



# Grief Support Information

with



**Barbara Gillett Saunders**  
Grief Counsellor/Thanatologist

# INTRODUCTIONS

Barbara Gillett Saunders

Grief Counsellor/Thanatologist

An A-ha moment  
&  
Disclaimer

# AN "A-HA" MOMENT IS ALL IT TOOK



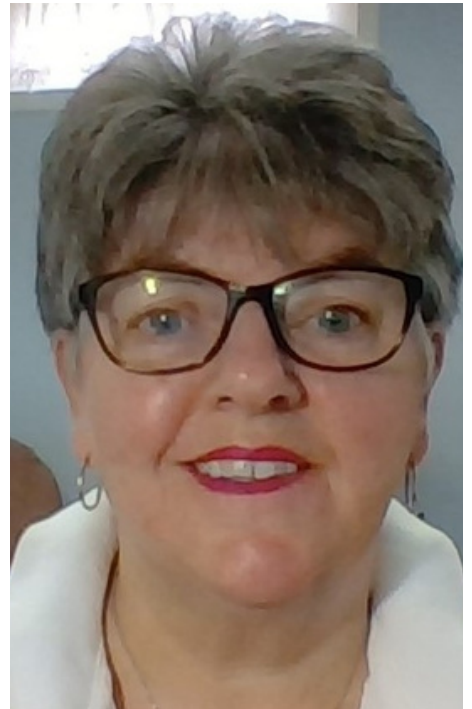
In the past several years while counselling to support individuals who had someone die by suicide and noticing the steady increase of those needing support, I became overwhelmed and frustrated with the lack of time and resources needed to do my job effectively.

In addition to my workload, counsellors, teachers, hospital staff and more connected with me to help them support their clients with grief and loss.

What the heck was going on?

I asked several individuals if they had the basic skills to ask questions and listen effectively, to which they all responded with "YES". I then asked them what was stopping them from talking about death, grief and loss with their clients.

The main response I heard was, "I don't know how to start the conversation and what to say next".



**THAT WAS IT!  
I HAD A REASON AND AN ANSWER  
TO WHAT WAS GOING ON.**

I now offer programs to empower heartfelt counsellors to confidently support their grieving clients who need them the most.

Are you ready to shine bright for your clients?

All my best,

*Barbara Gillett Saunders*



# IMPORTANT DISCLAIMER

The information contained in this presentation and grouping of handouts, is meant to be used by a professional counsellor, teacher, nurse, trained volunteer, hospice worker etc. The intended purpose of these handouts is to help a qualified individual support their grieving clients.

Discussions or conversations need to be included in the process when using the handouts. It is not advisable to give the handout to your client and send them on their way. Do your due diligence to explore what the client is experiencing mentally, physically, emotionally and spiritually as it may pertain to the topic at hand.

Barbara (Gillett) Saunders and "Healing a Heart's Loss" in any capacity are not responsible for any outcomes as a result of another person's use of the material mentioned and provided in handouts.

All my best,

*Barbara Gillett Saunders*



GENERAL  
INFORMATION  
ABOUT

GRIEF  
&  
LOSS

## Present Time

In reality, many people grieve but they do not mourn. Instead of being encouraged to express their grief outwardly, they are often greeted with messages such as; "carry on", "keep your chin up" and "keep busy". They end up grieving within themselves in isolation, instead of mourning outside of themselves in the presence of loving companions.

**This is where people can get “STUCK”  
and unable to process their grief.**

What does grief look like?

### GRIEF

Is the **INTERNAL**

The thoughts and feelings  
we experience

- Why questions
- Anger, sadness, fear  
numbness, shock etc.

### MOURNING

Is the **OUTWARD**

Expressions of grief people  
see

- Crying
- Isolating self
- What we wear

Below are different references to grief, loss and trauma outlined in a very general perspective to give you a concept of grief with stages, models, frameworks etc. if you want to search for more information.

