

# **Bereavement Support Package**

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## **What is Grief and Bereavement?**

Bereavement is the state of having experienced a loss through death. Grief is the internal response to the loss, which is characterized by a gamut of emotions.

Grief is initially experienced as a kind of “numbness” that comes over a person. Shock and denial is something that will hit in varying degrees and has to be gone through before a person begins what is usually called the “grief work”.

Once the acknowledgement of the death comes, the therapeutic process of grieving begins. It has to be gone through. There is no way around it. Grieving is nature’s way of re-healing and re-establishment.

Because grief is something that is so personal, it cannot be avoided by ignoring it or frenetic activity.

Grief is not only a psychological reaction, it also manifests itself in physical reactions such as fatigue, listlessness, restlessness, unaccountable aches and pains, lack of appetite, etc.

The combination of the physiological and the intellectual can be seen in the reaction of the bereaved in their dreams.

Grief is a highly complex but absolutely normal reaction to death. It affects each person differently. While reactions are wide and varied, studies have shown that many bereaved benefit from participation in a self-help bereavement group where they may express their feelings of grief, share their experiences and help one another.

## Expectations You Can Have For Yourself

### You can expect that:

- Your grief will take longer than most people think it should
- Your grief will take more energy than you can imagine
- Your grief will involve continual changes
- Your grief will show itself in all spheres of your life and who you are. It will affect your social relationships, your health, thoughts, feelings and spiritual beliefs
- Your grief will depend upon how you perceive the loss
- You will grieve for many things (both symbolic and tangible), not just the death itself
- You will grieve for what you have lost already as well as for the future; for the hopes, dreams and unfulfilled expectations you held for and with that person
- Your grief will involve a wide variety of feelings and reactions: some expected and some not
- This loss will resurrect old losses, feelings and unfinished business from the past
- You may have some confusion about who you are; this is due to the intensity and unfamiliarity of the grieving experience and uncertainty about your new role in the world
- You may have a combination of anger and depression: irritability, frustration, intolerance
- You may feel guilt in some form
- You may have a poor sense of self-worth
- You may experience spasms, waves or acute upsurges of grief that occur without warning
- You will have trouble thinking and making decisions: poor memory and organization
- You may feel like you are going crazy
- You may be obsessed with the death or preoccupied with thoughts of the dead person
- You will search for meaning in your life and question your beliefs
- You may find yourself acting differently
- Society has unrealistic expectations about your mourning and responds inappropriately
- You will have a number of physical reactions
- Certain dates, events, seasons and reminders will bring upsurges in your grief
- Certain experiences later in life may resurrect intense grief feelings for you

## Emotions

When someone important to you dies, you grieve. Whenever you have any kind of loss, you need to grieve its disappearance from your life.

Grief means you have many reactions in widely contrasting combinations. These are *healthy responses to loss* and are an important part of the “work” you do to deal with your grief and move on in your life.

You will be very aware of strong, often mixed emotions after a death or loss. These may come and go; like waves washing over you. The intensity of your emotions may be new for you, perhaps frightening or overwhelming.

Some of them may be like the emotions mentioned here, others may be different. You each move through your grief in your own way and at your own pace.

### In the beginning...

You may be in shock. You are bewildered, literally stunned. “I feel like a spectator in a play. But the drama is about me and the person I loved.” You may feel numb all over, almost paralyzed in a world of unreality.

You don’t want to believe it. “It’s a bad dream. When I wake up, I’ll find it really didn’t happen.” *Denial* is when you secretly think or pretend your loved one will return and life will go on as before. It is so strange. You feel as if the death has not really occurred, even though you know it has. Many people need time before they can face the harsh truth. It is so hard to realize that in your lifetime you will never see or touch the other person again.

*Panic* may set in. “What will happen to me?” “I’ll never make it alone.” “Why can’t I get hold of myself?” You feel like you are losing control, panicking over things you used to do with confidence. “If only I could run away, somewhere, anywhere!”

### Later...

Emotional pain often brings *physical distress*. For example, inside your chest you may feel a sharp pain, as if a jagged rock is pressed against your ribs. You collapse, exhausted, into bed but cannot sleep. Food may have little taste for you. You eat only because you think you should. Or else, you just cannot stop eating. Your stomach may be tied in knots. Your back may be hurting. The pain is not imagined, it is real. Your body is feeling your emotional loss.

