TRAUMA, LOSS AND BEREAVEMENT

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MADD Canada's Mission
is to stop impaired driving and to support victims of this violent crime.

This brochure has been designed to assist victims dealing with the aftermath of an alcohol or drug-related crash. It is our hope that this booklet will be of value to you and comfort you during this difficult time.

Please don't hesitate to contact us for information or support.

1-800-665-6233

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Oakville, Ontario L6H 5R7

Please see the last page for a list of additional MADD Canada resources and services for victims of impaired driving.

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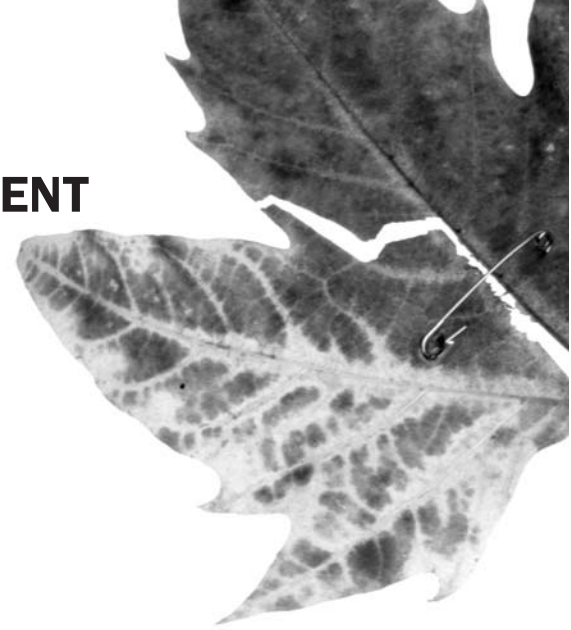

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This project would not be possible without the expertise, compassion, knowledge and effort of the following people:

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Agnes Struik provided the material for Part 2 of this brochure.

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Ms. Struik is also a children's consultant with Bereaved Families of Ontario-Toronto where she is involved in training children's facilitators, supervising facilitators, and assessing readiness of children for groups as well as numerous other activities.

In addition, Ms. Struik presently serves on the board of the Ontario Society of Psychotherapists.

THE CHALLENGE OF GRIEF FOLLOWING SUDDEN LOSS[1]

Why should I read this?

If you are reading this brochure, you are among those who have experienced the sudden, violent death of a loved one as a result of an impaired driving crash. The nature of this type of loss brings uniquely painful and difficult challenges to those left behind. The purpose of the following information is to provide you with an overview of the various factors that may be involved in your reaction to this trauma. While it may seem inconceivable to you that you will ever be able to live with this experience, we offer you this information to provide you with an understanding that you are not alone on this journey, and with hope that you can find meaning and joy in your life once again.

[1] The following information is based on the author's own experience as well as reference to the work of several prominent researchers, clinicians, and authors who have written extensively on the topic of grief. So that this brochure is more readable, these primary references are listed at the end of this brochure rather than noted throughout the presentation of information.

How should I use this information?

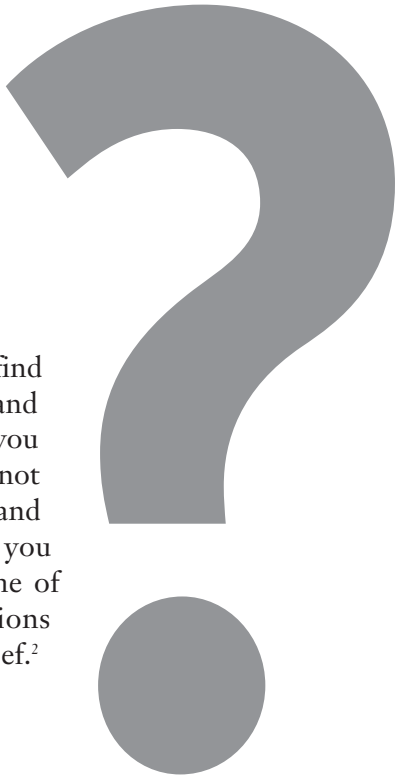
The readers of this brochure will vary in many ways. For some of you this may have been a very recent loss, and for others a longer period of time may have passed. In light of this, there will be some information that will not be relevant to you, at least at a given point in time, or may be difficult for you to think about. Thus, we recommend that you read this material when you feel a need to understand your experience, and/or when the consideration of such information feels timely to you. Once you have read what you want, keep the brochure handy, and read it again at another time. Each time you read this, you may get a new insight, or relate to something that you did not relate to before.

We hope that this information provides a way of exploring and further understanding your own personal loss experience. In the following, you will find a description of:

- *Frequently asked questions* about grief
- the common *challenges* of grief
- a description of the impact of a *sudden loss* such as you have experienced
- a description of *other factors* that will affect your grief reaction, and
- some general ideas about what you can *do* in the face of these challenges.

Since we can not provide you with all of the valuable and extensive information that is available regarding the experience of grief, you will find some suggestions for further reading at the end of this brochure.

Frequently asked questions about grief



The situation in which you now find yourself is an extraordinary one, and likely far outside any experience you have had before. Thus, you may not know what to expect of yourself, and have many questions about what you are going through. Here are some of the most commonly asked questions about the experience of loss and grief.[2]

Am I going crazy?

Grief is a natural, human reaction to separation from those we love. It has been said that it is the price we pay for loving. As you will see, however, the nature of this response varies greatly from person to person. Since most of us have not experienced something as significant as this in our lives, we likely do not know what to expect. As a result, there can be a strong sense that there is something "wrong" with our reactions. Be assured that there is a wide range of thoughts, feelings, and behaviours that are considered to be *normal reactions to an abnormal situation* such as the one you have experienced - you are not going crazy.

[2] With regard to the definition of terms used throughout this brochure, the term *bereavement* refers to the state of having suffered a loss of a loved one. The terms *grief* and *mourning* refer to the actions, reactions, adjustments, and processes as you cope and live with this loss. The terms grief and mourning will be used interchangeably throughout this brochure.

Will I go through stages of grief?

