

## Support

- When we are grieving we might feel that we are to blame for our loved ones being sick, or that we are being punished. No-one knows why they became ill; it is not anyone's fault
- When we are grieving there are people who will help take care of things and who will be there for us with compassion and kindness, because grieving is hard work
- At some point the grieving will get easier, but the grieving process is a difficult one
- We are all on our own journey; we can depend on each other and use our spiritual beliefs as tools to help us

## In Your Community

For more information about palliative care, talk to your health care provider (e.g. doctor, specialist, or nurse) or community health worker (e.g. home support worker).

Your health care provider or community health worker can also provide more resources with information and support, including information from Cancer Care Ontario and the Canadian Cancer Society.



# Teachings to Support Grief and Loss



## We Are Not Alone

“Palliative care” is not a common term in First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities. Palliative care is comfort care. It makes a person as comfortable as possible when they have an illness that is unlikely to be cured, and it can also support their family throughout this time.

For those who have been diagnosed with a terminal illness it might come as a shock to realize that nothing more can be done to cure the illness. People often react with disbelief and do not want to upset their families by telling them.

Experiencing grief and loss is very painful. Some of our beliefs and perspectives as First Nations, Inuit and Métis might be helpful and comforting at this time.

Many of us share a belief in the Creator or God, and we recognize the Creator in our prayers and ceremonies. We have a spiritual connection to the Creator and our Elders remind us that we are connected to the land and related to all of the living beings around us.

## Our Beliefs

From a traditional Anishinaabe view, the Elders talk about how everything is interconnected; one symbol of this is the medicine wheel. They tell us that we are spiritual beings who come into this world. Our life begins in the eastern door and we journey to the west. As a person passes, they will walk through the western door and return to the spirit world. Dying is a sacred and natural part of life’s journey; it is the final stage of our life when our spirit returns to the Creator.

Mushkegowuk people as original inhabitants of the land traditionally value harmony, and respect and honour the teachings our Elders and ancestors have shared.

The Haudenosaunee traditionally believe in being of good mind and honouring the cycles of life represented by the circle, which is a symbol of unity and strength. When someone passes, their spirit leaves the body and rises to the sky world. There is a shared responsibility for comforting each other in times of loss as well as for celebrating life.

The Inuit have a traditional practice where a newborn child is given the name of a relative or community member who has recently passed on, connecting the families. This practice helps the community healing process and the celebration of life.

For the Métis, the land sustains the spirits and lives of the people. Death is seen as a spiritual rite of passage that respects the beliefs and values of the individual and their family.

The Christian faith has a strong presence in many First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities and can be a source of comfort.

## Respect

For those who are terminally ill, or for their caregivers, it may be hard to cope with your feelings. It might help to know:

- When someone is terminally ill they often want to spend their remaining time at home with family close by
- It has been part of our culture as Aboriginal Peoples to look after our own throughout life, from birth to the time of dying. This can be done at home with the right support and equipment, or we can support our loved ones in the hospital or hospice
- The person who is terminally ill may want to have time with an Elder, a healer, a priest or a minister, depending on their beliefs. Any of these people can offer spiritual support and ceremonies for the person and the family, depending on their wishes
- For the person who is terminally ill, the love and support of those around them can help them to find healing and forgiveness in their life, and share final messages or make memories to leave behind
- When the time comes for our loved ones to pass, we can remember that they are more than their physical body; their spirit will be free
- When we lose someone we need time to let go of our loved one and to grieve on all levels. There is great support when we are surrounded by our family, our community and our beliefs and customs