



## **Volunteer Handbook**

## Forward

The first version of this manual was born in 2011 in Southeast Asia and edited by Bereaved Families Ontario-Toronto (BFO) giants.

With much admiration and gratitude, I thank Aruna Ogale, a former Executive Director, Sarah Garcia, a former Program Coordinator, Jacqueline Menagh, a former Program Coordinator, Margaret McGovern, a past BFO Executive Director, Stephen Flemming, a consultant for BFO, David Wright, a consultant for BFO, and Chris Leonard and Yvette Perrault, BFO training leaders, for their contribution and support.

May you find the information engaging and helpful in your role at Bereaved Families Ontario-Toronto.

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## Bereaved Families Ontario - Toronto

### 1.1 Mandate

#### Mission Statement

Bereaved Families Ontario-Toronto (BFO) is a volunteer based bereavement support organization that provides programs and services based on a mutual support model to individuals, families, groups and communities throughout the City of Toronto.

#### Our Beliefs

We honour and respect that family, social, cultural, faith and life experiences affect how people grieve. Whether a loved one died from an illness, accident, murder or suicide, we believe that:

- The deep grief an individual or family experiences following a death is normal
- Grief is a unique experience for every person
- Everyone carries within oneself the capacity to heal
- Critical to the healing process is an emotionally safe space in which to begin and continue to grieve

#### Our Values

We are a community of people who value:

1. **Compassion:** Authentically relating to one another with care, empathy, openness and acceptance
2. **Mutual Support:** Providing support for one another in a confidential, safe, and nurturing environment. Often, no one can understand the bereaved like another bereaved person
3. **Understanding:** Respecting that while there are common threads that weave themselves among the bereaved, every person learns to live with grief in their own way
4. **Diversity:** Celebrating and embracing the richness of unique and diverse life experiences. Our work is framed within a context of equity and inclusion
5. **Integrity:** Creating a safe space in which to grieve, through honesty and transparency  
Our organization must be built on a foundation of mutual trust
6. **Relationships:** Building and sustaining mutually supportive connections with members, volunteers, donors and community partners

#### Organizational Goals Statement

In order to provide support and to continuously strive to increase our effectiveness, BFO adheres to these goals:

- To be a community leader in the provision of mutual support bereavement services
- To increase awareness among service users and the public on issues related to grief and bereavement
- To be welcoming and accessible as many diverse communities as possible in Toronto
- To build integrated services and mutually beneficial strategic partnerships
- To be an organization where learning, innovation and community are fostered
- To connect individuals, families and communities to the organization in a vital, mutually supportive way that responds to their unique needs

## Our Program Goals

We aim to assist people in learning to live with the “new normal” of their life following a death by:

- Providing a safe space in which to explore grief in whatever ways that works best for the person
- Reducing the isolation of bereaved people by facilitating connections with other bereaved people
- Normalizing the grief experience
- Nurturing the resiliency of people to identify their own inner resources and coping strategies

## 1.2 History

In 1977, John McKibbon, part of the chaplaincy department of the Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto, whose own daughter had died of leukemia, initiated a parental bereavement support program. Margaret Darte, Marilyn Lee, Diane Oakes Foster and Irene Clarfield were participants in this program. As a result of their experience these four women became involved in the development of a bereavement support program and founded Bereaved Families of Ontario.

The purpose of BFO was to create a caring and non-judgmental environment where bereaved parents could support other bereaved parents towards a better understanding of their journey of grief.

At its inception support programs were provided both in Toronto and in the Oakville area. While the original mission of the organization was to provide support to mothers, fathers and siblings who had experienced the death of a child in the family, the mandate was soon expanded to include supporting children, adolescents and young adults who had lost a parent. In addition, a program was initiated which recognized the special circumstances around supporting parents who had experienced a miscarriage, stillbirth or newborn/infant loss.

In 1988, the Metropolitan Toronto chapter of Bereaved Families was formed. Over time, eleven other affiliates have also formed throughout Ontario to meet the needs of bereaved individuals in their communities.

## 1.3 BFO's Mutual Support Process

BFO offers peer led mutual support programs for individuals to begin to work through their experience of grief. BFO volunteers are bereaved, familiar with the journey of “learning to live” with grief, and emotionally ready to support others. What propels the agency forward is our shared sense of loss and empathy for the grief experience. With the grief experience as our

connection point, combined with education and training, BFO can reach out to the community to offer support and model hope to the newly bereaved.

The aim of a mutual support program is to provide emotional support. For that reason, BFO's process is designed to give bereaved individuals a nonjudgmental, compassionate space to express their grief, explore their "new normal" life, and connect with other bereaved members. The groups are led by two volunteer facilitators, and organized by age and type of loss. The role of volunteers is vital to the success and continuity of the mutual support programs. With the support and guidance of professional advisors and staff, volunteer facilitators create a safe atmosphere for group members to talk about the person who died and how the death impacts their lives.

Our hope is that group members will mutually share and receive encouragement, information, and emotional support. The BFO community works to facilitate connections among bereaved members, nurturing the strength and resiliency of its members. While grief is a unique and individual process, hope, health, and healing are generated knowing we are not alone.

## 1.4 Current Programs

### **One-to-One Meetings:**

One-to-One meetings are available for service users who are eligible for a Closed Eight-Week Group. This session allows service users to receive immediate support by offering a safe place to share their stories with a trained bereaved volunteer.

### **Closed Eight-Week Mutual Support Groups**

Mutual Support Groups at BFO are small, closed-membership groups of 8-12 people who have experienced similar losses. Two bereaved volunteers facilitate each group. Generally groups meet once a week for two-hour sessions. These groups are for:

- **Parent group:** parents who have lost a young or adult child
- **Young Adult Group:** young adults 18-29 who have experienced the death of a parent/caregiver or sibling
- **Spousal Group:** Adults who have experienced the death of a spouse/partner
- **Family and Friend Loss Group:** Adults 30+ who have lost a parent, sibling or close or chosen family member

## 1.5 Volunteer Roles

### **General expectations and responsibilities of BFO to volunteers**

- Provides initial volunteer training, and ongoing skill development opportunities.
- Police reference check
- Provides volunteer support by staff and professional volunteers
- Provides safe and comfortable environment

**General expectations and responsibilities of volunteers**

- Facilitates BFO groups and one-to-one meetings, with the support and supervision of staff and professional advisors
- Completes BFO training and police reference check
- Participates in BFO workshops and opportunities for growth
- Commits to being available for at least one group a year
- Responds to staff requests for one-to-one meetings
- Stays in active communication with staff
- Practices self care, self reflection, and self monitoring
- Commitment to one's own grief work – modeling ongoing “grief work” over time

**Group facilitation**

- Create and maintain a safe space for the group
- Manages the flow of conversation, providing all members an opportunity to participate in discussions
- Maintains the group focus and structure with flexibility
- Role models appropriate group behaviour
- Uses active listening skills to stimulate group discussion
- Ensures BFO guidelines are followed: Group members must maintain confidentiality and respect diversity in the shared space
- Encourages members to continue defining their own feelings and ideas
- Assists the group in making decisions
- Attends all sessions, checking-in and out with group
- Ensures that all BFO forms are distributed, completed, and handed-in.