**There is no set path to heal from or experience grief.  
There is no magic wand!**

From Dr. Allan Wolfelt

1. Acknowledge the reality of the death
2. Embracing the pain of the loss
3. Remembering the person who died
4. Developing a new identity
5. Searching for meaning
6. Receiving ongoing support from others

Elizabeth Kubler-Ross (a quick view of her stages of grief, but not explained)

1. Denial
2. Anger
3. Bargaining
4. Depression
5. Acceptance

Dual Process Model with Margaret Stroebe and Hank Schut

- Crying
- Yearning
- Experiencing sadness, denial, or anger
- Dwelling on the circumstances of the death
- Avoiding restoration activities

A few more names in the field of grief and loss studies are;

Kenneth J. Doka *Ph.D.*  
William J. Worden *Ph.D.*  
Colin Murray Parkes *psychiatrist*  
John Bowlby *psychologist*  
Dr. Gabor Mate (*addictions, trauma*)

## What does grief look like?

Other factors that may affect your story and loss scenario;

- Complicated grief...due to a traumatic event, situation, type of death
  - Example: disenfranchised grief where no one talks about it such as suicide, AIDS, divorce, abortion etc.
- Unable to do the grief work...WHY?
  - No time to grieve
  - Don't want to do the work of grieving
  - Belief in old myths of grieving...get over it, enough time has passed
- Attachment bonds
  - How close you were/are to the person who died
  - What circumstances or situations might affect the grief process
  - Relationship to deceased
- Family Dynamics
  - Strained relationships with family members after the loss
  - Not being respected for the way you grieve
  - Not grieving the "proper" way...the way society thinks your grief "should" look like

**Never "SHOULD" on yourself!**

Do you have any examples or concerns you want to write down?

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## BELIEFS ABOUT COUNSELLORS/PROFESSIONALS

There may be a lack of trust of professionals due to past experiences or old beliefs.

Fear and the manner in which they were socialized may prevent older adult griever from disclosing much information (pg. 323, 324). Older adults may not seek the help of professionals.

## **CHILDREN GRIEVE LOSS/DEATH DIFFERENTLY THAN ADULTS**

Adults can set an example for children. A child's concept and understanding of death differs and changes with each developmental stage. Showing emotions in front of a child gives the child permission to express their feelings.

Unexpressed grief will possibly erupt in the future in unexpected ways that you may not relate to a prior loss. Teenagers may appear to be handling life well after a loss and a few years later express noticeable behavioral changes. Talking about the loss/death with age-appropriate words and concepts is important

**If you are old enough to love, you are old enough to grieve.**

## **OLDER ADULT GRIEVERS**

Being older and perhaps having experienced more losses does not mean that experiencing loss/death gets easier. An accumulation of losses can sometimes affect a person's ability to cope (Hooyman, Kramer. 2006, and Pg. 70).

## **WHEN REPRESSED GRIEF COMES BACK**

Many older individuals may experience "a natural occurring life review process" (pg. 325.) As children, older adult grievers may have been taught not to show their feelings and been excluded from funeral services. In some cultures, children were taught to be seen and not heard.

Looking back on life's losses, especially when triggered by a recent loss/death can complicate the individual's grief process. Family members may not realize this is happening. A better understanding of the griever's life can add an element of compassion that may not have been expressed by family, friends or supportive professionals.

NOTE: The "Handbook of Bereavement Research" states that suicide risk is higher in older bereaved people, particularly in men. Decreased psychological distress was noticed with individuals who had help from support groups to improve their sense of control in their life (Stroebe, Hanson, Stroebe, Schut. 2004, pg. 597).

## Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) may be a component of your loss experience, especially if;

1. You notice you are having prolonged recurring thoughts of the death and its circumstances.
2. You are replaying the final moments over and over in your mind trying to make sense of the death/ loss.
3. You can't get the thoughts of the loss or situation out of your mind.
4. You are experiencing chronic anxiety (anxiety disorder).
5. You have a prolonged tendency to avoid triggers surrounding the memory of the experience.
6. You have witnessed the death/loss or found the deceased individual.
7. You have heard graphic details of the death; vicarious trauma.
8. You have mental health concerns that increase your vulnerability to trauma related concerns.

NOTE: You may notice you have some of what is mentioned above, but not in its extreme sense. You may not have PTSD. Keep in mind, grief is experienced in different intensities at different times for many individuals.



