



GRIEVING WITHOUT ISOLATING YOURSELF

Actions and resources to help you through this difficult time

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The power of human connections in times of hardship

As we grow older, we often experience loss. Most of the time, adapting to grief is a gradual process. We acknowledge the loss, we endure the hardship, and we carry on, sometimes stronger than before.

Our ability to cope depends in part on our relationships with those around us:

- family, friends, neighbours
- neighbourhood amenities (shops, library, cultural centre, etc.)
- community organisations, cultural or religious associations.

Being able to rely on one or more people to confide in provides us with an emotional safety net. We can express our feelings, needs, fears, and difficulties to them in complete confidence and confidentiality.

For people who live alone or who do not have a strong support network, grief can exacerbate loneliness. Moreover, loneliness and isolation are detrimental to our well-being and health.

Grief, a common reality among people aged 65 and over

In 2024, 78,000 people died in Quebec. Among them, 88 per cent were women and 81 per cent were men aged 65 and over. With an increasingly ageing population, the number of deaths is expected to continue to rise each year.

Older people are therefore particularly at risk of experiencing bereavement, whether it be the loss of siblings, spouses, friends or neighbours. This reality, which is often left unspoken, is nevertheless part of everyday life for many older people.

Source: Institut de la Statistique du Québec (2025). *Quebec's demographic report*. statistique.quebec.ca/fr/fichier/bilan-demographique-quebec-edition-2025.pdf

LOSSES THAT MAY LEAD TO GRIEF

- The death of a loved one
- Retirement and the loss of the social role associated with work
- Decline in health and autonomy
- The death of a pet
- Moving to a new place and losing one's home and familiar surroundings
- No longer being able to drive and restrictions on freedom of movement
- The responsibilities of informal care

A FEW DEFINITIONS



Social connections encompass the various ways in which people connect and interact with one another.



Loneliness refers to the painful feeling resulting from a gap between desired and actual social connections.

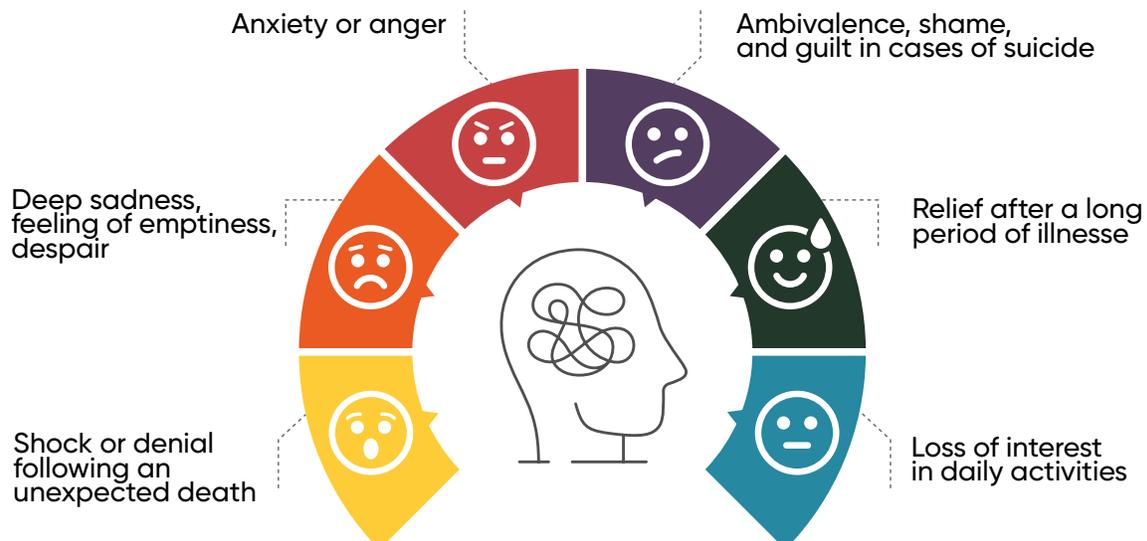


Social isolation refers to the objective absence of sufficient social connections in terms of both quantity and quality.

Source: World Health Organization (2025). *From loneliness to social connection: charting a path to healthier societies* https://cdn.who.int/media/docs/default-source/who-commission-on-social-connection/whocsc-plainlanguage-en_comp.pdf?sfvrsn=c5396dff_6&download=true

Grief, a process unique to each individual

Losing a loved one brings about a whole slew of emotions and reactions that can vary depending on the circumstances:



 Every person grieves in their own way, at their own pace, with their own emotions and reactions.

How we cope with grief depends on several factors:

Age

Personality traits

Education, living conditions

Identity: sex, gender, sexual orientation, culture, religion, migration status

History of mental health issues: depression, anxiety

Relationship with the deceased, circumstances of their death, and past experiences of bereavement

 There is no such thing as an 'ideal' grieving process. The key is not to isolate yourself.