In contrast to popular belief, there are no "stages" of mourning that everyone goes through. Instead, current experts in this field now believe that while there may be some similarities amongst those who are grieving, grief also is one of the most personal experiences you will encounter. It is coloured by numerous factors, including the mourner's personality, the nature of the relationship with the deceased, the impact of other loss experiences you may have had, the nature of the death (e.g, sudden or prolonged), the multiple personal meanings of the loss, and a wide variety of other influences. Some of these personal factors are discussed later in this brochure.

What should I do?

While this tragedy was not a choice on your part, you do have many choices and options in the process of coping with, and grieving, this loss. This idea contrasts with the popular belief that grief following loss is something that happens to us, and that we have no say in how it proceeds. Experts now believe that there are endless choices in the process of adjusting to loss, and that an awareness of these choice points, as small as they may be, can be most helpful to the bereaved person in bringing an increased sense of control back into their lives.

Will I ever forget my loved one?

Your relationship with your deceased loved one continues, even though the actual physical contact is no longer possible. In this sense, therefore, you may find that over time your love for this person continues or grows stronger, or changes in some way, even as you forge a life that does not include their physical presence. Some bereaved people describe actually sensing their loved one's presence, or find themselves talking to the deceased. If you have experienced this, such an occurrence may or may not be comforting to you. The relationship may continue more internally, as one refers to the loved one's values for guidance, thinks of what they would do in a certain situation, or incorporates certain activities into one's life because of their influence.

Does grief ever end?

Even as people learn to go on with their lives and live fully again following the death of a loved one, the normal grief response includes a recurrence of strong feelings related to the loss, over the course of a lifetime. *This does not mean that grief is constant*, but rather there are times of revisiting feelings or memories, that involve strong emotions and upsurges of grief. Things such as new developments in our lives, the occurrence of meaningful dates on the calendar (e.g., anniversary of the death, birthdays, holidays, etc.) or in the event of any reminder of our deceased loved one, thoughts and feelings about them naturally will be activated. It is important to understand that you are not "back to square one" at such times but, rather, this is normal and expected.

How do I make sense of this?

Any loss, and certainly the type of loss that you have experienced, will assault your assumptions about the world. For example, prior to this tragedy, you may have held a view of your personal life as generally predictable and safe. Following this loss, however, such an outlook no longer makes sense to you. Part of the normal grief process involves the incorporation of this loss experience into your perspective in a way that allows you to perceive the world in balanced or reasonable terms again.

Will I ever be my old self again?

You will be forever changed by this experience. As you may have gathered by the ideas presented thus far, grief is not a time-limited experience, after which you return to your old self. While the bereaved do find meaning and purpose in life again, we now understand that the grief process leads people to feel that they are different than they were before.

The common challenges of grief

While there are no set stages of grief, there is a consensus that grief poses some common challenges for those who have experienced the death of a loved one. In this section, we briefly outline these commonly identified factors for you. While these are presented in a certain order, each can come and go, occur in any combination or sequence, and will vary in terms of their prominence from person to person. Indeed, all three of these major challenges are present, in one form or another, all of the time. If you are going to be reading further about grief, you will see this list of factors or challenges also described with words such as processes, needs, choices, or tasks. Whatever the term used, your understanding of these common challenges may provide you with some insight into your current experience and expectations for the future.

The challenge of truly understanding that this loss has occurred.

This challenge is experienced in a number of ways, involving the literal task of recognizing and believing that the death has occurred, to other levels of understanding of what this loss means for your life from now on. There is much emotional and psychological upheaval and confusion in the face of these challenges, and wide-ranging thoughts and feelings as the reality of the death "hits home." The case of sudden, unanticipated loss is particularly difficult to take in, and will require a gradual process for you to fully comprehend the situation. There is no time limit for this to occur, and it is natural that you would not wish to do it.

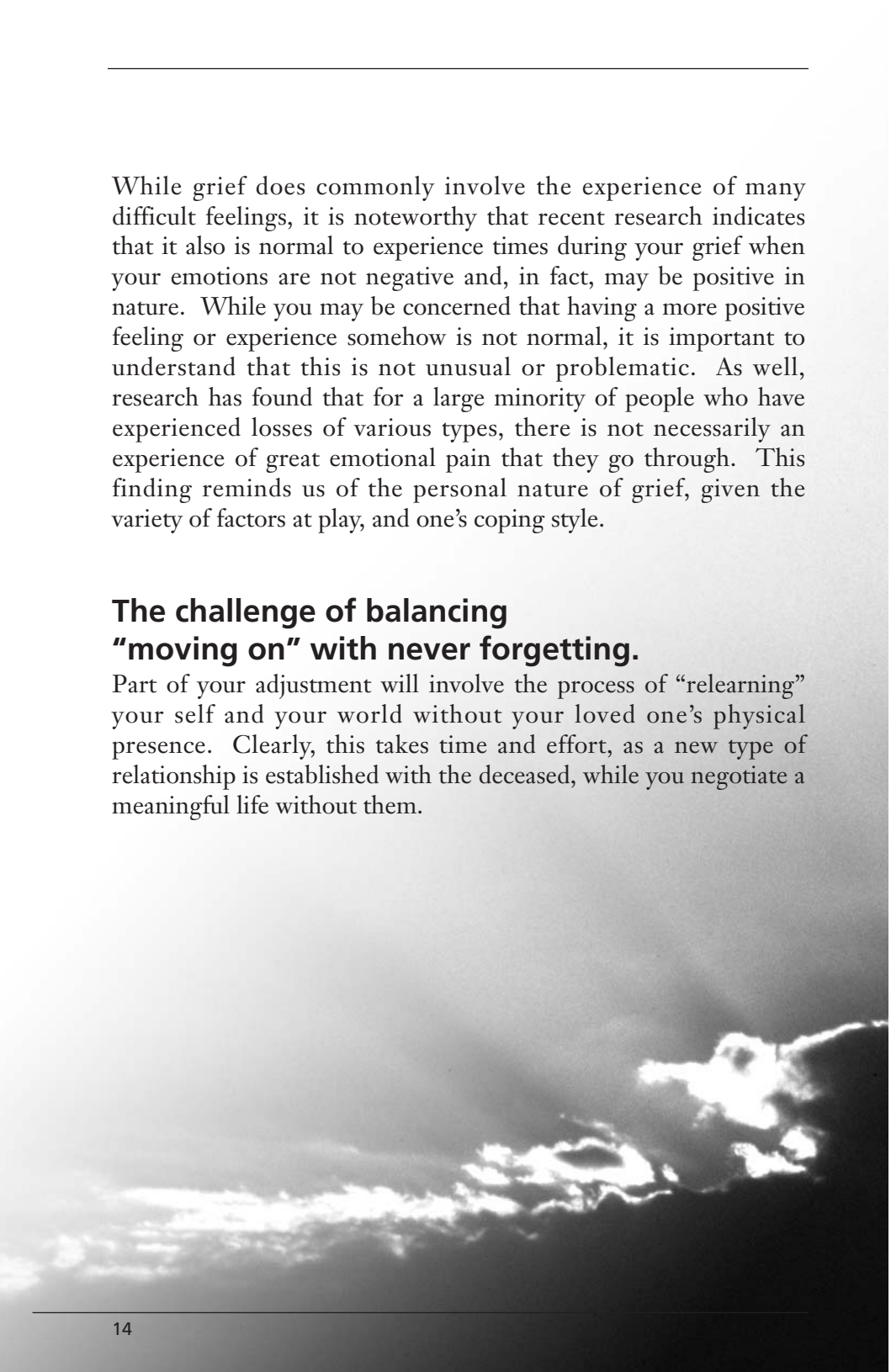
The challenge of dealing with your emotions.