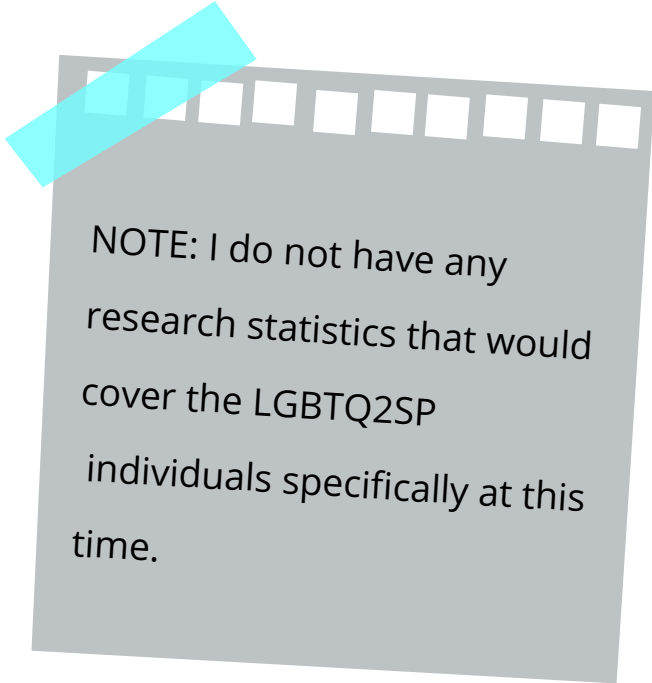
It is important  
to do no harm  
from a personal,  
professional and  
an ethical spot.

## GENERALIZED GENDER GRIEF POINTS

1. Women generally express their feelings more than men do
2. Women generally use emotion focused coping
3. Men generally use rational problem solving skills
4. Men show their emotions through sex
5. Women show their emotions through caring
6. Men may focus on tasks instead of dealing with their feelings
7. Women may seek the solace of friends or counsellors
8. When men do seek counseling help they tend to do better than women
9. Men can be more socially isolated than women
10. Elderly men are at a higher risk of dying of a heart attack after the death of their spouse (Hooyman, Kramer. 2006. pg. 68, 69).

NOTE: Men who are widowed, alone with no supports, isolated and living in rural areas are at a high risk for suicide.

**There is no right or wrong way to grieve.**



NOTE: I do not have any research statistics that would cover the LGBTQ2SP individuals specifically at this time.

# A Few Different Types of Loss

## Nonfinite Loss

Losses that an individual may live with for the rest of their lives. This can include; adoption, divorce, infertility, sexual abuse, traumatic injury, ongoing illness

## Ambiguous Loss

Is the loss of a loved one who is still alive, but the relationship has changed in some way. Some equate this to being in a "GRIEF LIMBO". Examples can include; kidnapping, dementia, separation from others due to war, person on drugs, etc. You don't have closure and continue to be distressed over the situation.

Retrieved April 19, 2022 <https://www.tikvahlake.com/blog/what-is-ambiguous-loss/#:~:text=Ambiguous%20loss%20is%20unlike%20any,immigration%20of%20a%20loved%20one>

## Nondeath Loss

### Tangible

Include losses such as; loss of home, job, your country, divorce, adoption, loss of self, mobility, possessions, friendships, etc.

### Intangible

Include; loss of dreams, meaning, identity, safety etc.

## Disenfranchised Grief

Is grief that is not acknowledged by others. Is unseen, does not receive the support of others or is dismissed by others.

Examples can include: divorce, ex-partner, miscarriages, loss of a pet, loss of a job, home, culture, multigenerational losses, children's grief, traumas etc.



# HEADS UP...

This is important to  
be aware  
of for yourself &  
your clients.

# The load gets lighter

You and your clients do not have to look deeply at every concern and issue. You may notice that when you start to look at one concern, the heaviness or weight starts to come off of other concerns. The load lightens.



# Hold the space

For those who grieve, it is important to have someone who will hold the space for them to grieve. To be heard without judgment.