Grieving increases the risk of loneliness or isolation

For older people, several phenomena associated with grieving can increase the risk of loneliness or isolation.

PHENOMENA	EXPLANATIONS
Reduction of our social network	Repeated deaths can cause or increase our feelings of loneliness.
Grief becoming increasingly difficult to cope with	A new grief often revives previous losses.
Fear of experiencing another loss	The fear of suffering another bereavement can hinder our desire to form new relationships.
The grieving process underestimated by our social network	The significance of grief is sometimes underestimated, which reduces the empathy and support of those around us.
Changes in our living conditions	Moving out, losing mobility, or having trouble maintaining certain friendships can reduce our social network.

The harmful effects of isolation

Maintaining relationships by participating in social activities is an important source of overall well-being. It is also a good way to maintain our physical, psychological and cognitive health.

Isolation is detrimental to health because it increases the risk of:

- premature death
- heart disease, stroke, diabetes
- neurocognitive disorders (e.g. Alzheimer's disease)
- depression, anxiety, suicidal thoughts.



How to avoid loneliness and isolation during mourning bereavement?

Grieving is a painful experience. However, we can get through this difficult time more easily by taking care of our health and avoiding isolation.

For example, we can:

- **Recognise and share our emotions** with someone we trust.
- **Maintain our social relationships** (family, friends, neighbours, organisations).
- **Taking care of our physical and mental health** (balanced diet, physical activity, meditation, relaxation therapy, group activities).
- **Expressing our grief through arts** (writing, painting, music, crafts).
- **Participate in social or volunteer activities** to regain a sense of belonging.
- **Make use of local resources** (senior citizens' associations, community centres, cultural or religious organisations).
- **Dare to forge new bonds...** even at 80! Whether friendship or love, these relationships bring comfort and vitality.

Source: McMaster Optimal Ageing Portal (2023) <https://www.mcmasteroptimalaging.org/blog/detail/blog/2023/07/26/interventions-to-address-grief-symptoms?sid=2fdccabc-a4c9-4ec7-b58b-6b5a9ca985e6&hl=approaches+to+all+eviate+bereavement>



Particular grieving situations

Certain circumstances surrounding death can make the grieving process more difficult for older people. For fear of being judged or misunderstood, they may hide their pain and isolate themselves. A supportive and attentive support network can make a real difference.

Grief experienced by a recent immigrant

Newly immigrated seniors already experience several losses: family, environment, language, social status, religious rituals, cultural references, etc. Adapting to a new country requires a great deal of energy and complicates the grieving process, especially if the funeral takes place in the country of origin.

Nevertheless, the migration journey enables some individuals to develop inner strengths that can help them through the grieving process.



Frequent challenges

- When someone in the country of origin dies, the bereaved person is sometimes unable to attend the funeral due to health issues, travel costs, responsibilities, etc. This absence can cause feelings of guilt, accompanied by a longer period of denial over the loss of the deceased person.
- When a death occurs in Quebec, the bereaved person is deprived of the support of their distant family. This person may face difficulties in carrying out the religious and funeral rites of their country of origin for legal or administrative reasons. The grieving process can then be prolonged when the bereaved person clings more to distant memories.



Advice on how to cope with grief

- Keep in touch with distant family members (text messages, emails, video calls, social media).
- Attend the funeral via videoconference, if possible.
- Keep a memento of the deceased person.
- Rely on friends or the host community.
- Organize a local commemorative ceremony.
- Consider fundraising to finance a trip to the country of origin.



Resource

<https://sherpa-recherche.com/wp-content/uploads/GUIDE-DEATH-AND-MOURNING-MIGRANTS.pdf>



Grieving the loss of a life partner for LGBTQ+ seniors

When their life partner dies, LGBTQ+ seniors (lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, trans or queer people, etc.) face additional challenges. Oftentimes, only a small circle of close friends and family is aware of their relationship, which increases the risk of them grieving in solitude. In addition to ageism, they must also cope with the discomfort that sometimes still exists among their loved ones and in society regarding sexual orientation. A warm and caring welcome can ease their fears about confiding in someone.



Frequent challenges

- The lack of understanding among healthcare workers who do not offer support to LGBTQ+ individuals in accompanying their partners at the end of life.
- The non-recognition of their grief and their "chosen family" (friends and other members of the LGBTQ+ community) by their family of origin.
- The risk of revealing one's sexual identity upon the death of one's life partner, which can lead to exclusion by respective families and friends.
- The legal or financial difficulties associated with their civil status not being legally recognized.

When grief is not acknowledged, it can create a feeling of invisibility. Older adults of the LGBTQ+ community who have experienced many years of discrimination may then feel that their relationships are still invalidated. This lack of empathy and support complicates the grieving process and leads to greater isolation.



