

Grieving As A Family

From Victoria Hospice ~ Victoria, BC

Communication is the key to coping and growing as a family through grief. It is important to be together to talk, cry, rage, or even sit in silence. At the same time there should be respect for each member's way of handling his or her grief. Some family members will grieve privately, others openly, and others a combination of these two styles. In many ways each family member must grieve alone.

Here are some suggestions to help with family grief.

Expect that each family member will grieve in their own particular way and at their own pace. This may affect your ability to support one another.

- Even though you may be really focused on the death of one family member, remember that remaining family members continue to need your time, attention and love. Try to find a balance between what is missing and what is here.
- Try to be sensitive to each other's feelings. Feelings are often difficult to verbalize. Listen to what is meant as well as to what is said. Hugs, a hand on the arm or back gives comfort and a sense of closeness.
- It may be helpful to set aside time to be "alone together" as a family or to even hold a family meeting. Encourage but don't pressure family members to talk and express grief in their own way. Be careful not to give each other the silent treatment. Make sure the person who has died continues to be part of family conversations.
- Plan together for family projects or trips. A family diary or scrapbook in which each family member may contribute a writing or drawing can be a way to help you remember and talk about the family member who died.
- Remember, the life stages of family members affects how they deal with their grief. So too does their personality, life experiences and support systems.
- Discuss changes in family duties and roles for the survivors in the family. Don't expect another family member to replace or to be the same as the member who died. For example, expecting a young boy whose father died to be "man of the house" or a daughter whose sibling died to be the same in schoolwork and sports may complicate their grieving.
- Recognize that anniversaries, birthdays and special holidays may be difficult for your family. Talk together about what you want to do on these occasions.
- Remember, if grief or family problems feel overwhelming, seek professional help.