Grieving people have a high  
need to be understood  
&  
a low need to  
understand others





# Thoughts of suicide

## *Have the conversation*

Depending on the situation, the person, their coping abilities and so much more, THOUGHTS OF SUICIDE may be on their mind. Have the courage to step into this conversation in a manner that does not include actually checking off a list of questions while the individual is sitting in front of you.

### **THIS IS THE BEST WAY TO LOSE THEM!**

If prior suicides have been attempted they are at a higher risk of attempting again. The pain from grief can be overwhelming.



# Grief Waves

Grief waves or grief bursts come in all sizes and hit whenever they want. They do not care who you are, where you are, what you are doing.

They can hit hard when you least expect it and at others time can be a gentle reminder of the loss experience.





# Cultural Considerations

Ideally , it is better if you know and understand the cultural understandings of the individuals you are supporting. Never make assumptions about someone.

Are interpreters needed? Don't be afraid to say you are not familiar with their cultural practices...it is never too late to learn. We learn from each other.



# Best Practices

Some individuals belong to regulatory bodies that govern best practices for their members; such as the Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers (OCSWSSW). When looking at best practices, a few considerations need to be;

1. **100% confidentiality** unless a "RELEASE OF INFORMATION" form has been signed by your client giving you permission to talk about their situation.
2. Keep paper **files secure**, don't leave them on your desk or in your car.
3. Be up front with what you know or do not know, **don't pretend**.
4. Be **honest** with your statements and comments.
5. Do not make **assumptions** about anything.
6. Seek additional **supports** when needed for your clients.
7. Ask for **clarification** when you do not understand something that is being said.
8. Do not take on more than you can handle...**SELF CARE**
9. Keep learning



# STARTING THE CONVERSATION ABOUT GRIEF & LOSS



# *Get the basics and then go deeper*



What are your main loss concerns at this moment?

Tell me your story.

Are there any other losses you have experienced to date?

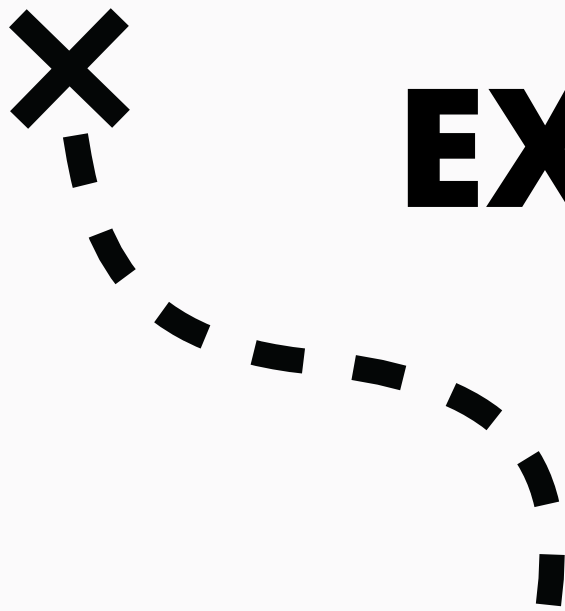


How are you coping now?

Do you feel supported by others?

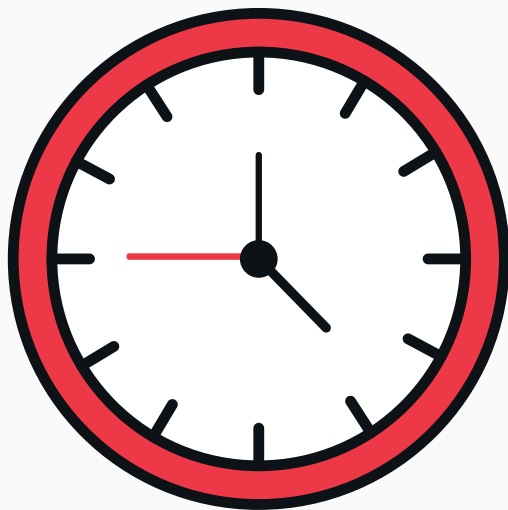
Who is your emergency contact person?





# EXPLORE

Where you start is not a straight line to where you will finish.



It takes time for people to

KNOW  
LIKE  
&  
TRUST  
you.



Grief is not all about sadness. For some situations there are funny moments to be remembered, ask about them.