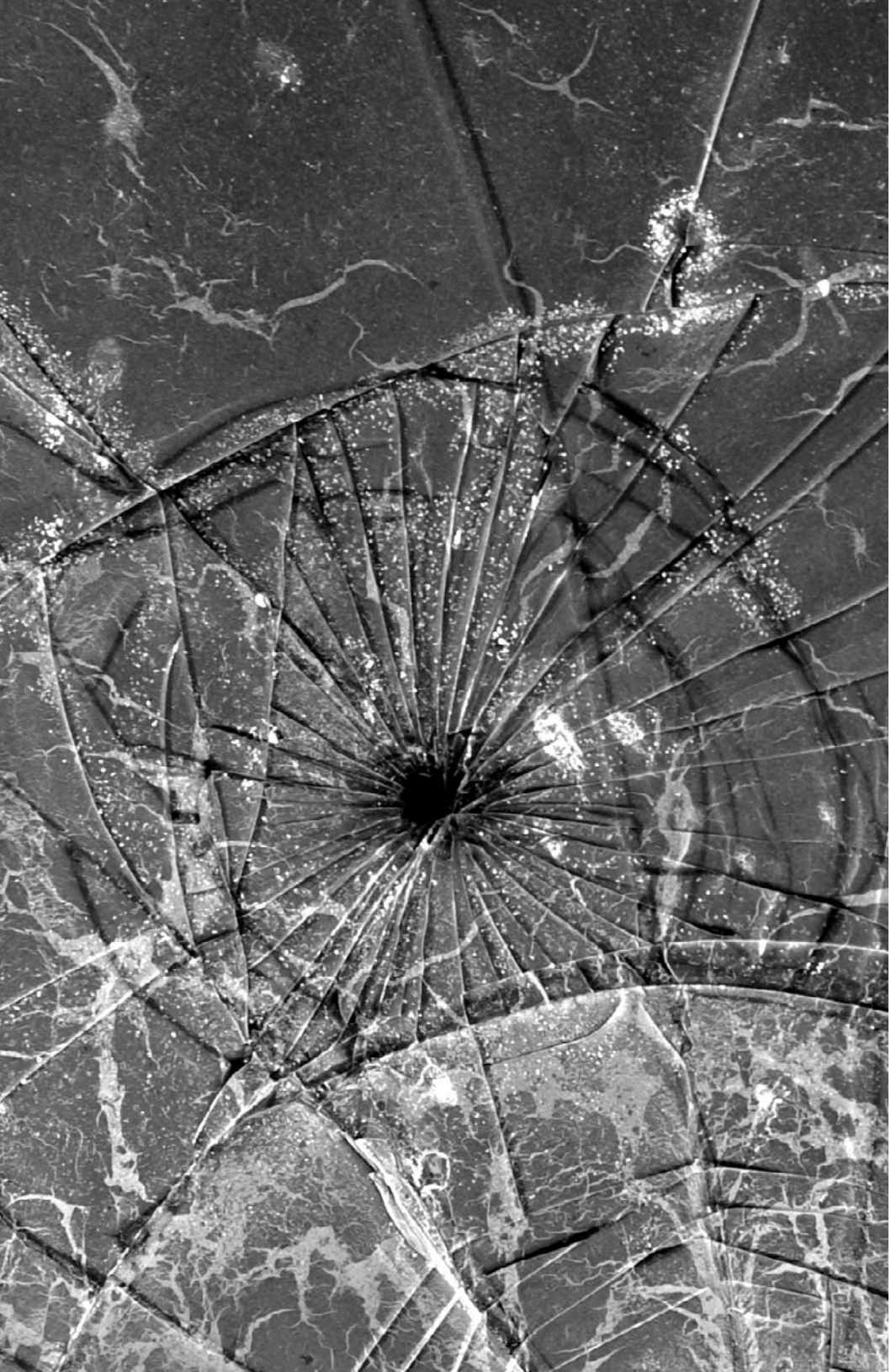
For a significant percentage of bereaved people, it is normal to feel great pain, involving all of the human emotions, in response to the separation from those we love. While each of us may differ in terms of how we experience and express this, there is a consensus amongst grief experts that bereaved people are advised to accept this experience, and not attempt to totally avoid or deny it. This emotional pain may not be constant, but will come and go, and can include a wide variety of feelings such as sadness, sorrow, longing, anger, guilt, anxiety, fear, hopelessness, helplessness, confusion, and so on. You also may experience significant physical symptoms, such as very poor sleep patterns, exhaustion, inability to focus or pay attention, or a lack of appetite for food.