**One-to-one meetings**

- Arrives early to review BFO intake form and welcome the service user
- Records the necessary information on the one-to-one form
- Uses active listening skills to create a safe space for service user to talk about the death
- Model “openness” to share and disclose personal bereavement story
- Checks- in with staff following the meeting to debrief

**Note: Volunteers are not professional counsellors. It's important to remember that BFO is based on a model of mutual support.**

## Grief: Experience and Education

*“Grief is simply the price we pay for loving” ~ (Buckle & Fleming, 2011)*

Responding to the death of a loved one can be immensely difficult. While grief is a natural, human process, there are many misconceptions about how to grieve, what is normal, and what is helpful. We ask volunteers to reflect on their personal bereavement experience, and combine it with a working knowledge of grief education. While we are not looking for volunteers to be counsellors or grief experts, it is important to be self aware and informed as we support others.

### 2.1 Terms and Definitions

**Anticipatory Grief:** The process triggered by an awareness of impending loss and/or death (Perreault, 2011)

**Attachment:** Forming attachments are a basic part of the human experience. When someone dies, bereaved individuals have to redefine their attachment to the deceased.

**Bereavement:** The state that comes from suffering a loss (Rando, 1988).

**Disenfranchised Grief:** Grief that is socially not supported or recognized (Perreault, 2011).

**Grief:** A personal reaction to a loss (Buckle & Fleming, 2011).

**Mourning:** Public expressions of loss, impacted by social, cultural, and religious context (Buckle & Fleming, 2011).

**Resurrected Losses:** When a current loss triggers feelings from past losses.

**Role Reorganization:** To function, families develop roles, rules, communication patterns, expectations, and behaviours (Rando, 1988). When someone dies, a void is created in the family dynamic. To continue to function, everyone has to shuffle, divide, and reassign roles to different family members.

**Secondary Loss:** When one loss leads to more losses (Rando, 1988).

**Sudden Temporary Upsurges of Grief (STUGS):** When grief is triggered and temporarily surfaces (Rosenbatt, 1983).

**Unfinished Business:** When issues are not addressed or resolved between the bereaved and the deceased (Rando, 1988).

### 2.2 Common Grief Myths (Adapted from Rando, 1988; Perreault, 2011)

- Grief unfolds in predictable, orderly stages
- Time heals all wounds
- When someone is grieving, it's best not to upset them by talking about the deceased
- Once a death has occurred, the goal is to get “over” it
- Grief and mourning are the same thing
- It is best to put the loss out of your mind and get back to the way things were

- All losses result in the same type of grief
- Crying is a sign of weakness
- A person isn't truly grieving until they cry or break down
- It takes two months to a year to get over a loss.
- Most bereaved people feel better after hearing a cliché statement about loss
- Bereaved people only need to express their feelings to get over a loss
- Once grief is resolved, it never surfaces again
- Everyone follows a certain number of stages of grief and expresses it in the same way

**Note: Reflecting, are there any surprises? Where do these myths come from? What purpose do they serve? How do they affect us?**

## 2.3 Considerations for Grief Work

The following is adapted from Perreault (2011) and is meant to inform volunteers of some of the major theories and ideas in the field of grief work.

### Styles of Grieving

We all grieve differently. Martin and Doka (1999) found individuals have a dominant pattern of grief based on the interaction between gender, culture, and internal temperament.

Patterns of Grief:

- Intuitive: Experience, express, and adapt to grief on a very affective/emotional level.
- Instrumental: Experience, express, and adapt to grief in physical and mental ways
- Dissonant: Experience grief but are inhibited from finding productive ways of expressing or adapting to it.

### Dual Process

Over the years various "stages and "phases" of grief have been proposed. In the 1960s, Kubler-Ross saw grief as a series of linear stages to move through. In recent years, her ideas have been challenged. Stroebe and Schut (1999) encourage us to understand grief as a dual process, where we work through the past and future at the same time. We naturally swing back and forth between our grief, between what we have lost and what we have to rebuild.

### Four Tasks of Mourning (Worden, 1982)

1. Accept the reality of the loss
2. To Experience the pain of grief
3. To adjust to an environment in which the deceased is missing
4. To withdraw emotional energy and reinvest in other relationships

## Grief and Time

When someone is grieving, it is common to wonder how long it will last. There is no set time frame: “It depends on the degree of attachment, the suddenness and manner of the death/loss event, an individual’s past experiences working through other losses, and their particular social support systems.” (Perreault, 2011, p. 37-38).

In general, the first few weeks after a death consist of sorting through practical matters. Attention is given to family members, planning a memorial, probating the will, dividing possessions, etc...For some, until there is a significant anniversary or holiday, the reality of the situation may not be experienced.

### 2.4 Suggestions for Facilitators

**Below are some tips to keep in mind when putting your experience to use when working with others.**

- Reflecting on your grief experience will help you empathize, support, and connect with others.
- Monitor your assumptions about grief, so that they do not blur your perceptions of other people’s experiences.
- Be open and ready to affirm different responses to loss, as there is no single, uniform response.
- Affirm how there is no set time frame for grief: Remember STUGS.
- There is nothing you can say to take away another person’s pain. Humbly being present to pain is therapeutic.
- The healing process unfolds as bereaved individuals share their story, know they are not alone, and experience mutual support.
- Meet people where they are at emotionally in their grief process. Do not try and rush or force them to accept reality.
- Acknowledge the expression of guilt or regret about wishing things had happened differently. Do not try to take a person’s pain away.
- Nurture service-users’ effort to access available resources, inner strengths, and resiliency. Do not give advice.

## Volunteer Skill Set

### 3.1 Active Listening

#### What is Active Listening?

Effective communication is essential for productive one-to-one meetings and group sessions. Used in multiple disciplines, active listening is an extension of regular communication, involving verbal and nonverbal skills. These skills are acquired and used by a listener to understand, support, and connect with a speaker.

To get a sense of how active listening works, imagine the Panama or Rideau Canal (Encina, 2006). Both man-made water channels are managed by massive lock gates. Now picture two compartments divided by a lock gate, with significantly unequal water levels. If the gate were opened water would flow strongly out of the compartment with the higher water level, eventually reaching a state of equilibrium and calm.

