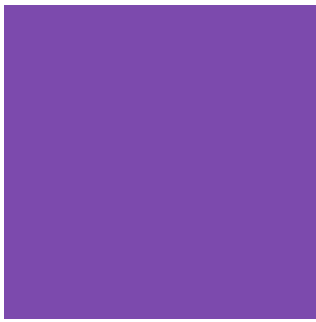




Beside you through grief's journey



**SUPPORTING  
FAMILIES  
OF MISSING &  
MURDERED  
INDIGENOUS  
WOMEN &  
GIRLS & OTHER  
MISSING  
PERSONS**



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Caring Hearts provides mental health support to the people of Saskatchewan when they are overcome with grief and heartache. We offer young people the opportunity to begin their journey of grief and healing through Caring Hearts Camp. We educate agencies and service providers by sharing our expertise so they can fill their professional toolboxes and better support their communities. Most importantly - we listen, we understand, and we are beside the people of our province every step of the way to help guide them through grief's journey.



### A MESSAGE FROM DUANE BOWERS, LPC, CCHT

Duane is a licensed Professional Counselor and Educator. As a therapist, his specialty is working with survivors of traumatic death and suicide, which includes providing support to families of abducted, missing, exploited and murdered children through the National Centre for Missing and Exploited Children [NCMEC]. In September 2001 Duane responded to the Pentagon immediately following the terrorist attack on September 11th, providing support to rescue and recovery workers.

Currently, Duane is responsible for the clinical supervision and training of staff and

volunteers for a variety of organizations that deal with trauma and loss in the US and Canada. In Canada, Duane works through Caring Hearts providing education and assisting in creating programs focused on trauma informed care, first responder trauma and ambiguous loss. He also serves as a consultant to the Canadian Centre for Child Protection in Winnipeg, Manitoba Canada.

As an educator, Duane teaches seminars nationally, internationally and regionally on dying, death and grief, as well as trauma, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), and traumatic loss.

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# Introduction

by Duane T. Bowers

When a family discovers that a female member or other person has gone missing, it sets into motion a process of physical, emotional and mental activity that is incomparable to any other situation. As time passes and the female or other family member remains missing, the family becomes more and more dependent on the agencies, the systems and the strangers that are trained to respond to the event, but not necessarily to support of the family of the missing female. When a family discovers that a female or other member has been murdered, grief becomes a process of the individual family members, the immediate family, the extended family, and often of the surrounding community. If the family has difficulty in asking for or finding appropriate support, they may become emotionally, mentally and even spiritually isolated. It becomes the duty of those around this family to provide the support in spite of their ability to ask for help.

The word support is used consistently in this writing. When supporting the family of a

missing and/or murdered female or other missing persons, we cannot cure, we cannot fix, we cannot heal, we cannot alleviate, we cannot facilitate closure...we can only support the process this family must endure. Throughout this writing is the reference to the supporter or the person providing support. This refers to you; the friends, family members, clergy, volunteers or para-professionals, law enforcement personnel, medical personnel, mental health workers, and tribal leaders and healers who are assisting the family through this experience.

This writing provides information about supporting families when the female family member or other missing persons (1) is missing ,(2) was missing and has been located, and (3) was missing and has been found deceased. Each of these scenarios is presented in a separate chapter. Chapter 1 – *Supporting Families of the Missing* provides the basic information, and is the foundation for the other two chapters. Chapter 1 should be read first.

Chapter 1 follows the needs of the family from the time the female or other missing persons goes missing, through the following hours, days, even weeks of the absence. The chapter presents information on how to support the physical and emotional needs and structure of the family, and shows how providing healthy support at the beginning of the absence serves as a basis for healthy coping throughout.

In Chapter 2 we address the recovery of the missing woman/girl or other missing person in the context that a recovered person is not necessarily one who is returned to the family unit. However, recovery does allow for the family to establish permanence whether the woman/girl or other missing person is returned or not. It is also important that the person providing support understands their own needs and limitations; a support person who gets involved beyond their capacity is no longer a support, but another casualty of the female gone missing. Support for the family must come from a



variety of sources and is not the responsibility of one person. Through the suggestions in this chapter we find that one of the best ways to provide support is to encourage the family members to utilize several different avenues of support.