While grief does commonly involve the experience of many difficult feelings, it is noteworthy that recent research indicates that it also is normal to experience times during your grief when your emotions are not negative and, in fact, may be positive in nature. While you may be concerned that having a more positive feeling or experience somehow is not normal, it is important to understand that this is not unusual or problematic. As well, research has found that for a large minority of people who have experienced losses of various types, there is not necessarily an experience of great emotional pain that they go through. This finding reminds us of the personal nature of grief, given the variety of factors at play, and one's coping style.

The challenge of balancing "moving on" with never forgetting.

Part of your adjustment will involve the process of "relearning" your self and your world without your loved one's physical presence. Clearly, this takes time and effort, as a new type of relationship is established with the deceased, while you negotiate a meaningful life without them.





What is the impact of sudden and traumatic loss?

The death of someone close to us, in any manner, can challenge us in the general ways just described. Although you may have experienced the death of a loved one due to an impaired driving crash, your grief reaction and general adjustment will involve these factors outlined so far.

That said, this type of sudden loss is one that sometimes is described as "traumatic" because of the terrible circumstances in which your loved one died, and the corresponding intensity of your response. The total lack of anticipation or chance to prepare may be so overpowering that your entire world will be turned upside down. Your ability to cope is further overwhelmed because of the common initial reactions of shock, confusion, and the overall intensity of the experience.

What follows is an outline of some of the distinctive features of a sudden, violent loss such as you have experienced:

There was no warning.

There was no chance for you to anticipate this traumatic loss. How your world *was*, now is not how your world *is*, although it is very difficult to begin to absorb this. Thus, part of your response may be extreme feelings of shock, if not outright numbness. Extreme, prolonged feelings of shock are common in the face of such sudden loss, and is the way that your system is attempting to protect you from the total pain of such a deep "injury."

There was no chance to say goodbye.

Given that there was no warning, you and your loved one will have been "cut off in midstream." Thus, you may find yourself consumed with your most recent interactions with them, and possibly troubled by your memories about these last encounters. People also describe a sense of "unfinished business" in a larger way, regretting things that were, or were not, said or done. While troubling, it is important to understand that this is entirely normal and expected when faced with such a sudden separation.

The grief is intense.

In addition to feeling so intensely stunned and shocked, those who have experienced such an unanticipated loss also may report extreme feelings of all sorts, such as confusion, anxiety, fear, anger, guilt, and sadness. The traumatic nature of this loss may fuel or complicate your emotional experience. In addition to the kinds of thoughts and feelings that occur in response to any type of loss, there also may be an accompanying stress response syndrome, involving greatly increased anxiety, a heightened sense of helplessness or powerlessness, "survivor guilt" (i.e., guilt for living, while your loved one has died), or a replaying in your mind an imagined scenario of how the death may have occurred. This stress response does not occur for everyone in your situation, but if so, it signals the traumatic nature of this loss for you.

The world no longer seems safe or predictable.

Until something like this happens in one's life, many people assume that their life and world will proceed in a relatively predictable and sensible manner, with minor adjustments along the way. It also often is assumed that we are safe from danger, at least in our modern, routine day-to-day lives. When this type of sudden, violent death occurs, these assumptions are shattered. At times, you may experience profound confusion and anxiety because you have no other way to understand the world, and your loved one's death may lead you to believe that the assumptions of safety and predictability no longer apply.

You may be consumed with the death itself.

Since this death does not make sense to you, you may find that there is much thinking about the death itself, reviewing the lead-up to it, and looking for some way to understand it. You may find that you do this repeatedly. Again, this is a normal reaction to this unanticipated tragedy. The violent nature of your loved one's death, and the possibility that their body was badly disfigured, also may be involved in thoughts and imagery that you find particularly difficult to ignore. If you were in the vehicle with them, there may be vivid recall of the scene, that you play over and over again in your mind's eye.

This was preventable.

When your loved one dies due to an impaired driver, there is an identified person to hold responsible. In light of this reality, the death is understood as preventable. When this is your experience, there may be an accompanying anger, directed at the driver in this case, and a strong sense of the injustice and unfairness of this circumstance.

Anger.

Anger is a normal way to protest against what has happened. Not only may you feel anger toward the impaired driver but, as well, you may find that you feel angry toward other people, God, or even the person who died. While it is important to understand that anger is a very common experience in grief, it is equally important to express these feelings in ways that are not harmful to you or the others in your life.

Dealing with legal matters.

In all likelihood, there will be a criminal legal process as a result of your loved one's death due to the impaired driving crash. You may find yourself quite focussed and occupied by these legal matters. For some, this actually can be quite a helpful focus, as they may experience this as one way to channel their anger, and/or to achieve a degree of understanding about what happened. For others, however, the legal process may feel like a huge wall that prevents one from beginning their process of adjustment. It also may add stress, as you are required to revisit the situation, as well as experience frustrations with the legal process, or with judgments that are made.

Common grief reactions

As the previous sections indicate, there are some general principles that are valuable to understand, especially in helping to clarify our expectations for what may occur following the death of a loved one. As mentioned, however, grief is a very personal and unique journey. This is clear when we realize that each human being is unique, as is any relationship that we have with each other. Thus, when a person dies, the nature of the challenges for one bereaved person can not be the same as those for another. We already have discussed the unique impact of sudden loss on your grief process. What follows is a description of some of the other factors that will be important in understanding your personal grief experience.

The characteristics of the person who died.

Your reaction to this loss in part will relate to who died. What roles did this person play in your life? What were they like as people? What was their personality style? An important influence on your grief process will be whether a spouse/partner, child, parent/guardian, sibling, or friend/significant other has died. Each of these types of relationships may pose specific challenges for you, and will be briefly discussed here:

- **Death of a child:** Of course, the relationship between a parent and a child can be one of the most intense and central attachments in one's life. Correspondingly, in the event of a sudden loss of a child, no matter their age, the grief can be profound. For many parents, this loss is experienced as losing part of yourself. This is further complicated by the unnatural order of a child dying before the parent. This contributes to great confusion about prediction and order in the world. Moreover, given that a central parent role is one of protection of the child, there can be an enormous sense of guilt and responsibility that you were not able to prevent this harm. The losses also are multiple in the case of a child dying, as one loses their role as parent, and everything that goes with that, as well as losing one's hopes and dreams for the future. The family system as a whole is affected by this loss, as are relationships with partners or spouses, and with any other children. Another potential complication in your adjustment to this type of loss may be other people's fear and discomfort about it. While not done with any intention to hurt or reject you, you may find that others avoid you, as your loss represents their worst fear.

