

Self-Care for the Bereavement Caregiver

When a child or youth has experienced a death loss, there is a natural ripple effect to the family and community members surrounding them. Bereavement caregivers may be particularly at risk for being impacted by transference of the grief experienced by the bereaved. Such caregivers include, but are not limited to, health professionals, social workers, teachers and school child and youth counsellors, neighbours and family friends. For anyone providing bereavement care to a grieving child, youth or their parent, it is important to recognize the potential impacts of being a bereavement care provider.

THE FOLLOWING ARE SOME WAYS TO ENSURE SELF-AWARENESS AND SELF-CARE:

Get in touch with your own reactions and grief. For anyone who has experienced a significant death loss, there is the possibility that a child or youth's loss can trigger one's own grief. Accepting that this is a normal reaction can help us separate our own grief from the child or youth's grief.



Check your personal barometer. Exhausted from busy family events? Feeling extra stressed or distracted by today's to-do list? Paying attention to our own energy level helps us re-energize before meeting with a grieving child. Perhaps a refreshing drink or brief walk and fresh air are in order.



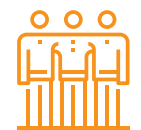
NATO: No Attachment to the Outcome. As much as we would like to remove the pain of a child or youths loss, this is not possible. Let go of high expectations of yourself to affect change in the family. The best you can do is focus on being present and companion the child, teen and their parent.



Go easy on yourself. As a bereavement caregiver, feeling the pain and loss of the grieving child or teen is a normal and natural reaction. It is just important to find ways to release these feelings.



Debrief with people you trust. While it is important not to share confidential details, debriefing with colleagues or friends about how a session with a family has affected you mentally and emotionally helps let it go. Receiving support is just as important as giving it.



Strive for work life balance. Providing care for grieving children and youth is important work. However, it should never be all encompassing. Life affirming activities are key to keeping a sense of balance when providing bereavement care. Feeding your mental, spiritual and physical self keeps you strong and vibrant, which benefits you as well as the families.



Never apologize for needing a break. Sometimes our personal situations and the stress of our work affect our ability to provide quality bereavement care. This is a normal reaction, not an inadequacy. Better to step aside to have someone else play this role than to continue when not feeling able to be truly present for a child or teen.