Now, compare this scene to the state of someone who needs to express something, like a grief experience. For various reasons individuals hold in their emotional needs, waiting for a release. Many individuals would rather let the pressure build-up than risk jeopardizing their safety, protecting themselves from judgment, hurt, or criticism. A part of an active listener's role is to create a sense of safety and encourage the individual to open their lock gate. If the individual does open the gate emotional expression can begin, deepening the level of interaction.

The flow of emotions may be intense. During the releasing process, it is important to remember that there is still too much pressure for the individual to consider other perspectives. The need for a safe place to release emotions may be all that is necessary. Active listeners can support individuals to open their lock gates, lower their reservoirs of emotion, and feel more internal calmness.

#### Summary of the Active Listening Stages (Adapted from The Support Network, 2009)

The active listening stages are arranged in a way that helps individuals naturally “down regulate” and manage. While the stages seem linear and structured, they are not forced unnaturally. What is important is to be genuine, create a safe place to talk, and meet people where they are at emotionally.

##### 1. Rapport Stage: Building Trust

- Give an invitation to talk
- Monitor your: Voice (tone, volume, and pace) and body language (face the speaker, maintain eye-contact)
- Set the climate: Non-judgmental, confidential, and compassionate attitude

## 2. Focus on Stories, Emotions, and Concerns (\*\*hardest stage\*\*)

- Respond with understanding – instead of reacting!
- Listen to and explore their emotions, stories, and concerns
- Use listening tools [see below]
- Reminder: Do not try to solve problems. Stay with the feelings.

## 3. Option Exploration (if applicable)

If a person specifically requests a desire to explore his/her options, volunteers can work to empower him/her to identify available options:

### Levels of support: P.I.E. Acronym

**Prior Coping:** what have they already tried in the past? Did it work?

**Internals:** What can a person do for him/herself 24/7?

**Externals:** What support systems do they have available to them? BFO!

\*\*Volunteers do not give advice!

## 4. Closing Stage: Winding Down the Session

The intention is to gracefully and gently bring a sense of closure to the session.

In general:

- 1) Summarize what was said
- 2) Focus on the positive in the situation
- 3) End on a 'hope' for their life
- 4) Remind them that this is the 'beginning' and grief is a long road

## Active Listening Tools (Adapted from The Support Network, 2009)

### ✓ Open/Closed Questions:

Open Questions: Open questions cannot be answered with a “yes” or a “no”, and are used to encourage individuals to elaborate.

Closed Questions: Answered with a “yes” or “no,” these questions are used to get concrete information.

For example: “Tell me about your relationship” vs “Was your relationship good?”

### ✓ Minimal prompts:

Minimal prompts, like verbal “m-hm” or head nods, show you are listening and to encourage the individual to continue sharing.

### ✓ Validation:

Statements that let an individual know that his/her feelings are okay or valid. For example: “You have every right to feel that way”

### ✓ Normalizing:

Statements that let an individual know that his/her feelings are understandable/normal. For example, “Many people share that feeling.”

\*\* Keep in mind that we only want to normalize feelings and **not** behaviours

✓ **Paraphrasing/Reflecting/Mirroring:**

The process of restating an individual's words in new language, in order to convey understanding, clarify meaning, or summarize what you heard. For example: "Correct me if I'm wrong, but I am sensing you feel \_\_\_\_"

✓ **Feeling Checks:**

Questions that check to see how an individual is doing emotionally.

\*\* Be careful of overusing the obvious, cliché question "*How does that make you feel?*" For example: "What are/were you experiencing?"

✓ **Showing Empathy:**

Demonstrating to an individual that you can relate to or understand what you are hearing on an emotional level. For example, "That sounds scary."

\*\* Beware of phrases like, "I know exactly how you feel!"

✓ **Empowerment:**

Give encouragement, point out the individual's strengths, and work with them to make his/her own decisions. \*\* Be genuine. For example, "It took a lot of courage to share that with us"

✓ **Silence:**

Don't be afraid to give people space to process their thoughts/feelings.

✓ **Body Language:**

- Eye contact (as long as it's not uncomfortable for others)
- Lean forward and face the speaker
- Sit still
- Nod with affirmation

✓ **Appropriate Self-Disclosure:**

Be conscious of how much you are talking.

- Before sharing, ask yourself, "what is my intention for sharing this piece and how will this serve the other person?"
- Consider the timing: Volunteers may feel triggered by what someone is sharing and want to jump in to the conversation: strong emotional reactions often hamper our ability to listen effectively.
- We do not give out our phone numbers to group members: volunteers can always be reached through the office.

**Possible Rapport Killers:**

- Giving advice: Resist the urge to impose our own methods of coping on others
- "Shoulds"/preaching
- "Why" questions: tend to put people on the defensive
- Jumping into a "fixing"/"rescuing" mode
- Multiple questions
- Making assumptions
- Giving false hope, false reassurance
- A compulsive need to cheer people up
- Interrupting
- Judgments
- Dismissing concerns

## 3.2 One-to-one Meetings

### What is a One-to-One Meeting?

Before joining a Closed Eight-Week Group, service users meet for a one time, one-to-one meeting with a volunteer to talk about their bereavement experience. Staff arrange the meeting, matching volunteers and bereaved individuals by age and type of loss. Approximately an hour in length, the meeting is an opportunity for service users to get more information about BFO and begin to express their loss in a safe, nonjudgmental setting.

### Structure of the Meeting

1. Arrive at the office (at least) 15 minutes prior to the appointment
  - Review the intake form and one-to-one guidelines
2. Meet and welcome the service user(s) at the door:
  - Offer water/tea/coffee
  - Bring them to the room and offer a seat
3. Introduce yourself and summarize the purpose of the meeting:
  - About you: trained, bereaved volunteer
  - About the meeting: peer support, a confidential space to talk about the death
4. Complete the form when service user is most comfortable
  - Review the accuracy of the service user's information in the one-to-one form
  - Confirm the address, contact/emergency information, etc...
5. Bridge into the bereavement story:
  - Use appropriate self-disclosure, briefly sharing your bereavement situation and paralleling the details
  - Ask them about how they heard about BFO
  - Ask permission questions to hear the story.
    - For example, "Can you tell me what happened to " \_\_\_\_"? (Use the name of the person who died).
  - Create a safe, supportive space to share their bereavement story
6. Closing the meeting:
  - Thank the service user for coming in to share
  - Check-in with how they are doing now. Let them know that it's normal to feel emotional, drained, and/or tired after "opening-up". Discuss how they are getting home.
  - Inform them of the next steps: staff will call them to check-in in the next few days
7. Contact staff to debrief

### Important Reminders

\*Use active listening skills [see: Volunteer Skillset]

\*Self care: The meeting can be emotionally draining. We encourage you to debrief with staff and make the time to self care.