What about accomplishments?  
Theirs and yours.





Tell me about your  
special person or  
family..

Resources are important as are  
other supportive options,  
suggestions  
or ideas.



# HANDOUTS AS TOOLS

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Reinforcing



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All my best,

*Barbara Gillett Saunders*

# HOW TO USE THE HANDOUTS

"What do I do with this information?" may be a question you are asking yourself.

Each handout can be given to your grieving client to help you start and continue a conversation about their grief and loss. It is not uncommon for grieving clients to not know where to start with their story or what emotions to look at and when.

Working from a client centred approach, taking the client's lead on what is their main concern at the moment is a good place to start. There are times when, as a counsellor or supportive person, you know there is more to be explored.

The handouts provided in this package can be used as a means of having your client explore differing concerns that may be present with their current situation. Sometimes, one word will bring up other memories or concerns for the individual.

This is a **basic** assortment of handouts to include in your tool box of interactive ideas for exploring.

*Remember there can be deeper traumas, past losses and more that hinder and complicate the grieving process.*

Look for:

1. key words a client might use when answering or filling out their handout
2. what emotions do you see or are mentioned by your client
3. what resonates with your client when they read a poem
4. places where you can reinforce how grief is like this sometimes
5. what is left unsaid
6. experiences the client has had or may be concerned about for themselves or others
7. acknowledgment from your client that there is a lot going on or the totals reflect that there is a lot of work that needs to be done

# GRIEF REACTIONS

Sometimes we do not have all of the words to describe how we are managing now that grief is a part of our lives.

The following is a list of common grief reactions. Check mark all that apply to you now and perhaps in a different manner, indicate ones that you no longer have.

- Shock
- Numbness
- Sadness
- Despair
- Disbelief
- Feeling removed from daily life
- Unable or difficulty in carrying on with everyday tasks
- Loneliness
- Isolation
- Social withdrawal
- Difficulty concentrating
- Forgetfulness
- Irritability
- Anger
- Body aches and pains
- Increase/decrease in appetite
- Sleeplessness/oversleeping
- Confusion
- Guilt
- Crying
- Feeling empty
- Restlessness
- Over activity
- Avoiding reminders of loved one
- Tightness in chest/ throat
- Nausea
- Hollow feeling in stomach
- Sense of depersonalization
- Frustration
- Dreams about the person
- Visiting places or carrying objects that remind us of our loved one



# GRIEF IS LOVE WITH NOWHERE TO GO

Grief is love with nowhere to go,  
but it is “love” just the same and we feel it.  
It is not so much a permanent place of emptiness  
as it is a process toward healing and capacity  
with tears as a necessary part of the journey.

Jamie Anderson



What comments can be made about this statement?

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# EXPLAINING MY LOSS TO YOU!

I want you to know --- I have experienced a loss that is devastating to me. It will take time, and I don't know how much time I will need for me to work through the grief I feel because of this loss.

I will cry more than usual for some time. My tears are not a sign of weakness or a lack of hope or faith. They are the sign that I am recovering from the depth of this loss that may be compounded by other loss concerns.

I may become angry; seemingly for no reason. My emotions are heightened by the stress of grief. Please be forgiving if I seem forgetful, irrational and confused at times.

I need your understanding, compassion and presence more than anything else. If you don't know what to say, a gentle touch or hug will let me know you care.

Please don't wait for me to call you. I am often too tired to even think of reaching out for the help I need. I often do not know what it is that I do need at any given time.

Don't allow me to withdraw from you. I need you more than ever during the next year and perhaps more. I cannot make you feel better while struggling myself.

If you have had an experience of loss that seems anything like mine, please share it with me. You will not make me feel worse. This loss is the worst thing that could happen to me, but I will get through it and live, laugh and love again.

# BEGIN WITH YES

Begin with YES isn't always easy, is it?  
Sometimes finding the energy and the will power when  
You're feeling exhausted, discouraged and stuck is just  
about the hardest thing in the world.

On those days, make the steps really, really small.  
Remind yourself that any step is good, and very often  
it's one of those seemingly small steps that set big change in motion.