Many people become angry when someone close to them dies. “Why me?” “Why her?” “What did I do to deserve this?” Hostility is one of the most difficult emotions to handle. Many of us are taught as children that anger is an unacceptable feeling and we learn to hold it inside from a very early age. But the feelings of rage do not magically go away.

Expressing your anger helps you to release your anguish and your frustrations. A life that is precious to you has been taken away and there is nothing you can do about it. Resentment is a normal part of the grief process.

You may feel *guilty* or angry with yourself. You keep saying to yourself: "If only I had spent more time with him, if only I had been more understanding, if only I had called the doctor sooner, if only I had done this, if only I had done that..."

Know that this is a common feeling and it will soften as you are able to remember what you did achieve. Remember that this is now in the past and guilt will not bring the dead person back to you.

Guilt may result in *depression*. You may feel alone, naked, unprotected. There could be a sickening feeling of going down, down, down. You may feel overwhelmed and drained. "Nothing matters anymore. Nothing. Life will never be worth living...Am I going crazy?"

Of course not. But what did you expect? To fill the void immediately? To go on living as before? Give yourself time...time to be hurt, to grieve, to cry, to scream, to "be crazy".

### **Finally...**

Your emotions will become less intense, less overwhelming and more hopeful. As you are ready, you will begin to re-invest your energy in the outside world and will start to feel like a "normal" human being again!

## **Looking After Your Health**

When you are grieving, it is important to look after your physical, as well as emotional well-being. This is often forgotten or ignored when you are under stress and can have a great influence on your emotional healing after a major loss.

Both your eating and sleeping patterns may change, as well as your general health. The following information is intended to help you find ways to take care of your physical health while you are grieving. Remember, everyone's needs are different.

### **Sleep**

Your sleep patterns will probably change during grief. While most people have trouble sleeping, some do sleep more. Dreams and nightmares are also part of the grieving process; a way of 'working through' tough concerns and feelings.

### **Suggestions**

Go to bed and get up at the same time every day, even weekends. Only use your bedroom for sleeping at night; nap elsewhere.

Keep the room temperature warm, rather than hot or cold.

Drink only herbal teas or decaffeinated beverages for at least five hours before bedtime. Soft drinks, coffee, tea, cocoa, chocolate and anacin all contain caffeine.

Exercise daily, but not close to bedtime.

Even though alcohol, cigarettes and heavy meals may make you feel sleepy, they can cause insomnia. Once they are out of your system, you wake up.

Sleeping pills can be used occasionally to help break the pattern, but remember your insomnia will pass.

Discuss your anxieties with an understanding friend or family member, or write them down in a journal. Counselling will help you deal with ongoing grief difficulties.

Don't keep busy right up to bedtime, take 30 minutes to prepare and unwind. Hot milk contains an amino acid that helps induce sleep. A warm bath can be soothing. Reading a 'light' book can give you something else to think about. Relaxation exercises or listening to gentle music also helps prepare you for sleep; watching television in bed will not.

A prime cause of insomnia is the fear that you won't get to sleep; tell yourself you will have a good, restful sleep.

Try curling up with a pillow or soft stuffed animal, lie on your side with a pillow behind your back, use earplugs or a pillow over your exposed ear to block out sounds.

Don't try to force sleep. Use mind games (count sheep, recall a pleasant time, plan a trip, plot a novel). If unsuccessful after 30 minutes, get up and do something pleasant and relaxing.

If the bedroom has too many memories, sleep temporarily in another room, rearrange furniture or redecorate, sleep on your partner's side of the bed.

## **Eating**

Your appetite and eating patterns may change during grief. You could have no appetite at all or could be constantly hungry. Food may be tasteless. Mealtimes can be difficult: the 'empty chair' reminds you that the person is no longer here, enjoying food without him leaves you feeling guilty, etc.

Poor nutrition can result in headaches, digestive problems, feeling fatigued or rundown.

## **Suggestions**

If eating alone is difficult, try changing where you eat or where you sit at the table. Do not choose this time to go on a diet, but do pay close attention to what you eat and drink.

Breakfast is important because it produces the energy you need to face the day's tasks. Good breakfast foods are high in protein and low in sugar – milk, yogurt, whole grain cereal, breads, lean meat, and eggs.