Chapter 3 addresses how to support the family of a murdered female family member. We discuss how the characteristics of the death influence the family's grief response, and how the family must shift from a dual sense of future to a future without the physical presence of the woman/girl or other missing

person. Family members may be driven to see that the perpetrator is brought to justice, or may express a need to forgive the perpetrator. Support for both of these perspectives is discussed. The chapter discusses the times and triggers that may result in re-grief for the family. Finally, we see how the family may need to create a 'new relationship' with the deceased woman/girl or other missing person, wherever they may be in death. In each of these processes we note how important it is for the person providing the support to do so in a non-judgmental way, regardless of their personal beliefs.

Previously, there has been no model to follow for the support of families of missing and murdered indigenous women and girls. Attempting to utilize existing models often results in the family not feeling understood, resulting in their refusing to ask for or to accept help in the future. This further isolates the family, as they struggle to face this dilemma alone. The information contained in this writing is based on anecdotal information derived from case studies and clinical interventions with families of missing and murdered women and girls.

# Supporting families of the missing

## A LOVED ONE GONE MISSING – AMBIGUOUS LOSS

**A** loved one gone missing is a loss unlike any other kind of loss. There is no information as to what caused the loved one to be missing, no information as to their status or what is happening to them, and no information as to if or when they will return. This is referred to as **Ambiguous Loss**.

Ambiguous loss can be defined as the loss that occurs when a person is psychologically present but physically missing (such as a missing person), or psychologically missing but physically present (such as a person with dementia). The impact of ambiguous loss on the left behind family members is intense. The less that is known about the situation, the more the family may experience anxiety, depression, and individual internal conflict.

In ambiguous loss, it is impossible to define a problem to solve, and it is not possible to experience an appropriate set of feelings or behaviours as one does know what the situation is. There are no rituals or traditions to cope with a missing loved one, and, because others don't know how to respond to the needs of

the family, they withdraw out of their own discomfort. Without healthy support, the family often finds itself in a state of emotional exhaustion or numbness due to the relentless uncertainty.

Over time, a clear set of side effects begin to surface in the behaviours of the left behind family members. These side effects include an inability to trust, result in a negative perception of law enforcement, the creation of poor communication between family members and a lack of understanding of each other's behaviour. In addition, there are questionings as to the power and role of the media, if it is involved. Dysfunctional and often self-destructive coping mechanisms become prevalent, and are often passed on to subsequent generations. The constant question as to whether the missing person is alive or dead becomes a point of contention between family members. (It is essential that each member's perception of what happened and the status of the missing family member be heard.) And, as simple as it sounds, the family may need help determining what

they can do about the current situation, and what they cannot.

Supporting families and family members with these side effects is the focus of this chapter.

### **RE-ESTABLISH STRUCTURE**

Providing support to the family of a missing family member should not be approached as a long-term encounter. Most often the family members are only open to periodic support for a specific issue, at a specific time, and no more. It is important to remember that these families, like any other, had a variety of dysfunctions and problems before the person went missing. Long term support would bring some of these problems to the surface, at a time when all emotional, mental and physical resources of the family must be conserved to deal with the missing member. Support comes by following the family members' lead, and focusing on their stated issue.

One of the first frustrations for the family often is the system (law enforcement, protective services, etc) which is expected to be in control of the situation.

However, no formal system or agency is capable of providing the immediate type of assistance and support that the family requires. Family members feel isolated, unsupported, vulnerable, angry and impotent in their ability to come to the aid of the missing person. As the minutes and hours pass, the family experiences emotional and perhaps physical shock. They simply don't know what to do. Support comes through assisting the members to establish physical and emotional guidelines for their thoughts, feelings, and behaviour.

