Sometimes, the bereaved partner is faced with deciding whether to ‘come out’ just as they are trying to cope with the loss. If you find yourself in this situation, talk it over with someone you trust. If the people you normally turn to for support and advice cannot offer you what you need, consider reaching out to support available in the community.

If you are struggling with grief, consider getting support from a certified counsellor, your medical doctor, a community organization, or a helpline.

What may help:
- Getting back into a routine.
- Physical exercise – even a 10-minute walk every day.
- Choose your support wisely. This is your grief and you know best how to express it.
- Remind yourself of what your partner brought to your life and remember that death ends a life, not a relationship.
- Know that with care, support and understanding, you can learn to adapt to this loss.

What doesn’t help:
Try not to use alcohol, drugs, or sleeping pills as ways of coping. While they may provide temporary relief, they are not a long-term solution. Talk to your doctor if you are having trouble sleeping or if you are struggling in your daily life.

For more information about grief support services on the North Shore, please contact:
Every Day Counts Program
everydaycounts@vch.ca
604-363-0961
everydaycounts.ca

Prepared by the North Shore Palliative & Supportive Care Program
604-984-3743

Coping with the Death of Your 2SLGBTQIA+ Partner

For more copies, go online at vch.eduhealth.ca or email phem@vch.ca and quote Catalogue No. GV.250.C672
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The information in this document is intended solely for the person to whom it was given by the health care team.
The death of your partner is one of the biggest losses you can face in life. How you deal with this loss and how you grieve will depend on many things, including:

- whether your partner’s death was sudden;
- whether you were ‘out’ to friends and family;
- what support you have available; and, most importantly,
- whether, over time, you can make sense of what has happened and begin to live your life again.

A major loss is not something you “get over”, but learning to adapt to this life event is one of the key factors in coping with a partner’s death. Adapting to life without your partner is a process and it takes time.

**Experiencing Grief**

As you grieve, you may experience many different emotions. At first, you might feel numbed and shocked – even if the death was expected. Later, you may feel angry that your life has changed so much or completely overcome with sadness at the unfairness of it all.

Thinking about bereavement in stages may help you to understand what you are experiencing, but don’t expect your grief to follow any set course. This is your journey. There is no right way to make this journey and no right amount of time it should take.

“When Jack died I felt like my heart would break, nobody knew what he meant to me.”

John, 51

The final destination on the grief journey, in terms of adapting and coping, is the most important one. This is where you can make sense of the death.

This may be because you can say ‘I am glad my partner is no longer suffering’ or you might find comfort through your spiritual beliefs.

Your biggest day-to-day challenge may be trying to deal with the loneliness following the loss of your close relationship. If other people don’t understand how deep your feelings were for your partner, they may say or do things that seem harsh or insensitive.

It is important to remember:

- What your partner and relationship meant to you
- Being with your partner has helped to make you the person you are and how you view the world
- Your partner will remain important in your life even after their death

The death of your partner is not just about the loss of their physical presence. It also means the loss of a companion, soul mate, and lover. There might be practical things too that your partner did that you miss. For instance, they might have paid the bills, done the cooking, sent the holiday cards, and so on.

Sometimes these losses don’t hit home for some time after the death, so it is important that you continue to have good support in the years after the death. Loss is not something you get over; it is something you learn to live with.

All relationships have their ups and downs and you may get stuck in the ‘if onlys’ when your partner dies.

Grief is a natural reaction to a major loss and many bereaved partners find their way through their grief with a support system.

It can sometimes be hard to know how families will react to the loss. Some families may have found it difficult to understand and support your relationship, but they understand the human feelings of loss and can offer support to the person left behind.

In other cases, families may withdraw their support after the death (perhaps due to a lack of understanding) and you may be left feeling that your loss is not as legitimate as that of someone in a heterosexual relationship. This is sometimes called ‘disenfranchised grief’ and is experienced by some people in 2SLGBTQIA+ relationships who have lost their partner.

There may also be disagreements about last wishes, property, and belongings, which can add to the burden and isolation of the surviving partner.