While protein enhances your energy and concentration level, high sugar intake causes fatigue and too many fatty foods can create serious health problems.

- Limit fatty meats and eat more chicken and fish
- Use 2% or skim milk, margarine and polyunsaturated oils
- Use low fat cooking methods (steaming, broiling and poaching)
- Eat vegetables, fruit, breads, rather than candy or baked goods
- Choose packaged and restaurant foods carefully, as they can be high in fat and sugar

Keep healthy snacks available, especially if you find yourself eating a lot. Try the following:

- Dried or fresh fruits
- Fig newtons
- Orange juice
- Popcorn
- Granola

## **General Health**

You will have several different physical reactions to grief and it is important to understand what is happening. You are also **HIGH RISK** for illness, so have regular check-ups and consult your Family Physician about any problems.

## **Suggestions**

Be careful about driving; poor concentration and 'blinking out' can make it hazardous.

Poor nutrition leaves you susceptible to disease, as well as weakened bone and muscle strength.

Poor energy is to be expected. Allow yourself to slow down and let go of some responsibilities for a time.

Regular exercise is essential; even a walk around the block helps.

Be careful with drugs and alcohol. Grief is not treated with medications, as they tend to mask rather than deal with the pain. Alcohol is a depressant.

Palpitations, digestive problems, chest pains, shortness of breath are all normal reactions to grief, but it is important to contact your doctor and have them checked out anyway.

*Remember, at this time it is important to take care of your body, as well as your mind. Good health will help you achieve a more balanced life.*

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## Ways We Deal With Loss

You may find it helpful to ...

You may find it unhelpful to ...

### Behaviours

Talk about it  
Treat yourself to something special  
Cry, laugh  
Go to the beach, park, etc.  
Have hot baths  
Keep busy, go out  
Start a new activity  
“Escape” for awhile (rest, vacation)  
Read, learn more about your situation  
Be with friends

Not talk about it  
Do reckless things  
Drink, do drugs  
Smoke (more)  
Rush around all the time  
Look for a replacement

### Feelings

Write or draw how you're feeling  
Accept and express them  
Get counseling help

Keep emotions inside  
Get stuck  
Take it out on others

### Thoughts

Think about both the good and bad  
Try to find humour  
Draw on past experiences  
Hope for the best, plan for the future

Refuse to think about it  
Try to forget  
Always daydream

### Physical

Exercise, relax, have a massage  
Eat and sleep properly  
See your doctor about problems

Sit around  
Eat or sleep too much or too little  
Take pills for grief

### Beliefs

Pray  
Re-examine beliefs and values  
Search for the meaning in your life

Reject or blame God and others indefinitely  
Completely lose faith or trust

## **Dealing With Grief... A Guide to Understanding Your Reactions**

When someone important to you dies, you grieve. This means that you may experience a wide range of responses, often over an extended period of time. The following three sections generally coincide with early, middle and later grief, though variation and overlap of these phases is common.

### **When a death occurs**

As you accept the fact of the death of someone important, you will feel shock, numbness and disbelief that this has happened. Panic and strong physical and emotional reactions are common.

### **Adjusting to loss**

Later, as the numbness subsides, you will deal with what this loss means to you and the emotional pain of grieving. The intensity of feeling may surprise or frighten you, but it is natural and can be resolved as you move through it.

### **As life goes on**

As you adjust to life without the person who dies, you will begin to re-establish connections with the world around you. You have more energy for family and friends, work and other interests.

Grief may be somewhat familiar, or it may be a new, uncertain endeavour. It is not an easy journey and there may be times when you want more support than is available through your social network.

## **The Grief Journey**

### **When a death occurs**

*Walking the edges*

#### **SOCIAL**

Withdrawal from others  
Unrealistic expectations of self and others  
Poor judgement about relationships

#### **PHYSICAL**

Shortness of breath  
Digestive upsets  
Low energy, weakness and restlessness

## **EMOTIONAL**

Crying, sobbing and wailing  
Indifference and emptiness  
Outrage and helplessness

## **MENTAL**

Confusion, forgetfulness and poor concentration  
Denial and daydreaming  
Constant thoughts about the person who died and/or the death

## **SPIRITUAL**

Blaming God or life  
Lack of meaning, direction or hope  
Wanting to die or join the person who died