### 3.3 Fostering an Inclusive Environment

BFO serves an incredibly diverse population. Discrimination based on age, disability, race, religion, sexual orientation, and gender is not tolerated at BFO. To be effective in working with the BFO community, volunteers need to develop the capacity to respectfully and humbly respond to individuals who have different backgrounds, identities, and experiences. We all need to work together to make BFO an inclusive and safe environment.

#### Fish Bowl Metaphor (Rasmussen, 2006)

In a support group, new fish (people) are placed in the water (environment) and hopefully swim together in harmony. However, if the water is dirty or polluted, how long will the fish thrive?



The water in the bowl needs to be attended to, whether cleaned or changed, in order for the fish to experience a safe and inclusive environment. If the water is neglected and remains dirty, the fish may try to jump out or die from toxicity. As a community, we need to focus on ensuring the water is clean and safe while we work to support our fish.

#### Helpful Approach: Cultural Humility

*Cultural Humility* is a stance that embraces humility and openness with individuals who have different cultural identities than our own (Hook, Davis, Owen, Worthington, & Utsey, 2013).

#### Components:

1. Commitment to self-evaluation: we are never finished learning and we all have blind spots. We must be humble and courageous enough to examine ourselves critically.
2. Awareness of one's own worldview and background, and how it may impact interaction with others
3. Acknowledgement of harmful power imbalances
4. Respectful and humble attitude towards others whose life experiences are different from my own
5. Appreciation of different cultural practices and worldviews
6. Acknowledgement of a range of experiences in different cultures, religions, sexual orientations, etc.

#### Considerations for Individual and Group Sessions

- Be open to the variations in response to loss and the expression of grief
- Be aware of your own beliefs: Maintain a non-judgmental and humble approach
- Be open to co-learning, relying on the individual to be the best source of information regarding his or her experiences, beliefs, and practices

- Acknowledge that individuals will have diverse values about death, suicide, and help-seeking
- Be sensitive to discrimination and stigma in the sessions between group members: There is no tolerance for discrimination at BFO, which is in BFO's Group Guidelines

### 3.4 Identifying and Assessing Risks

In one-to-one meetings and group programs, there may be individuals who are at-risk of experiencing harm. Types of risks may vary from suicide, domestic violence, or self-harm. Learning about risks can be overwhelming: volunteers are not expected to deal with these situations on their own. With the guidance of staff, volunteers are trained to identify risks, offer support, and explore safety.

#### Considerations for Developing Sensitivity to Emotional Intensity and Cues

- People come to BFO for support with unique experiences and emotions. No two individuals and losses are the same. Even if the circumstances are similar, the way we react and respond is dependent on a variety of complex factors unique to each individual.
- “Assumption is the mother of all screw-ups”: Though we are using the same language, words have multiple definitions and meanings. Instead of assuming that we know how people are doing, given their circumstances, it's best to clarify our assumptions and pay attention to their emotions.
- Pay attention to the meaning and feeling behind words
- As we develop sensitivity to emotions, it's important to remember they are not static; they flow and change on a continuum of intensity.
- In supportive conversations, some people may give cues that they are not safe. Saying this, we live in a time where people say, “I want to die,” and it means multiple things, including “I hate walking on Toronto's slushy winter sidewalks”. Further, we live in a time where taboo subjects are more openly discussed. While it's wonderful we can be more vocal about difficult subjects, it also means that in situations of potential risk words/cues need to be clarified.

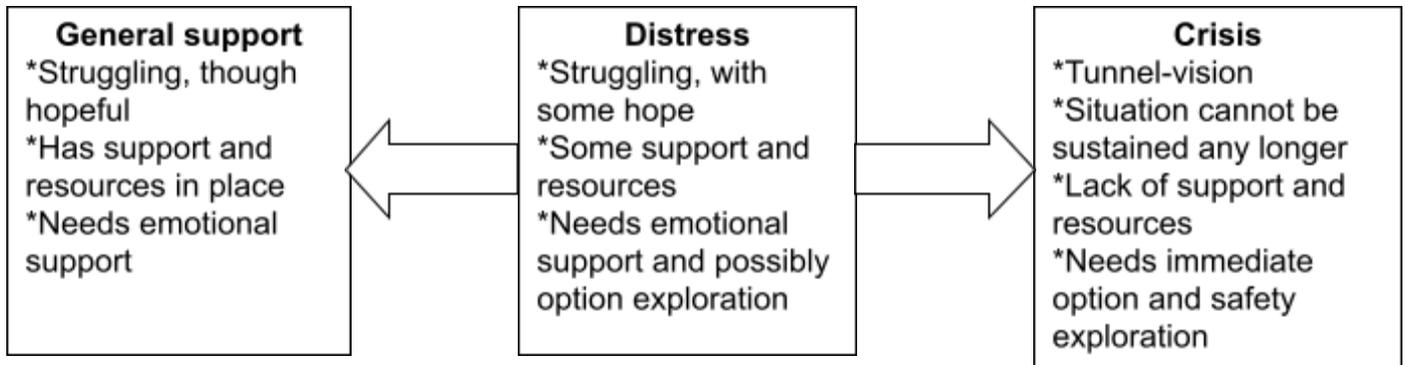
#### Crisis Situations

Since 1977, there have been very few cases of individuals needing immediate intervention at BFO. While the chances of crisis situations are low, volunteers need to be prepared. More than learning about specific topics like suicide or abuse, volunteers are trained to pay attention to if someone is in immediate risk.

After a death, the grief and despair can lead many bereaved individuals to feel “passively” at-risk. For example, a person may not care whether or not they go on living, but that does not mean they have a plan to die by suicide. As well, some people may seriously be thinking about suicide, though they have no intention of following through, and their feelings are temporary. In a few cases, an individual may see suicide as the only solution to ending their pain, and have formed a plan and timeframe to commit suicide.

## Recognizing Crisis

How do we distinguish who is in crisis and who is not? *Timing* is everything! The main difference between someone who is in distress and someone who is in crisis is that the person in crisis cannot presently sustain their circumstances any longer. It is the difference between saying, “I’m having a rough day”, and “I’m having a rough day and can’t go on any longer.” For example, a distressed person may say, “I am treading water”, while a person in crisis may say “I am drowning”. The diagram below is meant to illustrate a continuum of emotional distress and the types of cues to pay attention for.



### If you have picked up on cues of someone being in crisis:

During the session:

- Breathe!
- Offer a warm, non-judgmental, empathetic space
- Remember there are multiple meanings to words – ask for clarification
- After you’ve clarified that there is a risk of suicide, ask about:
  - Intentions
  - Plan
  - Timeframe
- Do not leave the person alone and continue offering emotional support
- Let them know you are concerned about their safety
  - Ask them about how they can stay safe: Who can they connect with? Friends, family, Mobile Crisis Team, Distress Lines
  - Let them know you are going to contact outside support
    - Do not leave the room
    - Contact staff for support (this rarely happens!)