- **Death of a spouse/partner:** While quite naturally it most often is the case that one partner or spouse will outlive the other, a sudden, unexpected death can leave the bereaved partner extremely heartbroken and unprepared. A major challenge in the adjustment to the death of a partner is that you may have lost someone who played many different roles for you. This person may have been your best friend, your financial expert, your lover, your partner in raising the children, your confidante, your social convenor, and so on. Adjustment following the loss of such a person will require you to be aware of this variety of losses and, eventually, to develop ways of dealing with them.

  The death of a partner also may leave you feeling quite lost in terms of how you define yourself, as so much of who you were may have been defined in relation to the other person. Now that you are not a part of a couple, you may find it to be quite awkward or uncomfortable relating to other couples with whom you used to spend time. Thus, you may find that you are more isolated and lonely.

  It should be mentioned that not all marriages or partnerships are ideal. Thus, in the case of a less than ideal situation, and the accompanying mixed feelings (i.e., not entirely positive), you may find that it is quite difficult to sort out your thoughts and feelings following the loss of your spouse or partner.

- **Death of a parent/guardian:** While we expect our parents to die before us, we do not expect that they will die suddenly or violently. Thus, in such an important relationship as the parent-child one, there can be much unfinished business, and a lifetime of history and connection suddenly ended.

  Your age and stage in life will interact with your parent's age and life circumstance as well, such that in the event of your parent's sudden death, your grief will be coloured by the nature of the interaction of these factors. For example, if your parent dies while you have young children, this presents you with issues about the absence of this grandparent, or perhaps the loss of their actual ability to help and support you.

For many of us, no one knows our past better than our parents. When a parent dies, there may be a strong sense of loss of this shared past. While you are an adult now, you have always been your parent's child. Regardless of your age or circumstance, your parent at one time was a very important and influential figure in your life, and they always may have been present in your life. Thus, the death of a parent is a unique loss, with much meaning attached to it, and it is normal to have strong feelings in response to this relationship ending. Like any relationship, the one with your parent may not have been entirely satisfactory. In such a case, there may be feelings such as anger or guilt that you will be left to grapple with.

- **Death of a sibling:** Society may overlook just how important our relationships are with our brothers and sisters. As a result, this type of loss experience may be one in which you feel quite alone or misunderstood, yet, for some people, this can be one of the most familiar and significant relationships they have had. No one else knows what it was like to grow up in your family. Just as in the case of the death of a parent, the death of a sibling involves the loss of this shared past. It is important to understand, therefore, that you quite naturally may experience a strong reaction to such a loss.

  Of course, these relationships also can be less than ideal, as there may not have been such a close connection or purely positive feelings. Thus, the challenges of grief following the death of a brother or sister also will depend on the type of relationship you had with him or her.

- **Death of a friend:** Our friendships may be some of our most intimate relationships or strongest attachments. A close friend usually is someone with whom we feel liked for who we really are, and with whom we have chosen to share our life. Our friends also may play many important roles in our lives, the absence of which can leave a large void. Indeed, the very person who you need to turn to for support at this time is actually the one who is lost to you. It is important to acknowledge the depth of loss in the case of a friend, and respect that your adjustment will reflect the central importance of this relationship in your life.

Your individual characteristics.

Another set of factors that will be influential in your response to the death of a close other will be your own personal traits and qualities. These factors include such things as your general ability to cope with such stress and adversity, your mental health, your past experiences with loss, death, and trauma, your cultural, religious, and other background characteristics, and the presence of other stressors in your life. Whatever your personality, it will be reflected in your grief process. All of these, and many other characteristics uniquely individual to you, will contribute to your reaction and adjustment to the death of a loved one.

The nature of the relationship.

As indicated earlier in the description of the impact of loss for certain types of relationships, your grief process in part will be influenced by the nature of the relationship you had with your loved one. The strength of the emotional attachment, and the unique meaning of the loss of that relationship to you, will be very powerful influences on your adjustment. The roles filled by that person may have been many, and will leave you with numerous challenges to overcome. If the relationship was difficult in some way, or involved mixed feelings, your grief process also may be quite confusing and complicated for you.

Your support system.

Generally speaking, ongoing, accepting, and caring support from others will be very helpful to you during your journey through grief. This requires you to accept such support, although at times you may not feel like it. While it is normal and understandable that some wish to isolate themselves, most bereaved people find that genuine companionship provides a much-needed sense of sharing their burden, and of feeling care and support from others. It is not a sign of weakness to turn to others who truly understand and accept you, and who have the patience to be there for you over time.

Your gender.

Different people react differently to the same loss, and one contribution to this may relate to the varied roles played by men and women, as well as their general styles of coping. While by no means are there absolute or total differences in terms of how men and women cope with loss, the stereotypes include men more as "doers," problem-solvers, and less emotional, whereas women may be more "feelers" and more open about their emotional experience. It is incorrect to consider that one style is better than the other. Perhaps more importantly, it is useful to understand that there will be differences, in part related to these gender roles.

What can I do?

Earlier in this discussion, we noted that grief is not a passive process, over which you have no control. However, it may not be clear to you how you can be more active in light of what has happened.

The choices you make at any given time will differ depending upon the nature of the challenges you are facing. For example, if you are feeling isolated, you may choose to turn to a trusted other for support; if you must learn a new skill that your loved one used to do for you, you will have to figure out how to attain this skill. Thus, you are constantly faced with choices, large and small, as you are addressing your grief-related needs. While it is not possible to list everything you will need to consider, in the following you will find a brief list of ideas about some of the general ways you can choose to proceed.