**Emotional shock** by nature provides a numbing effect. However, the effect is not consistent, and is characterized by constant interjection of intense feelings, followed by periods of numbing. This cycle of numbing/feeling/numbing allows the individual to continue to function physically and not be overwhelmed by an onslaught of feelings. The experience of 'missing' is so unique, that family members have no context in which to deal with the feelings that are encountered, and eventually, the family reaches

a place where they are able to temporarily shut down their emotions, and deny them. As a result of this emotional upheaval, there is a physical, hormonal reaction which may interfere with the person's ability to concentrate, their short-term memory, and over time, even their ability to fight off viruses and illnesses.

Having no reference about how to think, feel and act, the family member may withdraw and isolate. Another common behaviour is that of repetition; repeatedly picking up the phone to see if it works, repeatedly going to the door to see if the missing loved one is there, constant calling of friends or family within short periods of time to see if they have heard from the missing, or being driven to hunt the streets for the person. Not knowing what to do, family members often create activities. The activity is usually one that the family member doesn't have to think about but can do repeatedly. Having something to do allows him or her to not focus on feelings. The family may also attempt to control the situation by seeking

out information. The more they know about what's happening, the better they are able to cope. Unfortunately, in missing person events, information may be scarce and sporadic. Law enforcement, unless specifically trained for this type of event, does not have the resources of time or staff to be available to the family in the way that they may need. The inability to acquire information may then turn into an adversarial relationship with law enforcement, and speculation as to the facts about the missing person. If this occurs, support comes through assisting the family in determining which information is fact, and which may be speculation, and assisting them to maintain a balance in their interaction with law enforcement. Regardless of the nature of the response of law enforcement, their work is essential in this situation and their relationship with the family must be fostered.

Most helpful in this situation is exposure to someone who has had this experience - another family of a (once) missing person. These folks have personally experienced a loved one gone



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missing and provide support, in the form of normalizing feelings or the lack of feelings being experienced by the searching family. Knowing that someone else has experienced, felt and reacted as they have greatly alleviates a layer of anxiety for the family members new to the situation.

In lieu of someone with similar experience, support comes in validating whatever feeling is expressed by the family members; all feelings are valid. Assisting them to compare the current feelings to similar feelings of other difficult situations in their life may also support them by reminding them of coping skills they have used in the past. Reflecting back to other crises also assists the family to identify the strengths and weaknesses within the family and its members. In the time period immediately following the person gone missing, periods of talking about thoughts and feelings will be sporadic and brief in length, following the pattern of numbing/feeling/numbing. Providing a safe space for the family to discuss these feelings and thoughts, is essential support.

**Physical shock** may also be experienced by members of the family, in addition to emotional shock. As the hours may turn into days family members may forget or are not motivated to provide for their own basic needs. Daily routine may now be abandoned, as it is too painful and difficult to maintain a routine when one member is missing. However, these routines were created to assist in the provision of basic needs such as food, clothing, shelter, and safety. When the daily routines are abandoned, basic needs may go unmet.

Family members cannot focus for extended lengths of time – their ability to concentrate comes and goes. Support is provided by assisting them to identify the things that must be accomplished each day: meals, personal hygiene, medication, etc. Then, add to the list the activities the family feels are necessary to do to find their missing loved one: call the police for updates, check in with other family members, walk the neighborhood looking for the missing person, checking the phone to see if it works, etc.

Assist the family to create a timeline or schedule to include all of these identified activities. Help them to document the schedule in a way that is easy to post and follow.

The purpose of this schedule is to provide a structure; it provides a guideline to which the family can compare their behaviour. It is important to emphasize this is a guideline, not an expectation. There is no judgment of good/bad or sanction/ reward for compliance or non-compliance. There will be days when the family will follow the schedule closely and days when they cannot. The schedule assists them with short-term memory loss and provides a sense of control over life. As time passes, the family will be able to see improvement in their ability to comply with the schedule. The activities on the schedule may be edited, changed and adjusted as necessary. Eventually, it will lose its usefulness as the family takes more and more control and responsibility for their behaviour and functioning.

