


# Grief and the Winter Blues



Winters in Canada are long and can be difficult for anyone, especially in the midst of your grief. When the weather is cold and grey, it can leave us wanting to stay in bed and pull the covers up over our head. For those who are grieving, there can often be an added layer of malaise and hopelessness, leaving us feeling exhausted and inclined to withdraw from the world.

## HOW CAN YOU LESSEN THE WINTER BLUES?

Taking care of yourself, being active, and staying connected with caring people, are key to keeping up your emotional, physical and mental strength. The following is a list of ideas on how to take care of yourself and minimize those winter blues.

- **Plan ahead.** Some blues are normal this time of year. To help remind you of those future spring days, take time to make a list of activities and plans for spring and summer, or mark the first day of spring on the calendar and start a countdown.
  - **Stay Connected.** When we sink into the blues, it's tempting to hibernate and stop answering the phone, door, and emails. However, these are the very ways that the people who care about us try to reach out. It's okay to say no to invites, but it's important for our well-being that we say yes sometimes too.
  - **Make healthy choices.** The key to sustaining your energy levels is moderation, a healthy diet, and staying hydrated. Sticking to healthy foods can be difficult during the winter months when we're spending more time inside, so if snacking is too tempting, try keeping fewer treats in the house.
  - **Get regular sleep.** This is when the body heals itself and the mind sorts through all the information taken in during the day. However, sleep can be difficult for those who are grieving. Try the following:
    - Engage in regular physical exercise
    - Reduce screen time before bed
    - Limit caffeine and alcohol intake
    - Try a relaxing activity, like a bath
- If you've tried these and still can't sleep, it may be time to talk to your family doctor. Prolonged lack of sleep wears down our immune system and makes us prone to illness and depression.
- **Go outside.** It's hard to put on all the layers and go out in the cold, but nature and the outdoors can be so helpful for improving mental and physical wellbeing. Fresh air and oxygen is good for the lungs and mind, and a brisk walk can help ease body tension, aches and pains. Wooded trails offer a calming connection to the earth, and solace from the mad rush of daily life, while seeing neighbours can also be helpful in reducing feelings of isolation.
  - **Try a new activity.** Whether it is taking up a new craft or joining a class, learning something new can help the bereaved to re-engage in the world and begin a new chapter of life. Don't know where to start? Meetup is a free social group search site to help find activities in your area. [www.meetup.com](http://www.meetup.com)
  - **Make social plans** with friends and/or family and put it in the calendar. Knowing that there is a social activity to look forward to can help prevent us from sinking into isolation.

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- **Engage in Mindful Meditation.** It can be easy to forget how helpful deep breathing and taking a mental time-out can be, especially when we are bombarded with demands on our time and energy. Several deep breaths a few times a day can help us become centered when we feel pulled in many different directions. For grieving parents of young children, this may mean locking yourself in the bathroom for just a few minutes of peace and time to breathe! Try the 4-4-4-4 technique (breathe in deeply for 4 seconds, hold for 4, let it out slowly for 4, pause for 4, repeat).
- **Engage in Mindful Distraction.** Sometimes a place, object, or smell can suddenly remind us of the person who died (grief triggers) and bring us down on a good day. While it's healthy to let yourself feel the difficult emotions of grief, it's also important to find ways to distract yourself from it. Take some time to think about the activities which help you turn off the difficult thoughts and reminders (texting a friend, listening to upbeat music, playing a short video game, cuddling your child or pet) and practice doing these activities when sad memories become unwelcome.

Sometimes the blues can turn into depression. Signs of depression include:

- Difficulty getting adequate sleep
- Significant weight gain/loss
- Isolating oneself from family and friends for an extended period of time
- Frequent or excessive alcohol/drug use

If you or someone you know is struggling with daily functioning, or are participating in activities that are risky and unsafe, it may be time to speak with someone to help you cope with the difficult and painful process of grieving. If you have had thoughts of suicide and want to talk to someone, help is available.

**Canada Suicide Prevention Service**  
**1 833-456-4566 (in Quebec 1-866-277-3553)**  
**[www.crisisservicescanada.ca](http://www.crisisservicescanada.ca)**

**If you are in immediate danger of harming yourself, call 911.**

Prepared by Lighthouse for Grieving Children and Families