After the session:

- Remember to keep personal limits:
  - “We may care deeply about others and feel a strong sense of responsibility. It is important to have personal limits and remember that “none of us can force a person to understand or to change – they have to do it for themselves” (BFO Groupman, 1999, p43).
- Debrief with staff and self care

### **Third Party Situations**

If a one-to-one participant or group member begins to discuss someone other than themselves who may be at risk:

- Offer emotional support
- Bring the conversation back to the first person. For example, “I hear you’re very concerned about \_\_\_\_\_. It sounds like it’s really affecting you”
- Support them to encourage the other person to reach out for support [See common referrals section]

### **Referrals/Resources**

- Distress lines:
  - Toronto Distress Centre: 416-408-HELP (4357)
  - The Gerstein Centre: 416-929-5200
  - Kids help phone: 1-800-668-6868
- Social, health, and government information referral line: 211
- Mobile crisis teams (in-person, non-medical emergency):
  - St. Elizabeth Crisis Unit: 416-289-2434
  - Gerstein Crisis Unit: 416-929-5200
  - St. Michael’s Hospital Emergency Unit: 416-864-5094
- Medical Emergency: 911

### 3.5 Self care

Taking care of your 'self' is a life-long skill to develop and practice. The BFO volunteer position requires individuals to be empathetic and emotionally involved for the healing process to work. When we invest a lot of emotional energy into others, we need to ensure we have strong self care routines and coping strategies in place. "Many of us believe and know self care is vital and that an empty gas tank takes us nowhere. However, self care must be active and intentional and involves putting into place regular relationships and activities that fill the tank." (David Wright, BFO consultant)

#### Considerations for Developing a Self-Care Plan

Take some time to reflect on your current life circumstances as follows. Please consider:  
 What would you need to do to improve your sense of well-being?  
 What would others need to do?

#### Social Well-being

Intimate partner	Friendships and community
Family of origin	Extended Family
Children	Other significant relationships

#### Financial and Environmental Well-being

Conditions of employment	Opportunities for development
Policies and practices	Politics
Physical environment	Transportation

#### Physical, Intellectual, Emotional, and Spiritual Well-being

What activities do you engage in that are restful, stimulating, or nourishing?  
 Are you doing enough of what you like?  
 What might get in the way of your efforts to improve your well-being?  
 How can you practice self-compassion?

## 4.1 Group Guidelines

The following statements are BFO's group guidelines. They are handed out to group members and trainees at the beginning of training and group sessions. Also, they reflect what is necessary to create and sustain an emotionally safe environment for learning and exploring.

**Please review the following statements and reflect on what they mean to you:**

1. All members of the group are asked to honour the confidentiality of the people here and what they hear in the session.
2. There is no "worse loss". No loss is more or less deserving of support and understanding.
3. Emotions are a natural part of the grief experience. All emotions are welcome here. However, please be aware that intense expressions of anger may be frightening for some. Our intention is to maintain a sense of safety for everyone in the group.
4. A hug or a gentle touch of support may be welcome to some but jarring to others. We ask that you respect each other's personal boundaries around physical support.
5. We honor and respect that family, faith, life experiences, social conditions and cultural influences all affect how people grieve. Each group member must be responsible for contributing to an inclusive environment. Discriminatory comments or language will not be tolerated.
6. Whether someone significant in your life died from an illness, sudden or accidental death, murder or suicide, everyone is welcome here and everyone's individual grief experience will be respected.
7. Group members are asked to share time equally. Please do not ask questions or offer comments while other members are sharing their stories. Remember that silences can be productive and helpful for people to gather their thoughts and feelings.
8. Every person must learn to live with grief in their own way. Group members are asked to speak from their own personal experience and avoid generalizations or assumptions. You are asked not to comment on or give advice to issues raised by other group members. Instead, you are welcome to talk about similar issues in your own grief experience.
9. We recognize that everyone participates in the group in their own way. No one is forced to participate. You have the right to pass. You are free to share whatever is important for you about your grief in this moment.

## Exceptions to Confidentiality

All of the volunteers at BFO have signed a confidentiality agreement. However, it should be noted that the exceptions to the confidentiality rule are:

- If a person has reasonable grounds to suspect that a child, under the age of 16, is or may be at risk of neglect, or physical, sexual, or emotional harm, the person must promptly inform a staff or professional advisor. If child abuse is suspected, by law we must report it to Children's Aid.
- If a person suspects that a group member may be in danger of seriously harming themselves or others, the person must inform a staff or professional advisor.
- If a person is called upon (subpoenaed) to testify in court.

## 4.2 Group Facilitation

Volunteers play an essential role in BFO's group programs. The mutual support process is possible because the bereaved are supporting the bereaved. A natural rapport and trust develops because, at the essence of our connection, "we share the pain" of grief (BFO Groupman, 1999, p. 22). Knowing that volunteers will continue to grieve, supports are worked into the system. For one, there are always two facilitators per group, who can step in for each other if one is experiencing difficulty. Also, staff members are available to answer questions and offer support. Empathy and mutual support move us forward.

### The role of a BFO facilitator

- To make sure the group sessions unfold smoothly, protecting the mutual support process
- Empower the group to take ownership of their process
- Focus and structure the discussion, without teaching or leading
- Be available when the group needs guidance
- Encourage the group to work together. Identify when they are not, and step in when necessary.
- Engage everyone in the group, so that members feel a sense of "inclusion" and equal participation
- Make group members feel like their contributions are valued
- Role-model appropriate group behavior
- Debrief and communicate with professional advisors and staff

### Elements of each session

A major part of grief work is finding the words to "share the story" of a death. BFO support groups are designed to facilitate the storytelling process, creating a safe, mutually supportive place for group members to explore and adapt to their experience of grief.

There is no single, right way for a group to unfold, as there is no single right way to grieve. Every group of individuals is unique, with different experiences, interests, and needs. To

accommodate this, facilitators use the BFO skill set and guidelines to respond with flexibility to the group dynamics.

## **1. Opening a Session: Setting the Tone, Check-in, Rituals (optional)**

Every session, facilitators open the night by setting the tone, doing a 'check-in', and performing a ritual (optional).

### **a) Setting the Tone**

To set the tone for the evening, one facilitator can take the lead and, in their own language, thank everyone for coming, remind them of BFO's guidelines, and encourage the group members to participate and travel through their grief.

### **b) Check-ins**

In opening the discussion, it's good to see how everyone is feeling coming in to the session. This serves to assess what may be affecting group members' ability to participate and if any issues have arisen since the previous session. Facilitators lead a check-in by giving each group member an opportunity to participate. However, group members should not be pressured into speaking.

### **c) Rituals**

Some facilitators find it beneficial to incorporate rituals into the group. Facilitators are encouraged to bring creativity to the group experience, discussing the ideas with their co-facilitator and advisor.

