

Bereavement Support Group Guidelines Virtual Format

The following guidelines will aid bereavement group members in transitioning to the virtual format. Our aim is to provide a supportive environment for those experiencing grief as a result of the death of a loved one, while also practicing safe physical distancing amidst COVID-19 concerns.

Our facilitators may remind you of these guidelines during group as they are in place to create a safe environment for all those in attendance.

- If you are unable to join within the first 15 minutes (between 10:00am and 10:15am, please refrain from joining at all as a late entry can be disruptive to the group).
- Ensure all technology (audio/video/camera/Wi-Fi) is working for the duration of the group.
- Plug in your device (or make sure it is at full charge) so you do not run out of power during the group.
- Find a quiet space to participate to reduce distractions and preserve privacy (preferably a room with a closed door if you share your household with others).
- Using headphones with your device can also help preserve privacy and enhance the sound quality for all in the group.
- Close other programs/apps and windows on your device to minimize disruptions.
- Make sure your cell phone is on silent.
- Please try to remain engaged and avoid multitasking during the group (i.e. drinking coffee is okay, but anything more can be distracting to others).
- Refrain from interrupting other people when they are speaking (the facilitators will make sure everyone has had a chance to share).
- Be mindful that some group members may have a lag with their audio/video depending on their internet connection.
- Confidentiality requirements and expectations remain the same. What is shared in group, stays in group.
- Changing your view in Google Meet: Select the 3 dots in the lower right corner of your screen. Select “Change Layout.” Choose between Sidebar, Spotlight, or Tiled. “Tiled” allows you to see everyone equally.

In addition to the above guidelines specific to the virtual format, please review the following guidelines that Hospice Halifax has in place for its bereavement support programs.

- **Be on time:**
 - Minimize disruptions by arriving on time and setting cell phones to silent/vibrate if possible.

- **Group participants:**
 - No one under the age of 18 is permitted to participate in the support group.

- **Confidentiality:**
 - While participating in a virtual group, we ask that you ensure you are in a private space where the conversation cannot be heard by others. The best way to ensure use headphones, so that you are the only person who can hear the audio from the meeting.
 - While we ask that all facilitators and participants join the meeting from a quiet, private spot, we recognize that there are factors beyond our control, and cannot guarantee that everyone adheres to these guidelines.
 - What occurs in the group is strictly confidential. Do not use names of fellow group members in discussions outside the group at any time. However, you may wish to share with family and friends some of the general topics that were discussed (i.e. coping with special days, relationships to other family members etc.) and that is fine as long as you don't use any identifying information. (See below for exceptions to confidentiality.)

- **Participation is encouraged, not forced:**
 - We recognize that some group members may find it difficult to share. Everyone benefits from the group experience in their own way. If you choose to listen without sharing, **just say pass** and everyone will respect your choice.

- **Be respectful of differences:**
 - People differ in how they respond to death and grief, and everyone's unique experiences and feelings are valued in the group. We ask you to try to speak only for yourself and avoid giving advice or making generalizations (i.e. use "I" statements, I think/feel/believe...). Please refrain from using offensive language and speak in a way that is respectful to other group members. Discriminatory comments will not be tolerated.

- **Share time equally – silence is okay:**
 - Please be mindful of allowing everyone an opportunity to speak. Facilitators may intervene in discussions to ensure this happens. Sometimes silence can be useful in allowing members time to gather their thoughts and feelings.

- **Facilitator's role:**
 - The facilitators work to create a container in which to hold all of your stories. Sometimes, their job is to maintain structure by posing questions to the group, redirecting conversations, as well as intervening when group guidelines are not being followed. The bereavement group is intended to provide support, rather than counselling.

- **Confidentiality exceptions:**
 - All Hospice Halifax volunteers have signed a confidentiality agreement. However, there are exceptions to the confidentiality policy:
 - a) If a person has reasonable grounds to suspect that a child, under the age of nineteen, is or may be at risk of abuse, neglect, or harm and the person must report the information to Child Protection Services (Child & Family Services Act, Duty to Report).
 - b) If a person suspects that a group member may be in danger of seriously harming themselves, or others, the person may seek advice or consultation that could result in breaching the confidentiality of a member. This could include alerting the authorities.
 - c) If called upon (subpoenaed) to testify in court.