



Appendix G: Guide to Bereavement Assessment and Support

What you might hear/see	Risk Factors	What else helps
Ability to Cope		
Concerns re: identify, future	Partner, parent, or care provider of the deceased	Reframe/encourage, refer (hospice, seniors, support services), give homework: explore meaning of loss/what brings purpose to life. Review lifestyle factors.
Lack of comprehension or expected reactions	Mental illness/disability or depression	Mental health/depression protocol
Ongoing struggle with activities of daily living, concern about coping	History of unhelpful coping strategies (e.g., substance abuse, declines support/resources)	Explore history / context of coping and person's perspective, give homework: ask about sleep/eating routines
A plan / the means to complete suicide, previous attempts	Suicidal ideation	Suicide protocol, refer to mental health/community resources
Grief Reactions		
Ongoing heightened reaction(s) (e.g., pining, hopelessness, anger, guilt)	Inability > 6 months to address/work through emotional responses to death	Refer for counselling/therapy, give homework: identify triggers
Ongoing disbelief, denial of death or lack of reaction	Inability to experience grief or acknowledge reality of death	Explore cause(s), refer for bereavement counselling. Ask how death has impacted the person
Ongoing anger / disconnection with beliefs, God, meaning	Spiritual / religious angst	Encourage connection with faith community, spiritual advisor
Other Stressors		
Concerns about finances, children, work	Competing demands; limited practical resources	Explore options, recommend practical help, give homework: ask how person/ family are impacted financially
Loss of job, divorce, home	Other multiple losses	Explore impact of multiple griefs, normalize reactions
Confused, overwhelmed, loss of sense of 'self'	Cumulative grief, recent multiple/unresolved deaths; significant childhood death(s)	Normalize and acknowledge enormity/ impact of grief, refer for therapy/counselling
Supports		
Isolation, concern no one cares or understands them	Perceived lack of support including language/cultural barriers; disenfranchised grief	Acknowledge perceptions; reframe, support social connections, give homework: explore what support feels helpful and who (might) provide this
Relationships		
Unresolved family tensions/issues re: care, death, estate or relationships (e.g., abuse)	Longstanding or current discordant relationships in family (including with deceased)	Explore possibility of resolution; support mediation/advice, refer for family therapy/counselling
Anger, distrust of health care provider(s) (regarding diagnosis, care, system)	Negative perceptions/circumstances of care	Be open, non-defensive, support appropriate follow up.
The Death		
Concerns re: sudden, distressing, violent, untimely nature of death; extreme blame, fear, guilt, anger	Negative circumstances and trauma connected to the death	Invite the person to review the death/fill in any gaps or areas of misinformation, be factual, explore present/future issues and impact, refer for counselling
Listen & Be Present	Explore & Acknowledge	Normalize & Follow Up

Adapted from the Bereavement Risk Assessment Tool, © 2008 Victoria Hospice Society.

* Refer also to: Palliative Care Part 3, Table 2: Non-pharmacological Management of Bereavement"