Examples:

- Beginning each session by lighting a candle
- Opening each session with a quote, poem or song (and eventually inviting group members to bring something to share)
- Using silence, meditation and/or breath work as a way to keep people grounded and encourage reflection

**Note: Please check with the group members about sensitivities or allergies to candle lighting. If using breath work or other techniques, please let people know that participation is optional.**

## **2. Ending a Session: Check-out and Reminders**

### **a) Check-out**

About fifteen minutes before the session ends, facilitators can start to close the session by doing a "check-out" with the group. This allows the group members a chance to express their final thoughts, and facilitators to provide encouragement to the group about their progress. Like the check-in, each member of the group has the option of sharing how they found the session and are doing now.

- Facilitators can check-out last, setting them up to close the discussion.

### **b) Reminders**

Before the group breaks, it's good to end the session by thanking everyone for their participation, and reminding them to be gentle on themselves (and those they go home to). It's also an opportunity to remind them of what topics are ahead, how many sessions are left, and any other relevant information.

### 3. Breaks

A short break is necessary at about the one hour mark into the session. They:

- Give people a chance to attend to their physical needs (bathroom/smoking)
- Create a necessary "pause" for people who are feeling highly emotional and need space
- Allow group members to have a chance to start interacting in a more informal way, building group trust
- Give the facilitators a chance to check-in with each other and individuals who seem like they are struggling

#### Facilitation Tools and Tips (Adapted from TheBonnerFoundation, n.d.)

Below is a list of helpful facilitation tools and tips. Please note that there is no one way to facilitate: every group is different. Our hope is that you take your personal style, combine it with BFO's group format, guidelines, and facilitation tools, and adapt it to the specific needs and interests of a particular group.

#### ✓ **Prepare Prior to the Session**

- Read over the 'Group Guidelines' section
- Meet with your co-facilitator
- Arrive early: set up the chairs in a circle and be available to group members

#### ✓ **Create a Warm, Open, and Accepting Atmosphere**

- Remind the group of the BFO guidelines
- Affirm and encourage group members for attending
- Check-in
- Thank and affirm group members for sharing

#### ✓ **Content and Process**

- Definitions:
  - a) Content: is what the group members are talking about.
  - b) Process: is the impact of what is being talked about, happening in the present moment
- Often group members' focus on the content, ignoring the process they are going through. It's important to bring awareness to both content and process.
- One way to bring awareness to the process is by identifying what is going on right now, and invite responses from the group. For example, "What I'm noticing right now is \_\_\_\_\_ and I'm wondering how people are feeling about that"

#### ✓ **Group Feeling Checks**

Some stories are very painful to hear. It can be important to check-in with how the group is feeling, by asking simple questions like “Is everyone still breathing?”.

### ✓ **Self-Monitoring**

- Body language
  - a) Position yourself so that you can make eye contact with everyone
  - b) Lean forward and face the speaker
  - c) Sit still – don’t fidget
  - d) Nod with affirmation
- Appropriate self-disclosure [See: Active Listening]
- Emotional involvement: Stay aware of your own assumptions, judgments, and triggers. “Do not be surprised if at first your own grief blurs your perception of others” (BFOGroupman, 1999, p21)

### ✓ **Maintain Rapport and Trust**

- Respect and be consistent with the BFO process and structure [see: Group Format and Guidelines]
- Take breaks
- Start and end on time

### ✓ **Silence**

- Allow the group time to pause and process their thoughts and feelings. Resist the urge to jump in.

### ✓ **Bridging Statements**

- Bridging statements are a paraphrase of collective issues, feelings, and themes between the group member’s stories. For example, “Mark, you just spoke about feeling lost in the weeks following the death. Kim was sharing similar feelings earlier when she was talking about her experience.” By recognizing these commonalities, the group will move toward cohesion, and ultimately empowerment.
- Bridging statements, when followed by a question, are useful to encourage the flow of equal sharing and participation. For example:
  - a) “From what I hear, Mark is talking about how it can be difficult to respond to someone who asks you how you are doing - can anyone else relate to this?”
  - b) “The sense I’m getting is that several people in the group are saying....is that correct?”
- Ideally, as the group bonds, members will take the lead of the facilitators and spontaneously make bridging/connecting statements themselves.

### ✓ **Maintain Continuity Between Sessions**

It is natural for group members to reflect on the sessions and want to talk about questions or feelings that have arisen or been identified. When a new session pick up on issues or themes from previous sessions, and bring them up for discussion.

### ✓ **Observe Behaviour and Body Language**

By observing group or individual behaviour, it’s easier to spot issues and try to address them appropriately.

### ✓ **Offer Focus and Direction**

Sometimes groups get lost or off topic and head into dead ends. Validate it - it's okay! Help orient the group to where they are in their discussion and/or clarify where the group wants to go.

✓ **Manage Participation and Encourage Mutual Support**

- Step back and allow the group members to support each other
- Gently invite more reserved group members to participate

✓ **One Foot in the Group and One Foot Out**

As facilitators, we strive to have one foot in the group, actively sharing with others, and one foot out, trying to observe what is going on. If we feel especially triggered (for example, on the anniversary of the death), we may feel we need both feet in and we need to pull back.

**Facilitation Pitfalls**

- Dominating the group or pushing personal agendas and opinions as “right”
- Being judgmental towards diversity
- Dismissing group members ideas because you do not agree
- Taking sides during a group conflict:  
Remain impartial.
- Sounding scripted:  
Sometimes in our efforts to prepare, we overdo it.
- Pretending to know answers to group questions:  
The group will respect you more if you are honest about what you do not know.  
You can always refer them to the office, modeling how ‘not knowing’ is okay.
- Showing favouritism to specific group members
- Giving advice or problem-solving  
“We are not in a group to solve people’s problems for them. We are there to provide an atmosphere of caring in which they will begin to recognize their grief emotions for what they are and to offer support as they begin to make their own decisions. We do not tell people what to do” (BFO Groupman, 1999, p42).

### 4.3 Overview of Eight-Week Group Sessions

This section outlines the overall format and guidelines of the Eight-Week Groups. The first and closing sessions have a set structure and content to aid group members in transitioning in and out of the program. While the structure of the middle sessions follows the BFO guidelines, the content is more flexible and dependent on the group’s unique interests and needs. BFO has put together a list of relevant topics to guide the group discussions to deeper places. These topics were chosen to assist with emotional expression, and preparing group members for a greater understanding of their “new normal” life. After journeying together, the closing session is designed to allow group members’ to find closure and celebrate their grief work.

#### First session

The first session is designed to build the group's level of trust and begin the process of mutual support. At this point, the group members view everyone as a stranger. Facilitators follow the format of BFO's first session to create a solid foundation to build from for the following sessions.