If the missing is a child, it is essential to include in the

schedule time for the parents to spend time together, preferably alone. Couples time should be utilized to verbalize feelings, concerns and fears not just about the missing child, but for the family and each other as well. Honesty is paramount in this time together.

The schedule needs to also include family time. If possible, this time is separate from meals or other usual daily activity. Family meeting time is a time in which the family should feel free to discuss what they believe about the missing person and the situation. Family members should not feel limited in what they say because of the emotional reactions of other family members. After the family has discussed their feelings about the missing person, time should be spent allowing each family member to discuss what else is going on in their life, not associated with the missing loved one.

***NOTE: While a missing person will totally consume the consciousness and awareness of an adult, this may not necessarily be true for a child.***

***Developmentally children cannot deal with intense emotions or situations for extended periods of time and must have mental and physical activities (play) to provide breaks so they can process what is happening. This is not being disrespectful of the missing person or other family members but is a necessity for the left behind child to survive the situation. By allowing the child to talk about themselves and their activities, and by ensuring that the daily structure is followed, the left behind child's basic needs are supported.***

The schedule, must also include the activities of all who are living within the household. Finally, re-assigning the chores of the missing person and those of the family members who are now focused on her recovery will allow the household to function more smoothly, and provide a structure of behaviour for the family as a whole.

Support for physical shock is similar to support used for stress with a focus on eating, rest, exercise, personal hygiene and medication. The monitoring and administration of these particular

activities may be assigned to extended family members, friends and neighbours. These people wish/need to be involved and to feel they are contributing something while the family member is missing. Using them for support provides for family needs as well as their own.

Eating should be done on a regular schedule. Foods containing a large amount of sugar, fat and caffeine must be avoided during this time. These substances require a considerable amount of energy for digestion, result in temporary emotional 'highs', and subsequent emotional crashes as the chemicals in the foods are consumed by the body. High protein foods are best, as well as foods that are easily digested. During periods of high stress people tend to crave snack or comfort foods. Fruit, juice, protein bars and protein drinks and shakes, etc. should be made available for these cravings. Decaffeinated teas, coffees and sodas should also be available. Well balanced, pre-prepared meals ready for the microwave oven are very helpful at this time. Provision of these foods

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may also be the responsibility of extended family, friends and the community.

Rest and sleep may well be impossible for the family at this time. Many family members state that night time is the worst part of the day. They find that while lying in bed, mental activity takes over due to the lack of physical diversion, and their mind is spinning. Adults are very hesitant to use any kind of chemical sleeping aid for fear they may need to respond suddenly to a call or a knock on the door in the middle of the night. Often, they find themselves getting out of bed and engaging in some physical activity to quiet the mind. Children may experience dreams or nightmares which perpetuate their fear that what ever happened to the missing person may happen to them. Time spent reassuring the left behind child of their safety, involving them in making the house secure, and possible changes to their sleeping arrangement will help to provide them a sense of security.

It is essential to enlist the support of a medical doctor or tribal healer for the family.

If at all possible, the doctor/healer should make at least one home visit early on in the missing period to evaluate the physical needs of the entire family. If this is not possible, a consultation with the doctor should be arranged, which will allow for the family to discuss the variety of sleep aids available and the possible physical consequence of a prolonged period of sleeplessness. An alternative to taking sleep aids is teaching the family to rest instead of sleep. Counting while breathing or focusing the mind on relaxing the body, area by area, are healthy alternatives to letting the mind wander and worry throughout the night. With practice, family members will learn to rest the body and mind for increasing lengths of time. When family members do not get adequate sleep, their bodies will become vulnerable to stress and illness. Due to the lack of sleep, the entire family may find itself suffering from illness in addition to the situation of the missing loved one.

Exercise is important not only as a physical necessity but as a mental one as well. While

exercising we are forced to concentrate on our physical activity. Simple activity such as extra trips to the mail box, extra trips up and down the steps, and walking an extra block with the dog not only changes behavioural patterns but thinking patterns as well. These activities provide breaks from the intensity of the situation. It is advised that the exercise occur out of doors, or away from the usual environment, to provide fresh sensory stimulation for the individual. Exercise may also be incorporated as part of the search: walking to distribute flyers about the missing person, taking the stairs rather than the elevator at offices and agencies, and doing simple stretches when on hold on the phone are a few examples. Children attending school are provided with structure, and opportunities for exercise which gives them breaks from the intensity of the family.