Increase your understanding of grief, and what it involves.

You, and those around you, will have some misconceptions about what you will experience as you gradually rebuild your life following a loss such as this. The preceding information highlights some of what we know about this adjustment process. It is most important to know what your expectations are for yourself, and be able to make a realistic or fair judgment of these.

Look after yourself, in the most basic ways.

Whether you feel like it or not, you need to eat properly, maintain some level of physical activity, and attempt to maintain a routine sleep pattern. At the same time, you need to respect the physical toll that this experience will have on you, and pace yourself accordingly. While you will find it difficult at times to do these basic things, these are the cornerstones of coping effectively with the stress you are going through. Correspondingly, it is equally important to avoid harmful habits, such as over reliance on drugs or alcohol.

Stay connected to other people.

While it is normal to feel much less like being around others than before, most bereaved people will tell you that they have greatly benefited from an ongoing connection with others in their life. This may be decreased in actual numbers and frequency for awhile, but having time with those you find to be most understanding and supportive can provide a sense of hope, caring and acceptance that is invaluable. In addition to the support of those closest to you, you also may find that involvement with others who have gone through a similar experience, by participating in an organized support group, may provide you with a unique sense of companionship, and of being understood and accepted.

Find ways and opportunities to express your thoughts and feelings,

as is fitting for you, and as often as you need to do this. What form this expression takes may differ from person to person. While one person may be more open or emotional when expressing their feelings, this may not be another person's style. Some people are able to talk about their innermost feelings, while others prefer to express themselves through writing, art, or some other sort of activity. Whatever the form of expression, it is generally agreed that denying or ignoring one's genuine feelings is an obstacle to a normal, healthy grief experience. Thus, give yourself permission to express these feelings in some way.

Take "time out" from grieving.

Just as it is important to give yourself permission to have and express your feelings, it is equally important to understand that everyone needs a break from these intense and painful times. This may take the form of some sort of quiet, solitary activity, as well as times of reconnecting with the flow of life in some way. Some people feel guilty or badly if they turn their attention away from their grief for awhile, but this a natural need, that will help you feel more able to weather the more difficult and painful times.

Do I need professional help?

At several points throughout this booklet, the importance of connection and sharing your thoughts and feelings with other people has been emphasized. While this support may occur quite naturally, through friends and family or other social networks in your life, you may find that you do not have this, or you are concerned that this is not enough. Alternatively, you may be wondering if your grief process is not normal in some way.

Some signs that your grief may be straying off track include extreme avoidance or downplaying of the process of mourning (for example, quickly proceeding with all of your usual activities, staying extremely busy, or seeing yourself as trying to "replace" the lost loved one), feeling "stuck" in the extreme feelings (e.g., overwhelmed by constant sadness, anger, guilt and so on, or over relying on alcohol or drugs), or finding yourself unable to function at all in the various realms of your life, especially as the months and years have gone by. These are only a few of the ways that may indicate that your grief is going in an unhealthy direction. Even if you are not sure whether your experience is normal or not, consultation with a trained professional, especially one expert in the area of loss and grief, may provide you with the opportunity to further explore and understand your experience. The goal for seeking such assistance will be to help you to establish a normal or healthy grief process again.

If you would like to seek counselling, one of the best ways to find such assistance is through someone else who had a positive experience with a therapist. This may be someone you know and trust who received this assistance themselves, or it may be someone like a family physician who has developed a list of resources over their years of practice. Local hospitals and family service agencies also may be able to offer such support. For some, support groups, such as those offered through the local Chapter of MADD Canada, will be a most beneficial therapy.

If you have a history of other loss or trauma, or if you have had mental health problems in the past, it will be important for you to ask any potential therapist if they are trained in mental health matters beyond the process of grief, so that your loss experience can be understood, and attended to, with these other factors in mind.

Recommended readings

We hope that the information provided in this brochure has given you a preliminary frame of reference for your grief experience. If you found this material to be helpful in some way, you may find further reading also to be of benefit. Thus, following is a brief list of books that review the general response and adjustment to loss. There are a vast number of other books published that address both general and more specific aspects of any loss experience (e.g., death of a child, spouse, etc.) that you can locate through the local library, bookstores, or MADD Canada's index of titles from their Lending Library at www.madd.ca/english/services/lending.html. Some of the following references also provide a reading list of their own, that may give you even further guidance and understanding.

James, John W., & Friedman, Russell, *The Grief Recovery Handbook: The Action Program for Moving Beyond Death, Divorce, and Other Losses (revised edition)*. HarperPerrenial, 1998.

Neeld, Elizabeth Harper, *Seven Choices: Finding Daylight After Loss Shatters Your World*. Warner Books, 2003.

Rando, Therese A., *How to Go On Living When Someone You Love Dies*. Bantam Books, 1991.

Wolfelt, Alan D., *Healing Your Traumatized Heart: 100 Practical Ideas After Someone You Love Dies a Sudden, Violent Death*. Companion Press, 2002.

Wolfelt, Alan D., *Understanding Your Grief: Ten Essential Touchstones for Finding Hope and Healing Your Heart*. Companion Press, 2003.

References

In addition to these recommended readings, the following academic or professional materials also were utilized in the preparation of this brochure.

Attig, T. *How we grieve: Relearning the world*. Oxford University Press, 1996.

Doka, K.J. *Living with grief after sudden loss: Suicide, homicide, accident, heart attack, stroke*. Taylor & Francis, 1996.

Janoff-Bulman, R. *Shattered assumptions: Towards a new psychology of trauma*. Free Press, 1992.

Klass, D., Silverman, P., & Nickman, S. (eds.). *Continuing bonds: New understandings of grief*. Taylor & Francis, 1996.

Neimeyer, R.A. *Lessons of loss: A guide to coping*. McGraw-Hill, 1998.

Rando, T. *Grief, dying, and death: Clinical interventions for caregivers*. Research Press, 1984.

Stroebe, M, Hansson, R., Stroebe, W., & Schut, H. *Handbook of bereavement research: Consequences, coping, and care*. American Psychological Association, 2001.