## 1. Pre-group Meeting

In the week before the first session, the facilitators meet to build their level of rapport and plan the session. Certain tasks need to be divided between facilitators:

- Who will monitor the time and call for breaks?
- Who will open the session?
- Who will lead the brief introductions/check-in?
- Who will explain the format and guidelines of the session to the group?
- Who will share their story first to role model for the group?
- Who will close the session and lead the check-out?

## 2. Opening the Session

Group members may feel anxiety opening up in front of strangers. Without building the group's level of trust and comfort the process will not work. Facilitators play a big role in creating a safe atmosphere for group members to build rapport and share their stories.

### Facilitator's Role

- Welcome everyone; thank them for coming
- Affirm the courage it took to join the group; acknowledge the anxiety people may be feeling
- Remind the group members that you are volunteers - not therapists - and that you are also bereaved
- Keep in mind what their first group was like before they become facilitators

## 3. Explain Group Format and Guidelines

After the brief introductions, one facilitator can explain the format and guidelines of the group process. A facilitator can communicate to the group that the sessions begin with a check-in, a review of the guidelines, a discussion, and a check-out. Facilitators will offer suggested topics for discussion, and will take direction from the group members. The first session is when everyone begins to tell their story. Often, the storytelling may need to continue into the next session.

Then, a facilitator can pass around the Group Guidelines handout to review. A facilitator can remind the group that what is shared in the group is confidential. Everyone grieves in their own unique way, and that's okay. Also, for the first session, when people are sharing their stories, the only thing required of other members is to listen respectfully. Questions and comments are saved for later.

## 4. Storytelling

Finding the words and feelings to attach to a story of bereavement is a major task in grief work. A person cannot begin grieving until s/he acknowledges the loss. People feel anxiety when they are not sure what to say. By talking about the circumstances surrounding the death, the bereaved can begin to accept the reality of the loss, experience the pain of grief, and begin to adjust to life without the deceased.

With this in mind, it's of utmost importance that the facilitators create a safe, supportive environment. It's best if one facilitator begins the storytelling process and role-models how it works for the rest of the group. Once they are finished, they invite a member to share their story. It is recommended that people do not simply go around the circle participating: each group member can participate when they are ready, at their own pace. While the stories are being told, facilitators monitor the group's emotions and assess when they need a break.

## **5. Closing the Session: Check-out and Reminders**

Facilitators try to end on schedule, respecting the group members' time, maintaining trust. They must also leave enough time at the end of the session to "ground" the group members. If not all of the group members have had a turn to share their story, they can do so in the following week. It is important to touch base with each member before closing

### **Check-out and Reminders**

- Thank everyone for participating, while acknowledging that it is painful to hear each other's stories and be present to each other's pain.
- Check-out
- Acknowledge that even though the first session is really tough, it does get better. The first night of the group is the hardest, and it's important to come back – it does get easier.
- Remind the group members that everyone grieves uniquely
- Let them know that they can call the office if they have concerns/need to connect.
- Remind them to be gentle on themselves/self care

### **Middle Sessions: List of Topics**

After every group member and facilitator has shared their bereavement experience, facilitators propose relevant topics to the group for discussion. Facilitators work with the group to assess which topics will best suit their interests and needs. The topics are meant to be guidelines, allowing room for flexibility, so that the group members' grief work can develop naturally.

The following topics have been selected to assist group members in accepting the loss, expressing their pain, and their adjustment to living with grief. Facilitators can use what is written as starting points for forming open questions to stimulate the discussion. We recommend addressing all of the topics in some fashion, though they are in no particular order, nor are they likely to be confined to one week. Some topics can be combined. Group members may also propose other, relevant topics of interest. \*\*Try to go to the topics where the group has the most energy, interest, and concern.

### **Funeral and Memorial Stories**

In general, the second session is an opportunity for group members to share their funeral and memorial stories. There will be a variety of responses to this subject, as the funeral may have a positive or negative personal meaning for each person. A lot can depend on the individual's religion or lack thereof, relationship with their family, relationship to the deceased, and the type of death. Some group members may not have attended or had a service; they are welcome to share their experience if they wish.

### Getting Through the Day

For bereaved individuals, getting through a day can be incredibly challenging. They are adjusting to a new environment where the deceased is missing. Facilitators may open a discussion to explore how things have changed, secondary losses, and how people are coping.

- What parts of life at home and/or work have changed since the death?
- How are people organizing their time?
- Level of energy/ability to concentrate on daily tasks, socializing, shopping, housekeeping, sleeping
- Preferences to be at home or out of the home
- Identify hardest and easiest times in the day
- What ways of coping work for them?

### Symptoms of Grief

After a loss, it's common for individuals to feel they are on an emotional rollercoaster. Often, they think they are going crazy, as their energy and emotions fluctuate. Acknowledging this topic will help many group members feel more normal and less alone in their experience of grief.

- **Feelings:** shock, anger, irritability, numbness, apathy, yearning, verge of tears, anxiety, despair
- **Mental:** lack of concentration, disbelief, wishing/frustration with wanting things to be different, worrying
- **Physical:** fatigue/lack of energy, difficulty breathing, muscular spasms/weakness, difficulty sleeping, illness
- **Behaviour:** Restless energy, social withdrawal, dreaming of the deceased, appetite disturbances, withdrawal from past interests, sleep disturbances, crying uncontrollably, doing things out of character, avoiding reminders of the deceased
- **Grief Spasm:** unpredictable pangs of grief
- **Common Fears:** going crazy, losing memories, crying in public, never being happy again

### Guilt and Anger

After a loss, it's common to feel anger and/or guilt. When someone dies, some people feel an incredible loss of control over life, and the feelings are directed out/ inward. There may be unfinished business with the deceased. They may wish to have done things differently. They may feel guilt that they are relieved the person is gone. These feelings can also lead them to

question who they are, who they have been, and who they are becoming. Facilitators need to create a safe space for group members to explore their emotions and questions.

- Where is the anger/guilt directed (the deceased, the living, a higher power, themselves)? Where does it come from? Secondary losses?
- How are the feelings affecting them in daily life? Control over feelings?
- Exploring the “if-onlys” and “what ifs” about how things went

**Note: Facilitators need to be careful to keep the conversation about what people could have done differently, and not how they could have been different (behaviour vs character changes). Exploring different behaviour can give the bereaved a sense of control over their lives.**

## Relationships and Roles

After someone dies, relationships and roles change. Families need to rebalance and reorganize their dynamic. Group members can discuss what is changing/different in a safe, supportive space, giving them more control over their lives.