Personal hygiene and medical needs are often difficult for people to address with the families of missing persons. Making the point that someone needs a shower, to change their clothes, or to shave may



seem like an invasion of privacy. However, these activities are part of a daily structure of behaviour, and may need to be included on the written schedule.

In addition, monitoring an individual's medication may help to reduce the amount of stress and shock experienced by the body, maintaining its chemical balance. In situations of stress, it is easy to forget to take medication, or to have it refilled. If the medication affects blood pressure, hypertension, sugar levels (diabetes), etc. inconsistent compliance may have dire or even fatal consequences. If the medication affects moods or emotion such as anti-depressants or anti-anxiety medications, non-compliance can also have dire or fatal consequences. (Non-compliance with anti-depressants can lead to an increased risk of suicidal thinking and behaviour.) Monitoring medication is an important support that may be best assigned to an extended family member, friend, or tribal healer.

### **ACCEPT THE TEMPORARY ABSENCE**

As time passes and the person remains missing, the family begins to cope by accepting the temporary absence. This acceptance begins in short, barely noticeable durations of time. Family members will begin to speak of the short term future without including the missing person. This future may be minutes or hours into the future, but there is an indication of short-term acceptance that the missing person is not present. Another indication of the acceptance of temporary absence is discussion about 'when' the missing person returns. The family is shifting from the hope of immediate return, to the hope of future return in the short-term future. This is a significant shift in their perspective and must be honoured. Those providing support should make a similar shift in their reference to the situation.

One difficulty in accepting the temporary absence of the loved one is all of the reminders that he/she is missing. These cues come from tangible items, behaviour patterns, and in

speech patterns. It is not unusual in a preoccupied moment, for a family member to call out the missing person's name expecting a response, or expecting to see them come around the corner. The adult making breakfast and setting a place for the missing out of habit is another example of a cue. Each of the cues or triggers is a painful reminder that the family member is not currently present, and each trigger has to be felt through. One way of describing this is as a time of 'firsts'; everyday activities that are done for the first time since the loved-one has gone missing. Each first snaps the family's awareness back to the reality of the situation and raises feelings which cannot, for the moment, be ignored. Accepting the absence as temporary is one way the family can cope with these cues and their resulting feelings.

As the family accepts the temporary absence of their loved one, the emotional shock and numbing/feeling cycle begins to diminish. The family is now more capable of handling or coping with the details of the situation and does not need to

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shut down as often emotionally. The numbing-feeling cycle tends to be less extreme, moving to a more constant but less volatile emotional pattern. This is a new emotional pattern for the family members. They are moving from the response of emotional shock to emotional stress. This condition may be characterized by occasional emotional outbursts, lack of patience, bouts of panic (sometimes resulting in difficulty breathing), and quickness to anger.

Children, recognizing a change in the adult's behaviour and emotional pattern, change their own emotional pattern, though they often have to stay on their guard to avoid being the focus of an emotional outburst by the adult. These children may come to view their interaction with the adults during this time as walking through a mine-field; the climate is less intense, but sporadically more volatile. They experience a reduction in their own stress level in response to the over-all reduced intensity of the adult's reaction. The adult may vacillate between over-protectiveness and withdrawal from the children and may recognize the effect of their

behaviour on their children, but feel they have limited ability to control it.

In summary, within the first few days following the loved one gone missing the family faces accepting their temporary absence, and the reinforcing of the new structure. Family time should continue, acknowledging the missing member, discussing feelings and information about the situation, and reviewing the non-related activities of the left behind family members. Family members should be encouraged to continue to discuss what they believe has happened to the missing person. Family time may now also serve as a place of reinforcing information about stress, self-care and emotional responses. The more the family is aware of and can normalize their reactions, the less those reactions can result in alienation and hurt feelings. 'Couples time' should be continued as well, on a daily basis.

