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Bereavement Services

*Heartbreak is an invisible affliction. No limp comes with it,
no evident scar. No sticker is issued that guarantees
good parking or easy access. The heart is broken all the same.*

Thomas Lynch, *The Undertaking*

Secondary Losses

After our loved one dies, many other unexpected losses might begin to appear as well. In addition to the obvious and overwhelming loss of our loved one, these secondary losses add to our burden of grief and help explain why the path to healing can be a long process. Though not everyone will struggle with the same secondary losses, these are some of the additional losses you might experience:

Loss of Identity/Roles: Part of who we are includes what we did with and for the other person. A special part of us was given to our loved one, and this part is gone now as well. If your mate died, you are no longer part of a couple, and you might struggle with losing your standing in society or the new lifestyle you are suddenly forced to live. If your child died, you might question whether or not you're still a parent. Your underlying question might be, "Who am I now?"

Loss of Self-Confidence: It is not unusual to be filled with doubt and feelings of inadequacy following the death of a loved one. You might feel as if you don't know how to do anything right, and question everything you thought you knew. Where you once felt self-assured and competent, you might now find yourself lacking confidence and unable to make even the simplest decisions. It is easy to lose sight of our strengths and the coping skills that have helped sustain us in hard times.

Loss of Family Structure: A family is forever changed by the death of one of its members. Some may welcome another family member taking on the tasks of the one who died, others might struggle with this. If the person who died was "the glue" in the family, his or her death might result in the disintegration of the family unit.

Loss of Financial Security: Overnight, we can find ourselves with financial hardship unlike anything we have ever known. Two incomes become one, and we might be at risk of losing our home, housing, or transportation. We might uncover debt we didn't know about, or discover the life insurance we thought was there, doesn't really exist.

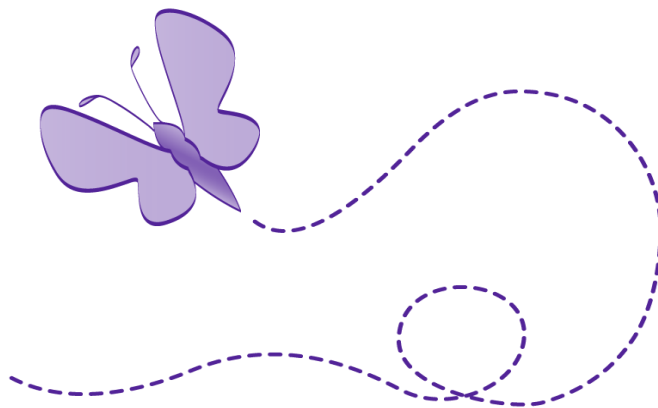
Loss of Intimacy: If the one who died was a spouse or partner, you might experience the loss of sexual and physical intimacy, yearning to be touched or held. Touch is a human need, and its loss is profound.

Loss of Feeling Safe: In grief, we might suddenly find ourselves feeling frightened to be alone in the home we always felt safe in when our loved one was alive. We might be fearful of tasks and challenges we once faced together with ease. Our own mortality might be in front of us in a way it has never been before, as well as the fear that our future will be as painful as our present.

Loss of Motivation and Meaning: The things we once loved to do might now seem meaningless, void of any joy. The simplest task might now be too much to accomplish, and we might wonder, “What is happening to me?”

Loss of Dreams: Our plans, hopes and dreams for a future together come to an end when our loved one dies. We mourn the loss of these dreams, sometimes wondering if we will ever dare to dream again, to ever trust or love again.

If you find yourself struggling with any of these secondary losses (or others that are not listed here) know that you are not alone, and there is nothing “wrong” with you. This is what normal grief looks like. As I begin, little by little, to come to terms with the day-to-day experience of my loss, I may feel overwhelmed with a confusing mix of varied and sometimes opposing emotions. Hearing a wonderful story about how much my loved one loved me, I might initially feel happy and comforted, but as soon as I feel that, I might also feel deep sadness for what I have lost. All of these feelings are part of the normal grieving process. Whether in a support group setting, with a friend or clergy, or through journaling or another art form, allowing and expressing your grief is your most powerful tool for healing.



Hospice of Southern Maine is grateful to have been able to provide care to your loved one and your family. As your healing journey continues, we hope you won't hesitate to contact us if you would like further information or support.

(207) 289-3640

or visit our website at www.hospiceofsouthernmaine.org

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