Author Unknown



# FEARS

Fears --- what are you afraid of?

I have often heard individuals express fears about their life, now that a special person has died. The following is a list of comments from others that might resonate with you.

1. Fear that I will never be the same
2. Fear that someone else will die
3. Fear of telling anyone what I REALLY feel deep inside
4. Fear of what would happen to my family and friends if I died
5. Fear that at times I am so low that I think of suicide for myself
6. Fear that I feel different and do not know what to do about this
7. Fear that if I tell someone I am suicidal they will lock me up some place

What else can you add to this list?

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If you have any of the above fears you are completely normal given the loss you have experienced. Some people experience the fears and feelings in different degrees or not at all. I have found that when a loss has occurred, the grief experienced by each person is "THEIR GRIEF". Comparisons do not work. There are definitely similarities and commonalities, but each person's life story is different as are their coping skills.

*If you hear, "It has been long enough (to grieve),  
or just get back to normal", ignore this!  
"NORMAL" is a cycle on the washing machine.*

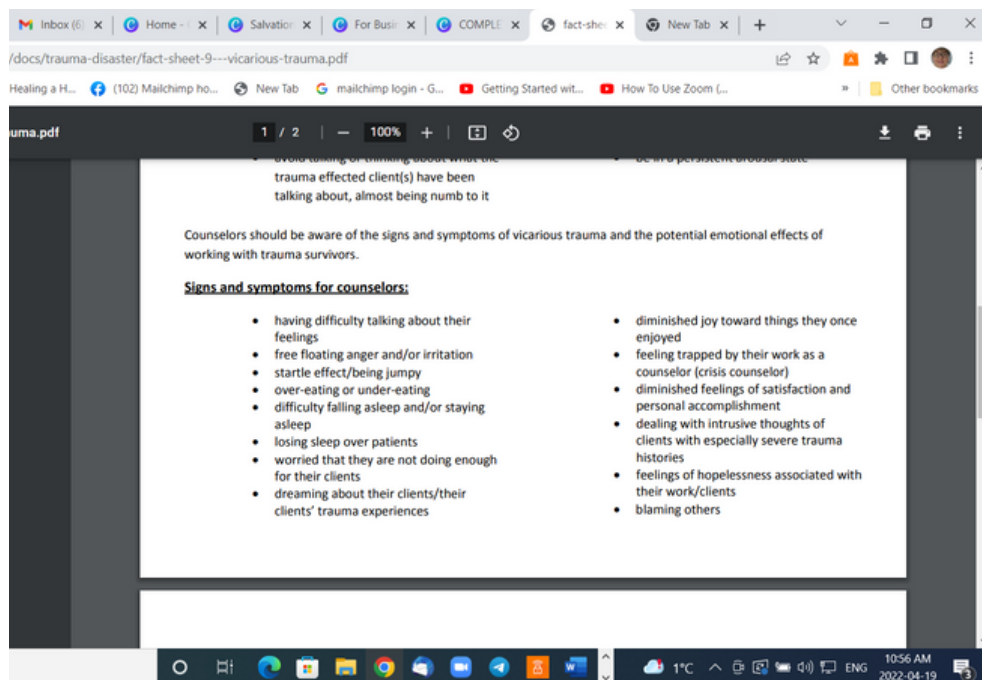
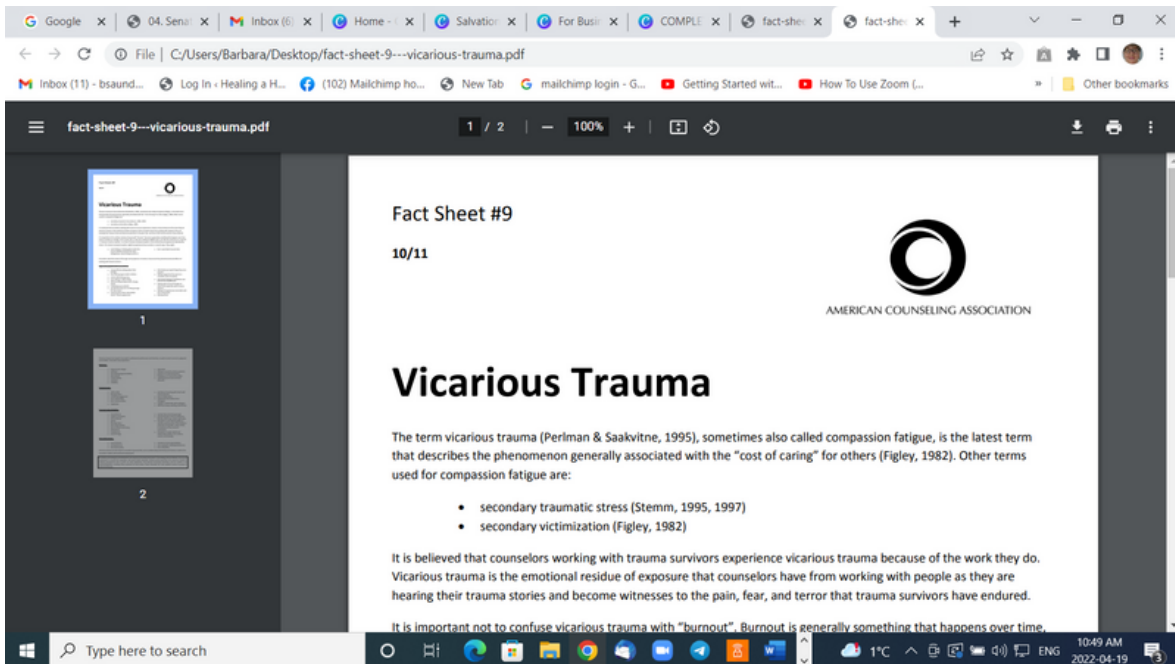
# IT IS ABOUT YOU TOO