This new emotional structure in which the family functions should be made more stable. Though these responses are considered to be temporary

with the situation, they indeed may become the new 'normal' responses of the future. It is important to assist the family to stabilize. This is an appropriate time to encourage counseling, time with tribal elders or other structured emotional support. This support can be found through a therapist, members of one's faith community, a variety of a peer support mechanisms and peer support groups, buddy programs, and traditional structures and coping strategies within the community.

If structured support is not available, or is refused, assisting the family members to review how well they are now coping, and how their coping could be improved may be helpful. Asking the family to compare themselves today to perhaps last week helps them to recognize change and improvement in their ability to cope with the situation. On a scale of 1 – 10 where were they then, where are they now emotionally? What has helped them to get this far? Is it still working? What might work better? What is the strongest or longest lasting feeling they are having today? How are they dealing with it?

The new behavioural structure is reinforced by editing and revising the family schedule. As stated, continuation of family and couple time is a must. The schedule at this point should include more of the household tasks, errands and chores. However, it still must reflect the behaviour associated with locating the missing family member. The more repetitive behaviours diminish as the family's knowledge of and exposure to the systems involved with locating a missing person expands. The schedule should now include activities to help alleviate the family's stress. Special events promoting exercise, rest and relaxation for the entire family should be added to the schedule. Self-care activities should also be included such as massage, sweats, recreation, traditional prayer and meditation. The schedule takes on a more functional role. The entire family is now aware of the structure, and should begin to accept the responsibility for assisting each other in compliance with the schedule. These structures should remain intact, regardless of the length of time the loved one is missing. If days change to weeks or

months, there should be little need to revise this new structure. The longer the behavioural and emotional structures are in place, the more they become integrated as normal. Therefore, these structures must be as healthy as possible.

Friends and extended family and community members may find that their involvement is less and less necessary as the family regains its ability to care for itself. However, extended family and friends should still be reflected in the schedule, cooking an occasional meal, taking the children to appointments or an occasional movie, coordinating yard work or car care, etc. Assisting with pet health, grooming and long-term maintenance can be extremely supportive. (This does not include day-to-day pet care which is part of the family's behaviour structure.) Extended family and friends may also be included in the continued process of searching for the missing person and dissemination of fliers. This provides diversity for the family, as well as a continuation of accepting help from others, and provides the opportunity for

participation by those closest to the family.

### **FILLING THE ROLES OF THE MISSING PERSON**

Another indicator that the family has accepted the temporary absence of the missing person is their participation in the process of filling the roles and expectations of that person. This begins out of the necessity to reassign basic chores and roles around the house to other family members. As time passes, the re-assignment of physical roles may expand. Once these roles are re-assigned, they become the norm over time, and serve as one of the agents of change to help the family as a whole, to adjust to the continuing absence.

More difficult for the family members is the filling of the non-physical roles of the missing loved one. The missing person's personality is unique and distinct, and fits into an intricate pattern with the other personalities in the family. The removal of that personality leaves a void in the inter-relationships of the other personalities. As a metaphor, picture the family as a hanging mobile, where each personality

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within the family balances the others. Cut the string of one of the pieces of the mobile, and the mobile spins out of balance. The family relationship pattern will need to achieve a new balance to compensate for the missing person.

The process of achieving this new balance is a subtle one. Slowly, family members will begin to assume characteristics, habits, behaviours and the interaction patterns of the missing person. The majority of this change is usually unconscious and sub-conscious. Adults may start to recognize that children are taking on gestures, responses and characteristics of the missing person. If the missing person is a child, and is seen as a 'favorite child' to his/her brothers and sisters, an active competition to assume that role may occur. If the missing child is the oldest, the next in the birth order may feel it necessary to fill the older brother/sister role. Even characteristics viewed as negative by the family such as cursing or tantrums may be adopted by another child to restore the balance of the family.