Grieving together: A parent's guide to childhood bereavement

Death is difficult for your child to understand. Tragic, abrupt death is even more challenging. It brings irrevocable changes into your child's life. Even though you are grieving and trying to cope with your own loss, your child desperately needs you to provide support for him/her.

Because you feel so vulnerable it may seem easier not to talk about the death and sadness with your child. Children however, have an uncanny way of sensing when "something is not right". Sharing honestly and openly about the person who died will allow your child to engage in the grieving process.

Your child needs to grieve in order to heal. Grieving is a normal human emotion, as natural as laughing, crying, playing or sleeping.

What parents/guardians need to know

1. **Your child's grief is a necessary natural way to heal his/her broken heart.**

2. **Your child carries within him/herself the capacity to heal and restore faith in his/her future.**

3. **Your child will express grief in his/her own individual way. The intensity, length and way he/she expresses grief will vary. For example:**

    - Susan sobbed continually when her father died, but Danny showed little emotion until his father's birthday three months later.
    - Some children grieve quietly, withdrawing, looking out of the window, writing in a journal or drawing pictures. Others grieve noisily, crying, throwing tantrums, beating a drum or playing sports.
    - Some children grieve for a long time; others are able to integrate their loss in a shorter period of time.

4. **Your child's grief will vary depending on his/her developmental level. For example:**

    - Five-year old Jose asks when his mommy is coming back whereas twelve-year old Scot knows his mother will never come back.
    - Seven-year old Lana thinks concretely and asks her mother what dead people look like. Thirteen year-old Jeremy worries about who will take care of them now that Dad is dead.

5. **Your child needs a supportive atmosphere in which to resolve his/her grief.**

    - Your child needs people around him/her who can offer support and comfort without judgment or expectations.

    - Your child may find it helpful to join a children's bereavement group where he/she can have his/her experience normalized as he/she listens to others share their story.

Personal factors influence a child's grief

1. **Your child's strengths, limitations and temperament will influence his/her grieving process.**

    - Your child has the same personality he/she had before the death occurred. He/she can use these strengths to move through the grieving process. On the other hand, if your child has always been very sensitive to changes, he/she will need additional support in his/her grieving process.

2. **The circumstances of the loss will affect your child's grieving process.**

    - Tragic, violent and unnecessary loss is hard for a child to process. If a court case is involved the child may have to revisit the circumstances many times resulting in repeated eruption of grief. This is hard, but also a part of working through the grief process.

3. **The family's belief system in regard to life and death affects your child's ability to process his/her grief. A child tends to take cues from the belief system modeled by his/her parents and often needs support in untangling the paradoxes that emerge. For example:**

    - Ahmed believes his higher power gives him comfort when his world seems to be falling apart.
    - Joanna is very angry at her higher power for failing to protect her brother.

4. **Openness and support of the family system can enhance your child's ability to work through his/her grief.**

    - If there is already tension in the family system the death of a family member creates even more insecurity and stress in your child. He/she may repress his/her grief to protect you or him/herself.
    - Try to keep these differences away from the child and provide a supportive network of people so you can work through the grief process together.

A child's grief differs from an adult's grief

1. **A child tends to be more physical and direct in expressing his/her grief.**

    - A child may cry, shout, kick, have temper tantrums, act out in school or grief may come out in vulnerability to illness, aches and pain.

2. **A child is less verbal than an adult.**

    - A child often does not have the emotional vocabulary to express his/her feelings and is more comfortable expressing feelings through beating a drum, running, kicking around a soccer ball, drawing, sculpting with clay or writing a story or poem.

3. **A child tends to follow a natural grief/play/grief cycle.**

    - You may be in the middle of sharing something with your child about the person who died only to have the child run out and play. Later he/she may return and ask more questions.

4. **A child is often attuned to parental grief.**

    - If your child feels upset because mommy/daddy is so sad he/she may repress his/her grief.
    - Or if the family represses grief, the child may act out the grief for the rest of the family.

How can you help your child?

1. **Give the child clear, accurate information.**

    - As much as possible, spare the child the unnecessary or potentially disturbing details, but be honest with the child that the person who died is dead, not breathing, and will not be able to do things with him/her anymore.

2. **Reassure your child that you will be available to him/her.**

    - Let your child know that you are sad too, but you will be there for him/her when they need to talk, cuddle or cry.
    - Your child might be afraid that you or he/she will die too. Reassure him/her that most people live a long time and that you plan to be with them for a very long time.

3. **Respond to the child's feelings as well as to what he/she is saying.**

    - Your child might say, "I don't want to go to bed, I can't sleep anyway." You might respond with, "I'm wondering if you are worried that something might happen while you are asleep."
    - It's okay to cry together, cuddle and hold each other. Be attuned to when and if your child wants physical comfort.

4. **Be willing to say, "I don't know."**

    - There is no right way to parent your grieving child. It is important to listen, to be spontaneous and let him/her know you'll figure this out together.

5. **Include the child in decisions regarding the possessions of the family member who died. For example:**

    - A nine year-old girl wants to wear her father's baseball cap.
    - A twelve year-old boy does not want to use his brother's hockey equipment.
    - A seven year-old girl wants to help her mother decide which of her father's clothes they would give to a charitable organization.

6. **Encourage your children to participate in rituals for the one who died.**

   - Sometimes parents feel it will be too difficult for their child to participate in rituals regarding the funeral, cremation, or spreading ashes. Your child needs to be given the opportunity to talk it over with you and make a choice. Children often have less trouble with rituals than adults do. The rituals help integrate the finality of death.
   - In the future include your child in ceremonies, anniversaries, and holidays where you acknowledge the absence of the loved one. Include them in informal activities such as visiting the grave, prayers or making toasts on special occasions.

7. **Inform the school about the death.**

   - Pave the way by meeting with your child's school principal and classroom teacher.
   - Ask the teacher to prepare the rest of the students by briefly telling them what has happened and to encourage them to be supportive.
   - Ask the teacher to acknowledge verbally to your child that he/she knows about the death and is aware that it may take time to adjust.
   - If necessary ask to delay deadlines or for a lighter assignment load.
   - Encourage your child to share any difficulties that may come up at school. Depending on the experiences of his/her classmates they may be wonderfully supportive or they may not know how to respond and your child may feel isolated.