# Vicarious Trauma /Secondary Traumatic Stress

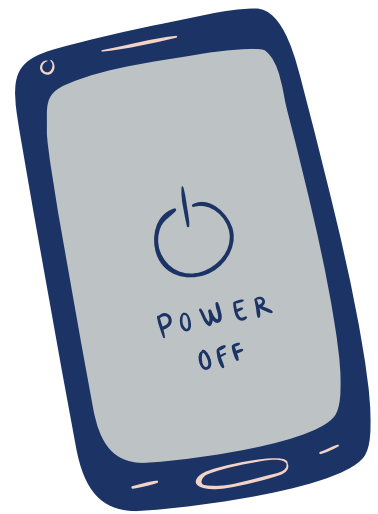
*This link has 2 pages of some good information*

Retrieved April 19, 2022 from

<https://www.counseling.org/docs/trauma-disaster/fact-sheet-9---vicarious-trauma.pdf>



# Self Care



Plus many more ideas

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I invite you to join me,

Everything I do is to empower others to see their own greatness. I believe everyone deserves to have someone special by their side to offer support, guidance, hope and encourage self-empowerment when someone dear to them has died.

From this heartfelt space is where I shine, naturally uplifting those grieving a loss.

Through my life's journey with moments of joy and deep despair I know I am no different than many of your clients or yourself. Now, I define myself by the courage and strength it took me to get to where I am today. Many others saw this in me long before I believed in myself.

**The world needs a COMMUNITY of heartfelt counsellors to help support the grief, loss and traumas of those around us.**

*Barbara Gillett Saunders*

## HAVE QUESTIONS?

519-637-8458  
St. Thomas, Ontario  
Canada

[bsaunders@healingaheartloss.com](mailto:bsaunders@healingaheartloss.com)  
[www.healingaheartloss.com](http://www.healingaheartloss.com)  
[griefcounsellingtoolkit.com](http://griefcounsellingtoolkit.com)



# WAYS TO STAY CONNECTED TO BARBARA

## EMAIL ADDRESS

[bsaunders@healingaheartloss.com](mailto:bsaunders@healingaheartloss.com)

## LINKEDIN

[www.linkedin.com/in/barbara-gillett-saunders-ba-rssw-thanatologist-grief-counselor-9a822440](http://www.linkedin.com/in/barbara-gillett-saunders-ba-rssw-thanatologist-grief-counselor-9a822440)

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Helping others is a  
gift to yourself.