### *What helps*

- To pace yourself moment to moment
- To make no unnecessary changes
- To talk about the person and the death
- To use practical and emotional supports

## **Adjusting to loss**

### *Entering the depths*

## **SOCIAL**

Rushing into new relationships  
Wanting company but unable to ask  
Continued withdrawal and isolation  
Self-consciousness

## **PHYSICAL**

Changes in appetite and sleep patterns  
Shortness of breath and palpitations  
Digestive upsets

## **EMOTIONAL**

Intense and conflicting emotions  
Magnified fear for self or others  
Anger, sadness, guilt, depression

## **MENTAL**

Sense of going crazy  
Memory problems  
Difficult to concentrate/understand  
Vivid dreams or nightmares

## **SPIRITUAL**

Trying to contact the person who died  
Sensing the presence of the person who died; visitations  
Continued lack of meaning

### *What helps*

- To recognize and express emotions
- To acknowledge changes
- To understand grief and know others experience similar responses

### **As life goes on**

#### *Mending the heart*

## **SOCIAL**

More interest in daily affairs of self/others  
Ability to reach out and meet others  
Energy for social visits and events

## **PHYSICAL**

Physical symptoms subside  
Sleep pattern and appetites are more settled  
Gut-wrenching, emptiness lightens

## **EMOTIONAL**

Emotions are less intense  
Feeling of coming out of the fog  
More peace; less guilt

## **MENTAL**

Increased perspective about the death  
Ability to remember with less pain  
Improved concentration and memory  
Dreams and nightmares decrease

## **SPIRITUAL**

Reconnection with religious/spiritual beliefs

Life has new meaning and purpose

Acceptance of death as part of the life cycle

### *What helps*

- To reflect on progress since death
- To begin envisioning a future
- To engage in new activities
- To establish new roles and relationships

We have chosen the image of the labyrinth as a metaphor for the journey through grief. A labyrinth is not a maze as there are no dead ends and no wrong turnings. There is only one way – forward. So it is with grief. The only way through is forward, with many turns and going back and forth over what seems like the same territory. We journey to the centre of our grief, to the centre of ourselves, and then slowly return to re-enter the world.

Each person's experience on the journey of grief will be different. This is a reflection of our personal style, our relationship with the person who died, our internal and social resources, and our past history of coping. As you journey through your own grief process, there will likely be unexpected turns and insights.

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## Things to Tell People Who Are Not Grieving

Dear (family, friend, employer...),

I have had a devastating loss. It will take me time, perhaps years, to heal the grief that has afflicted me. For some time, it is quite possible that I will cry much more than usual. My tears do not signify weakness, a lack of hope or faith. They represent the depth of my loss and signify my convalescence.

Perhaps at times I will seem angrier than is apparently reasonable. The stress of grief tests the intensity of my emotions. Understand that this journey of healing drains my energy and often leaves me feeling frustrated. Pardon me if I seem irrational.

I need your understanding and your presence more than anything else. If you don't know what to say, touch me, hold me, but please let me know that you care about me. Please, don't wait until I call you. I am often far too tired to even think of using the telephone to reach out for the help that I need.

Don't let me become a stranger to you. Over the next year or so I will need your presence more than ever. What would be so helpful to me is if you could lend me your willing and supportive shoulder and ear without trying to tell me how or what I should be doing; let me be silent if I want to or laugh and cry with me; offer to help with simple chores; most importantly continue to be my friend.

If, perhaps, you have ever experienced a loss similar to mine, share it with me. You will not hurt my feelings. Although my tears may well, I will be glad to hear the name of my loved one being used and to hear your special memories of them too.

This loss is the worst thing that has ever happened to me. But I will survive and I will heal. I will not always feel the way I am feeling at this moment. I am slowly learning that gentle patience and kindness with myself will help me to smile again in the future.

Thank you for thinking of me. Your consideration is a gift that I will appreciate forever.

## **Grieving – A Time to Heal Support Services Offered By Crossroads Hospice Society**

Many times in our lives we feel alone. This is especially so when someone we love dies. Even though family and friends may be near, they may not understand just how we feel. Grief, like a wound, needs time to heal. The brief time given to attend a funeral is only the beginning of the healing process. Crossroads Hospice Society offers a supportive environment where you may continue to express your feelings. In our experience, it is not uncommon to feel overwhelmed and detached from people who love you after a significant loss. Bereavement support can be of assistance to reconnect you with your feelings of love for friends and relatives and your passion for life.