8. **Tell your child if the courts are involved.**

   - Let your child know that you are going to court to try and make sure that impaired drivers don't hurt any more people. Sometimes it may take time, so let your child know that you might have to go to a lot of meetings.

Grieving together: A parent's guide to adolescent bereavement

Grieving is difficult at any age, but at adolescence young people are at a stage where they are going through a growth spurt which affects them in all aspects of their lives.

1. **Young people have a variety of emotions that fluctuate rapidly. For example:**

    - Luke knows his parents are having a hard time with his brother's death so he begins to take up a lot more responsibilities around the house. One day he is so tired of being responsible and angry he stays out all night.
    - Terry knows his mother is having a hard time with his father's death and he is scared that their whole family will fall apart without his father's strong presence. He fights with his mother because he wants her to pay attention to them.

2. **Around thirteen years of age, the brain capacity of a young person expands more than ever before. For example:**

    - Susanne knows that without her father's income, they might not be able to keep the cottage and that she will have to get a job if she wants to go to university.
    - Ravi worries that his mother's family is angry that his father encouraged his mother to drive and without their support, his sisters will have a hard time without the aunts to guide them.

3. **Young people are in the process of moving away from their family and toward their peers. For example:**

    - Charles' parents wish he would stay at home and be more open to talking about his sister's death. Charles spends a lot of time with his two best friends and tells them how angry he is that his sister had to die.
    - Kerry wants to protect her parents from more pain so she doesn't talk to them about her sister's death. Her friends just talk about clothes and boys and she doesn't feel they understand her. She finds herself more and more alone.
    - Lorne feels no one in the family or any of his friends understand how unfair life is. He goes around wearing black clothes, dark sunglasses and spends a lot of time with his earphones on.

4. **If young people do not have supportive relationships they may turn to less helpful ways to soothe the pain of grief and/or isolation. For example:**

    - Shauna feels their house is so sad and quiet. She can't wait to get together with her friends. She knows they will probably drink too much, but she desperately wants a break from all the sadness.
    - Rolland misses his brother so much, but he feels as if every part of his life is messed up since Alan died. When he uses drugs he doesn't feel as conflicted or angry at Alan.

Adolescents do want to share their grief, but often choose to do so away from their families. Tell them that you are available, but you won't be hurt if they choose to share with someone else. Encourage them to find a mentor, a group, a friend or friend's family.

Adolescents are more likely to share their grief through music, the internet or through writing or poetry. Encourage them to find their own safe way to share their grief.

Perhaps one of the greatest challenges you face in trying to help your grieving child is to find the fine line between sharing your grief with your child without becoming so overwhelmed that he/she loses his/her sense of security and becomes even more upset.

The most important thing you can do for your child is to be with him/her, to grieve, talk, laugh, play, cry and keep on going from day to day.

If you walk this road together you might find that you will learn a lot from your child just as he/she will learn a lot from you.

What makes MADD Canada unique from other organizations in the fight against impaired driving is our service to victims of impaired driving crashes including:

Emotional Support: Victim Services Volunteers and victims from the chapter offer one-to-one peer support. Some chapters conduct victim support groups.

Court Accompaniment and Support: Local chapter members volunteer to go to court with a victim and/or the victim's family.

Helping Victims Know Their Rights Under the Law: Volunteers assist victims in understanding their right to submit a Victim Impact Statement to the courts and help them in completing the statement if required.

Annual Candlelight Vigil & Victims' Weekend: These events provide the chance for victims to come together to honour and remember their loved one(s).

The Victims' Weekend includes educational presentations by professionals on grief, bereavement, coping with injury, and related issues. It also provides time for reflection in a supportive environment.

A National Resource Guide: This publication contains federal and provincial resources for all victims of crime, including a focus on victims of impaired driving.

Lending Library: All Chapters have been provided a list of books available on loan from Victim Services at the National Office. Topics range from Coping with Injury to Restorative Justice.

Four Free Brochures

A Guide to the Canadian Criminal Justice System for Victims of Impaired Driving
Coping with Life After Injury
Trauma, Loss and Bereavement
Understanding the Consequences of a Loved One's Impaired Driving

For Victim Support call MADD Canada's toll-free line: 1-800-665-6233

What is MADD Canada?

MADD Canada (Mothers Against Drunk Driving) is a national, grassroots, charitable organization with Chapters and Community Leaders across the country. MADD Canada Chapters are run by volunteers from across the country and include not only mothers, but fathers, friends, business professionals, experts in the anti-impaired driving field, concerned citizens and young people who want to make a difference in the fight against impaired driving.

History of MADD Canada

In 1983, MADD Canada's predecessor PRIDE (People to Reduce Impaired Driving) received official Chapter status from MADD in the U.S., becoming the only official licencee of MADD in Canada. Several Chapters were subsequently formed and in 1990, MADD Canada officially became a national organization.

MADD Canada has grown from coast to coast and continues to advocate for change to make our communities safer and to provide victims of impaired driving with a voice.

What Can You Do?

- **Don't Drink and Drive.**
- If you or someone you love becomes the victim of an impaired driving crash, call 1-800-665-MADD or your local Chapter.
- Get involved by volunteering for a local Chapter.
- If there is not a Chapter in your area, contact MADD Canada's National Office to inquire about starting one.
- Demonstrate your commitment to fight impaired driving by becoming a member of MADD Canada.
- Support measures to strengthen impaired driving and victims' rights laws by contacting your local government representatives.
- Tie a red ribbon on your vehicle as a visible reminder to drive sober.
- Open a dialogue with your children about drinking and driving.
- Donate to your local Chapter.
- Be a responsible host. Don't let your guests drive after drinking alcohol.
- If you witness someone who appears to be driving impaired, report them to the local authorities immediately.

You can make a difference!

MADD
Mothers Against Drunk Driving™
Les mères contre l'alcool au volant™

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Canadian Charitable Registration No:13907 2060 RR0001