Advice on how to cope with grief

- Rely on members of your 'chosen family'.
- Organize a special ceremony or ritual to share your grief with loved ones in the LGBTQ+ community.
- Continue to talk about your partner to honour their memory.
- Seek specialized support services, if necessary.



Resources

- <https://interligne.co/en/about-us>
- <https://aboutgrief.ca/topics/grief-and-people-who-identify-as-2slgbtq/>



The death of a pet

The grief felt at the death of a pet is often poorly understood or misunderstood by the pet owner's friends and family. This situation minimises the depth of grief experienced and deprives these individuals of the support they need.

And yet, this grief can be as painful as the death of a loved one. This is particularly true for older people living alone. The emotional bond formed with one's pet proves to be very powerful due to the pet's unconditional acceptance of its owner.



Frequent challenges

- The void left by the passing of an animal that often shared their daily life for several years and was a source of comfort in difficult times.
- The absence of the animal results in the loss of the physical and psychological benefits associated with daily care, such as walking or feeling useful.
- The lack of recognition that the loss of a pet can be as devastating as the death of a loved one.
- Withdrawal, when the bereaved person avoids contact with those around them for fear that their grief will be minimised. This can complicate the grieving process by limiting, among other things, the expression of one's feelings.



Advice on how to cope with grief

- Talk to the vet about your feelings following the death of your pet.
- Surround yourself with understanding people.
- Recognize and express your grief, take time to mourn.
- Paying tribute to the animal (funeral, photo album, ceremony).
- If the distress persists, seek help.



Resources

- <https://pettrust.ca/pet-loss-support>
- <https://vcacanada.com/vetstogo/paws-to-rest/grief-support>

When to seek help?

One in five bereaved individuals may experience significant distress that persists over time. This is referred to as **prolonged grief disorder**. This happens especially when death occurs violently or in a traumatic context such as a pandemic.

Even if we have personal resources, we sometimes need to **seek professional help**. It is essential to be aware of the warning signs: if you remain concerned, do not hesitate to seek help.

WARNING SIGNS OF PROLONGED GRIEF

It is perfectly normal to experience some disturbances during the grieving process. It is a cause for concern, however, when symptoms are numerous and persistent. Here are a few examples:

- Absence of emotion, as if nothing had happened
- Persistent problems with sleep or appetite
- Significant signs of fatigue or exhaustion
- Difficulty concentrating or making decisions
- Marked decline in interest in things one used to enjoy doing
- Increased consumption of alcohol, drugs, medicines or other substances
- Difficulty functioning in different roles (family, work, leisure)
- Isolating oneself from loved ones
- Intense suffering that persists or leads to suicidal thoughts.

Source : MSSS (2023). <https://www.quebec.ca/en/family-and-support-for-individuals/death/better-cope-with-grief/seek-help-go-through-grief>

 **Don't hesitate to ask for help to get through this difficult time.**

Words from bereaved elders



Staying true to yourself during the grieving process | Susan, 72

After accompanying her husband Richard through palliative care, Susan went through her mourning process methodically and with dignity. With her wealth of experience, she handled the administrative procedures, sorting through personal belongings and selling the house. These concrete actions brought her comfort and a sense of balance. Playing piano, singing and travelling have been a source of well-being. Without feeling the need to confide in anyone, she found her own path to recovery. Today, she is embracing a new relationship with Simon, while still keeping a special place in her heart for Richard.

Healthy solitude | Antonio, 83

Antonio is mourning the loss of his partner, Alexandra, with whom he shared 32 years of his life. He describes a deep pain, but also one filled with love. His harrowing loneliness has gradually become a space for reflection and personal growth. Inspired by a song by Moustaki, he learns to see solitude as a presence within oneself. For him, it is an opportunity to get to know himself better, to think differently and to forge new bonds.



Resources to help cope with grief

Free resources, in one's neighbourhood or online, can offer valuable support. If this is not sufficient, it is helpful to consult with your family doctor or other health and social services professionals. Specialized bereavement resources are also available if required.

IN THE COMMUNITY

Bereavement support groups: Sharing similar experiences helps reduce isolation and fosters a sense of community.