**\*\*Please note that not all of the sections will be applicable to every group\*\***

### a) Partner/Spouse

- What has been the response of your partner/spouse? Supportive, unsupportive
- Surprises? Expectations?
- Changes in the relationship: roles, isolation, closeness
- Ability to communicate about loss?
- Sexual relationship: too soon; too intense; withdrawal of physical affection
- Strategies for more effective communication

### b) Parent-Child

- What has been the response of your parent/child? Supportive, unsupportive?
- Surprises? Expectations?
- What role did the deceased play in the relationship?
- Changes in the relationship: roles, isolation, closeness
- Ability to communicate about the loss
  - \*Are you hiding your grief to protect the other?
- Strategies for improving communication and the relationship

### c) Extended Family

- The response from the extended family: supportive, unsupportive
- Surprises? Expectations?
- What role did the deceased play in the family dynamic? What will be different?
- Avoiding the subject of the death
- Feel pressure to “grieve” a certain way – what to do with the expectations of others?
- Strategies for responding to and coping with “well meaning” but thoughtless messages
- Strategies for how to move forward when the support begins to subside

### d) Friends and Co-Workers

- Reaction from friends and co-workers: supportive, unsupportive?

- Surprises? Expectations?
- Social withdrawal, difficulty making small talk, resentful of social obligations
- Other people's problems are seen as less significant
- Stigma and fears
- Benefits of BFO group in supporting group members

### **Difficult Responses from Others**

Throughout several sessions and topics, an ongoing issue for the bereaved is that other people respond to the situation in difficult, "thoughtless" ways. For example, others may say, "at least s/he isn't suffering anymore," "s/he is in a better place," "you can have more children," "you'll meet someone new", etc. It is also common for group members to vent about society's lack of understanding of grief and how to support bereaved people.

- Discuss difficult comments and questions group members are receiving
- Brainstorm and strategize ways to respond – an ongoing issue

### **Significant Dates: birthdays, anniversaries, holidays, and other special events**

After someone dies, the bereaved are generally emotionally triggered by birthdays, anniversaries, holidays, and other special events. There are secondary losses associated with the deceased person's absence.

- Has anyone experienced any significant dates since the death? How did they cope?
- Approaching holidays: What memories will surface? What roles did the deceased play?
- Acknowledge the challenges for getting through the first round of significant dates
- Strategies for coping

**Note: Facilitators can acknowledge if any holidays or group members' birth/death days or significant events fall during the course of the sessions.**

### **Previous Losses/Resurrected Grief**

A major loss often triggers and resurrects old issues, conflicts, and memories for the mourner. Unresolved or socially unrecognized grief may surface, complicating the grief work. It can be healing to revisit the previous losses in a supportive environment.

- Resurrected issues, conflicts, and memories from the past
- Unexpressed losses: grandparents, friends, relatives, pets, relationships, opportunities, dreams
- How are you still affected by your loss?
- Do we ever "get over" a loss?

### **Possessions and Memories**

Everyone grieves in their own way and time. Part of adjusting to a new environment without the deceased person is figuring out what to do with their belongings. There is no right or wrong way to answer the following questions.

- What are you going to do with the person's belongings?
- Do you feel pressure to do something before you are ready to?

- What will it mean to you to “let go” of the belongings?
- Family conflicts
- How do you feel about having the person’s picture up? Some people find it comforting or upsetting.
- How can you keep the person’s memory alive?
- Other possibilities: photo albums, rituals, scholarships, bursaries, dedicated park benches, planting trees, writing, storytelling, volunteering

## Supports and Coping

Grief is an exhausting experience. It’s important to discuss coping styles and what support systems group members have available to them. The hope is to have the members recognize their own coping skills.

- What have you tried in the past? What worked/did not work?
- What options are available?
- Coping: Self care and self-harm
- Holistic approach and strategies: physical, mental, emotional, spiritual
- If necessary, visiting a family doctor

**Note: Facilitators do not give advice [see: Volunteer Skillset]**

## Sharing photos and Mementos:

During a session, facilitators ask if group members can bring something special that reminds them of the deceased to the next session, like a photo or memento. If some group members forget, they can bring the item to the following session. The group member sharing can talk about what the item represents to them while it is being passed around the group. If the member does not have a memento they can always share a particular story.

**Note: It’s best to wait until the item has been passed fully around the circle before the next person starts. Once the first person is finished speaking, there is a natural inclination for the second person to want to start. If the photo/memento isn’t finished going around the circle, then the group’s attention is divided, which can be upsetting for the person sharing.**

## Closing Session

After forming bonds and journeying together, the group will benefit from a well-planned final session. Facilitators can propose some ideas to the group in advance, mentally and emotionally preparing them for the last meeting. There is room for creativity, whether the group, for example, wants to do a potluck dinner or dessert.

### 1. Close the Session and Check-out

A facilitator can open the session by providing positive reinforcement to the group about their dynamic and hard work.

- Normalize how ending a group may be distressing

- Share feelings about the sessions
- Check-in

## 2. Final Evaluation Forms

Facilitators ask group members to fill out the final evaluation forms.

- Evaluations are anonymous
- General information from the evaluations are shared with the facilitators for learning and growth purposes
- Evaluations are used to improve the BFO program
- Facilitators can leave the room when the group members are completing them.

## 4.4 Conflict Resolution

Conflict can be a normal part of the group process, so it's important for volunteers to be prepared for it when it arises. Not all conflict is bad. When it is handled well, it can stretch group members to a greater understanding and respect for diversity. Facilitators are not there to fix problems, but more, to make it safe for group members to resolve them on their own.

### Facilitator's Role

- Remain impartial: Do not take sides
- Point out what they see is happening and to gently ask the group if this is "okay"
- Make sure both sides have a chance to communicate their thoughts and feelings
- Do not analyze or assume to know the real reason something is going on
- Ask the group how they want to handle the situation
- Encourage group members to respond in constructive ways

### Common Problems

#### a. A group member "monopolizes" the discussion

- Prompt other members to contribute. Ask to hear from everyone.
- Gently cut in and make a bridging statement.
- If it gets serious, talk about it with your professional advisor
- We have to be careful not to make the person feel ashamed.

#### b. Lack of Participation

- Be patient
- Work on building the group rapport and level of trust
- Make eye contact with specific group members as you ask questions
- Check-in with the group about their level of interest in the topics of discussion

#### c. Lack of Focus

- Many times group members don't realize that the discussion is off topic. By pointing it out, it can help them focus. For example, "This topic is worthy of discussion and we can get back to this later."
- Communicate gently that they are off topic. If they are talking about something relevant, ask the group if they want to continue in that direction or get back to their original topic of discussion.
- If necessary, take a short break to reenergize the group.

**d. Late Arrivers**

- To keep group trust, it's important to maintain the BFO structure. If there are late arrivers, at the beginning of a session facilitators can remind everyone of the importance of coming on time.
- If certain group members are consistently late, facilitators can talk to them privately.

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