline.ca/docs/pathways.pdf](http://www.thehealthline.ca/docs/pathways.pdf).

A bereavement resource directory, *Seasons of the Heart*, is also available from London Interfaith Counselling Centre of on the Internet at [www.licc.ca](http://www.licc.ca). It lists various supports available to people who are bereaved

This brochure is based on a pamphlet developed Parkwood Hospital.

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# When Grief Becomes Difficult



*The journey through loss and grief is painful. We need to go through the pain, not around it.*



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There are few things in life, which compares to the pain and loneliness we feel with the death of a loved one. We are often not prepared for the difficult work of grief.

Grief is an individual experience, unique to each person, the circumstances around death, and the relationship with the person who has died.

Often, when death is expected, people begin to grieve before the person dies. This is called anticipatory grieving. For more information, refer to the brochure "Anticipatory Grief" produced by the London Regional Cancer Program.

When death is less expected, grief often begins after the death of a loved one.

Either way the loss you feel can be painful and overwhelming. This is normal.

### **What is normal grief?**

The journey through grief is an ongoing process. You begin by accepting the loss of your loved one. After this acceptance, one needs to work through the pain of the loss. As time goes on, you begin to adjust to life where your loved one is no longer there and you begin to realize that life will go on, even though you may not yet see how. This is often the most difficult task as you adjust to life without the person who died.

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Grief is resolved when you feel able to remember your loved one with fondness and pleasure, able to recall good memories and to think about them without the same degree of emotional distress. You feel once again whole, although it is not the same as before.

There is no set timetable for resolving grief. As long as you are moving through it, it does not matter how long it takes. It is the process that counts.

### **What is complicated grief?**

For some people, the grieving experience is more difficult. They get "stuck" and do not complete the healing process. This is called complicated grief.

### **How will you know if you get "stuck"?**

There are some questions you can ask to see if you or the person you are supporting is "stuck" in complicated grief.

#### *Have you accepted that your loved one has died?*

Reflect back and see if the pain is getting less, not day-by-day or week-by-week, but over a period of months. Ask yourself if you are making progress. This can be as simple as noticing parts of a day where you feel better.

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If you are not making progress, if the pain is the same intensity, and you continually review the last few days of your loved one's life, you may be "stuck" and should consider seeking professional help.

#### *Are you "going on as if everything is fine?"*

If you have not worked through the grieving process and you have put your feelings "on hold," you may need help.

Many people "postpone" grief. Then when another major loss occurs, the person still has the pain of the previous loss to deal with. Grief is about letting go and saying goodbye.

#### *Are you unable to move on?*

Another sign of incomplete grieving is the inability to move on, not able to grow personally.

If you find you are still living as your loved one "would have wanted" or taking on some burdens you would rather be without, because you feel it would be disloyal, you may need help.

Grief is never easy – but it should gradually get less difficult.

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