If you have suffered the loss of a loved one it is important to know that you are not alone. Crossroads Hospice volunteers know that grief is painful and grieving is hard work. They offer a listening ear and a caring heart which can support you as you journey through the grieving process.

Below is a description of the different individual and group support services we offer:

**Bereavement Information Packages** - A selection of articles which offer understanding and reassurance about the experience of grieving. These packages are sent during the first year of bereavement.

**One to One Volunteer Support** - Individual support is available for those waiting for placement in a group or who prefer individual support. Hospice volunteers offer support either by tele-care outreach or visits.

**Support & Share** - For Those Newly Bereaved - A drop-in for those who have experienced the death of a loved one and need to connect with others. Participants are invited to join in a small group for sharing with others who have experienced loss.

**Grief's Journey** - A walking group for the bereaved or those grieving the imminent death of a significant person in their life. This program combines informal support with fresh air and exercise.

**Memory Books** - Our memories can be as precious as gold and act as balm to our souls. A wonderful way to remember a loved one is to create a memory book through the art of scrapbooking. With an emphasis on "telling the story", scrapbooking techniques can be used to quickly, simply and easily create a celebration of lives and events. It can ease the way through our grief journey. Hospice volunteers are available to demonstrate scrapbooking techniques and consult with you about a project you may be interested in completing.

**Compassionate Grief Support Program** - This is an opportunity to share with others who have also experienced a loss and to explore and express thoughts and feelings associated with the grieving process. In the safety of a group you can share and learn from others. Topics addressed include the phases of grief; coping with loss; memories; dealing with anger, guilt and loneliness; forgiveness; letting go and saying goodbye. Groups meet once a week for 8 weeks. Day and evening programs are offered regularly throughout the year.

**Teenagers Face to Face with Grief: A Support Program for Adolescents** - The purpose of this program is to help adolescents develop positive coping skills and behaviours for dealing with the grief associated with the loss of a significant relationship. Participants benefit from gathering with others and sharing their experience(s) with loss in a supportive environment. The peer support helps to counteract the tendency for adolescents to isolate themselves from their support systems when they are grieving a loss. This program is designed for adolescents between the ages of 13 and 19 years.

*For more information on any of these services or to arrange for an appointment, please call our Bereavement Services Coordinator, Amelie Lambert: Office: 604-949-2274  
Cellphone: 604-813-6576*



# Grief Counselling and Support Services Resource List

## General Information and Referrals

B.C. Bereavement Helpline 604-738-9950  
[www.intergate.bc.ca/bcbereavement](http://www.intergate.bc.ca/bcbereavement) [bcbh@telus.net](mailto:bcbh@telus.net) 1-877-779-2223  
Services: Offers helpline for emotional support and referral to community support group programs.  
Fee: No charge

## Bereavement Counsellors

BC Association of Social Workers 604-730-9111  
BC Psychological Association 1-800-730-0522  
BC Association of Clinical Counsellors 1-800-909-6303  
\*Fee for service may vary. Some practitioners may use a sliding scale. Be sure to inquire for their rates prior to booking an appointment.  
\*Check for coverage under Extended Medical Benefits

## Resources for Adults

Burnaby Hospice Society [www.burnabyhospice.org](http://www.burnabyhospice.org) Burnaby 604-430-4103  
Services: One to one support; professional grief counseling and group support programs.  
Fee: No charge, donations appreciated

Crossroads Hospice Society Tri-Cities & New West. 604-949-2274  
[www.crossroadshospice.bc.ca](http://www.crossroadshospice.bc.ca) Castine Breckwoldt 604-813-6576  
Services: Individual support and group programs for adults and adolescents.  
Fee: No charge, donations appreciated

Richmond Hospice Society Richmond 604-279-7140  
Services: Individual support and group programs.  
Fee: No charge, donations appreciated

Ridge Meadows Hospice Society Maple Ridge 604-463-7722  
Services: Offers one to one and group support programs.  
Fee: No charge, donations appreciated

Surrey Hospice Society [www.surreyhospice.com](http://www.surreyhospice.com) Surrey 604-543-7006  
Services: Offers individual and group support programs for children, teens and adults.  
Fee: No charge, donations appreciated.