- **Grief Helplines:** 1 888 533-3845, <https://tel-ecoute.org/services-pour-les-endeuilles>
- **Online modules:** Canadian Virtual Hospice (16 modules designed by specialists and people who "have been there"), <https://mygrief.ca>

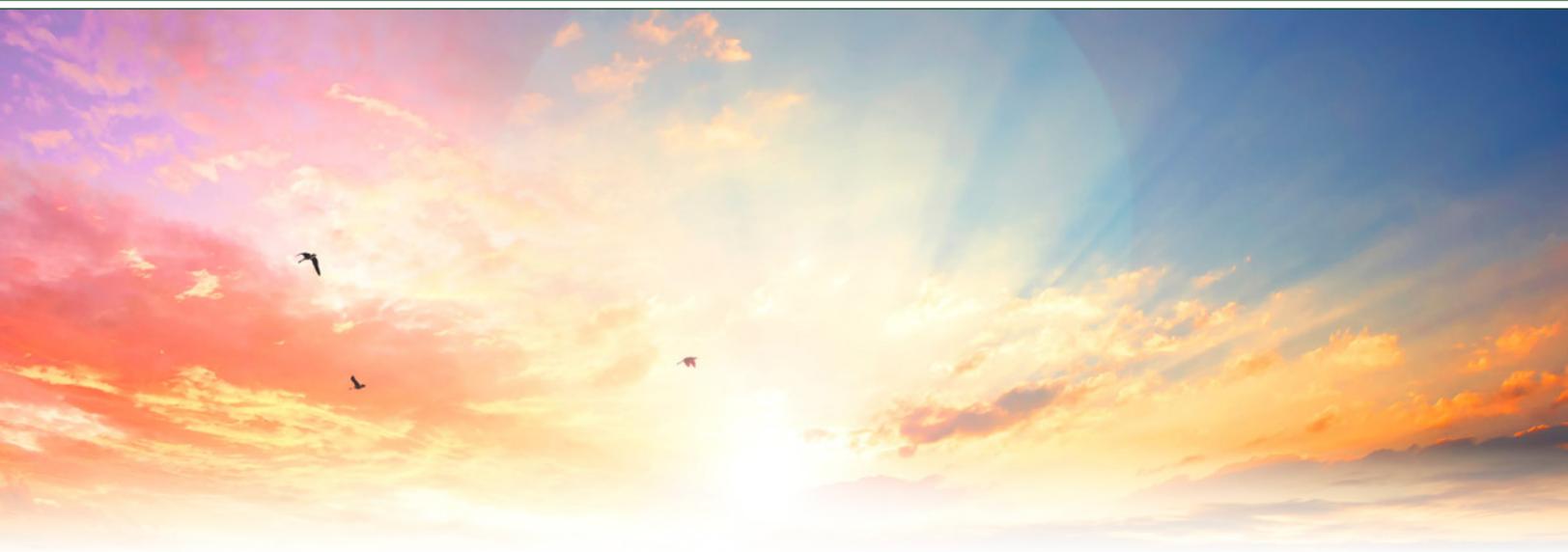
PRIMARY CARE

Consult a health and social services professional at a CLSC, GMF or medical clinic if grief is causing significant sleep, appetite or mood disturbances.

SPECIALIZED SERVICES

Seek specialized professional help if grief becomes overwhelming or persistent, which is known as complicated grief. Mental health support can help you through the grieving process.

- **Infodeuil:** <https://infodeuil.ca>
- **Ordre des psychologues du Québec:** <https://www.ordrepsy.qc.ca>
- **Fondation PalliAmi:** Free appointments with volunteers trained in grief counselling – (514) 413-8777, poste 127434, palliami.org/suivi-de-deuil
- **Institut Alpha:** Psychotherapeutic services for traumatic grief (514) 332-1600, <https://www.institutalpha.com>
- **Fondation Monbourquette:** Directories of support resources for bereaved individuals, Montreal, South Shore and North Shore: <https://www.fondationmonbourquette.com/ressources>
Elsewhere in Quebec: <https://www.maisonmonbourquette.com/bottin-des-ressources-1>
- If you are having suicidal thoughts: Call 1 866 APPELLE (1 866 277-3553) or text 535353, <https://suicide.ca/en>



Grief, an experience that can sometimes be enriching

Experiencing grief means going through a period of suffering, but also of transformation. Despite the challenges, this experience can offer us an opportunity to re-evaluate our priorities and find new meaning in our lives.

▶ KEY POINTS ABOUT THE GRIEVING PROCESS

- All losses deserve to be acknowledged, regardless of their nature.
- With age, losses generally become more frequent. Grief is therefore an integral part of our life journey.
- Grief can affect every aspect of our lives: our bodies, our thoughts, our behaviour, our relationships, our emotions and even our spirituality.
- Every grief is unique. There is no «ideal» way to experience it. Emotions, phases, and coping strategies vary from person to person... and from one loss to another.
- Grieving is neither quick nor linear. It is therefore perfectly normal to alternate between moments of sadness and periods when feeling better.
- Grief can accentuate loneliness and isolation. A person who is already isolated may find grief even more difficult to cope with.
- Grieving is an inevitable process. You have to give yourself time to go through it, without isolating yourself.
- Most mourned people adapt over time, and some even find it an opportunity for personal growth.
- One in five people experience complicated grief, which persists over time and requires increased support.
- Several support resources are available in various forms and can be consulted as needed.

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