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.

Victoria Hospice Society offers bereavement support by volunteers and counsellors for individuals and families, including children and teens. Our services include telephone support; counselling; a variety of bereavement support groups, including drop-in and walking groups; education; and referrals.

Victoria Hospice Bereavement Services are funded entirely through the generosity of our community. We charge no fees for individual or family counselling and support. There are fees for some of our groups and training.

We encourage your donation. Your gift will provide direct care for individuals and families today, as well as help us to meet the need for end-of-life and bereavement care tomorrow. To discuss making a gift or including Victoria Hospice in your legacy plans, or to find out more about fundraising activities, contact:

Victoria Hospice and Palliative Care Foundation
1510 Fort Street, Victoria, BC V8S 5J2
Phone: 250-952-5720
Email: vic.hospice@viha.ca
www.victoriahospicefoundation.org

The Bereavement Services office is open Monday through Friday (excluding holidays). All of our bereavement pamphlets and brochures (including this one) are available in print form as well as electronically through our website: www.victoriahospice.org.

Please visit our website for links to other sources of information and support about grief and bereavement.
Be genuine by being yourself
Your connection with the bereaved person should be a continuation of your usual relationship with them. If you are a close friend, they will want and expect caring contact from you. A bereaved person will not want anyone to assume an unfamiliar intimacy now. Your sensitivity and dependability can make a difference to how understood and supported they feel.

Acknowledge the loss as soon as you can after you get the news
Send a sympathy card with a note of personal condolence. Don’t let fear that you won’t say or do the right thing hold you back from talking with the bereaved person. Simply say that you are sorry to hear of the death, mention the person by name, be willing to listen to what the bereaved person may say. Ask how you can be helpful, offer some assistance in a way that feels comfortable for you.

Get good information about grief so that you understand the normal responses and phases of grief
Grief is a natural and necessary process that helps the bereaved person to adjust to life without the person who died.

Reach out to offer support
Be there by making regular contact over time. Many bereaved people find it hard to reach out or are concerned about being a burden on friends and family. Your initiative in keeping in touch will be appreciated.

Be patient
Mourning takes lots of time and grief never entirely goes away. The bereaved person will have ups and downs as they move through their grief. Be flexible in how you offer support as the needs of the bereaved person will change with the grief process.

Understand that everyone grieves in their own way and at their own pace
How a person grieves is a result of their personality, their past history of loss and the relationship that they had with the person who died. Accept the bereaved person’s evaluation of the significance of the loss and the depth of their feelings.

Remember that there is no right way to grieve
Avoid criticizing how someone is grieving; you cannot know what is best for them. Most often a person’s strengths, coping mechanisms and network of family, friends and acquaintances are sufficient to sustain them through their grief. However, if you are concerned, encourage them to take care of themselves by getting help also from their minister, doctor, or a counsellor.

Offer practical help
In the days after the death has occurred
• help with answering the phone,
• make lists of what needs to be done,
• bring a meal,
• do errands and shopping,
• take care of the children,
• be a chauffeur to appointments.
In the months following the death
• bring and share a meal,
• spend time to listen,
• help with garden chores or household maintenance,
• offer some holiday baking,
• share a regular walk or outing,
• offer expertise you may have,
• remember anniversaries, birthdays and special holidays.
When the bereaved person is ready
• help build a bridge to the future,
• include them in social gatherings with new people,
• accompany them to new activities,
• encourage their growing independence,
• welcome their new friends in your social circle,
• continue to remember the person who died and talk about them.