<u>Lower Mainland Grief Recovery Society</u>	604-643-9637
Services: Offers six-week closed support programs for adults – educational and support components. Available at differing times in the following communities: North Shore, Richmond, Kerrisdale, Vancouver	
Fee: No charge, donations appreciated	
<u>St. Paul's Hospital</u> (62355)	Vancouver 604-682-2344
Grieving Well – grief support and education series.	
No Fee	
<u>Living Through Loss Counselling</u>	Vancouver 604-873-5013
Services: Open weekly drop-in support group facilitated by a professional counsellor, one on one counselling and occasional closed support groups.	
Fee: Drop-in by donation, closed groups may have a registration fee	
<u>AIDS Vancouver</u> <a href="http://www.aidsvancouver.bc.ca">www.aidsvancouver.bc.ca</a>	Vancouver 604-681-2122
Services: Referral for bereavement support	
Fee: unknown	
<u>Bridge to Life</u>	604-941-0220
<u>Catholic Family Services</u>	Vancouver 604-683-0281
Services: Support groups for adults grieving through separation/divorce. One-to-one counselling.	
Fee: Sliding scale beginning at \$20/session	
<u>Family Services of Greater Vancouver</u>	Vancouver 604-731-4951
<u>International Christian Counselling Association</u>	604-461-4612
<u>Jewish Family Services</u>	Vancouver 604-257-5151
Services: On-going bereavement group. Counselling.	
No Fee	
<u>Salvation Army Family Services</u>	604-521-2421
<u>Surrey Memorial Hospital</u>	Surrey 604-851-2211
Services: Group held Thursday nights @ 7 p.m.	
<u>Vancouver Christian Counselling Centre</u>	Vancouver 604-688-3945

## Resources for Parents

Compassionate Friends [www.tcfcananda.net/](http://www.tcfcananda.net/)

Services: Drop-in support group for parents who have lost a child (at any age). Chapters around the province including:

Coquitlam	604-581-5516	Ridge Meadows	604-467-3971
Vancouver	604-298-7664	North Shore	604-926-6513
Abbotsford	604-986-9954		

Fee: No charge

Empty Cradle [emptycradle@telus.net](mailto:emptycradle@telus.net) 604-525-4347

Services: A bereaved parents group for those who have experienced pregnancy or infant loss(es).

Meeting held on 2<sup>nd</sup> Wed. each month, 7:30 p.m., at Olivet Baptist Church, 613 Queens St. New Westminster.

Fee: No charge

## Resources for Children

Canuck Place – Children’s Hospice [www.canuckplace.org](http://www.canuckplace.org) Vancouver 604-731-4847

Services: Support group programs for children and adolescents. Also provides programs for parents.

Fee: No charge

## Resources for Seniors

W.H.O. (Widows Helping Others)

Services: Self-help support and social network for widows, providing practical information, drop-in sessions, lectures and outings.

Coquitlam	604-942-0558	Maple Ridge	604-467-6911
Surrey	604-589-4634	Langley	604-530-8480
Abbotsford	604-853-1367	White Rock	604-531-4419

Fee: No charge

Century House Seniors Peer Counselling New West. 604-519-1066

Services: One-to-one support to peers by trained volunteers.

Fee: No charge

Burnaby Seniors Outreach Services Burnaby 604-291-2258

Services: Offers “On Our Own” social support groups for people adjusting to living on their own; volunteer one on one peer counselling.

Fee: No charge

## Resources for Suicide Survivors

### SAFER

Vancouver 604-879-9251

(Suicide Attempt Counseling Service)

Services: Support programs for suicide related deaths; critical incident debriefing; and one to one counseling with professionals.

Fee: No charge

### CHIMO

Richmond 604-279-7070

Personal Distress Intervention Center

Services: Suicide related loss support programs and one to one counseling. Groups meet every second Wednesday 4:30-6:30 p.m.

Fee: No charge

## Crisis Services

### Crisis Services

Van/NS 604-872-3311

Rmd/Delta 604-279-7070

Tri Cities 604-540-2221

Services: Telephone lines for those in crisis and needing emotional support.

Adults, teens, children, 7 days/week

*Updated: July 2011*