These shifts in role and position within the family may not always be healthy for the individual child or the family. Rather than just filling a role, a child may attempt to assume the identity of the missing person at the expense of his/her own identity. Often children will attempt to assume or fill the expectations of the missing person as a means to ease the pain of or to make the adult(s) feel better. This is never healthy. A child that changes their own idea of the future to take on the future of the missing person is thwarting their own development. Examples of this would be the child attempting to play a sport or pursue the talent of a missing person, or assume the responsibilities of a missing adult. If the present child lacks the ability to accomplish these activities, she/he is setting themselves up to fail. Every effort must be made to assist this child in understanding what they are doing, to define their own identity separate from the missing persons, to find value in that identity, and to establish their own idea of the future. In other words, explain to the child that they are behaving like the missing person, not

like themselves. As a result, now the family is missing two personalities. Point out to the child the things that make him or her unique, and express to them how important they are to the family. This can be accomplished by the parent under normal circumstances. However, the parent is often so absorbed in finding the missing person, that they do not recognize the shift in roles of the other family members. Or, they may remark about how much better the family seems to be functioning, and even reinforce and praise the newly acquired behaviours of the children without understanding exactly what has taken place.

This, again, provides an opportunity for the extended family members to observe the changes in members of the family, and bring them to the attention of the parent or adult. If the changes exhibited by the child are healthy, they need to be openly acknowledged as well. "I've noticed that you seem to be studying more. I'm glad that you are working to improve your grades, Susie. This will help you get into the college or get the job you want." Extended family



members can provide a valuable service by making the parent/ adult aware of any changes in roles that they may observe.

In summary, many of the physical roles of the missing person need to be reassigned or assumed by other family members. This can be done in a healthy way, which does not endanger the identity of other family members. However, when a family member attempts consciously or unconsciously to become the missing person, intervention is necessary. Appropriate support would be to help the family member to define their own identity, value that identity, and establish some sense of future for that identity separate from that of the missing loved one.

#### **REVIEW OF PERSONAL BELIEFS OF THE 'STATUS' OF THE MISSING PERSON**

This writing has presented the importance of family members discussing what they individually believe has happened to the missing loved one. This must be possible without concern for the impact of their belief on other family members. It is very difficult for a family member

to say they believe the missing family member is dead, when another family member reacts very negatively to that belief, shaming that family member for giving up hope. Family members do not have to accept each other's' belief, but need to hear it, without comment.

It is extremely important that the family can be honest about their beliefs as to the status of the missing family member. Each person's belief about the situation comes out in their behaviour and in the way they interact with other family members. If they cannot be honest about their beliefs as to the status of the missing person, they may control their behaviour within the view of the family and over-react outside of their presence. The over-reaction may even become self-destructive (i.e. the use of drugs and/or alcohol or participation in high risk behaviours, etc.).

Certainly, having to hide one's beliefs and feelings, and pretending to acquiesce to those of others will eventually result in resentment. If this resentment is not apparent, and continues

to be fueled for some time, relationships within the family are eventually destroyed. Family members will seek to replace these relationships with others outside of the family. Regardless of how painful honesty may be, the consequence of not encouraging honesty may be far more painful. Discussing individual beliefs must be continuous. Beliefs change over time, as a result of physical, emotional and even spiritual experiences of family members.

#### **FEEL THROUGH THE PAIN OF THE ABSENCE, UNCERTAINTY/ FEAR AND GUILT**

Even with all of the situations and interventions we have discussed to this point, we have not addressed the most difficult aspects of a loved one gone missing as they are experienced by the family. These are the emotional aspects of dealing with the pain of the absence of the family member, the uncertainty and fear about their fate, and the guilt of not protecting the missing person from that fate. Because these issues are so intense and emotionally powerful, it is very difficult for anyone in or around



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the family to discuss them. While it is helpful to discuss these types of issues, it should only be attempted when the family members are ready. Forcing a premature discussion of any of these topics will do more harm than good.

We should also realize that these discussions are done in small pieces, over a period of time. No family member is capable of fully disclosing all of the emotions involved at one time; normal coping skills cannot accommodate the intensity. Confronting the family members with probing questions is inappropriate. The best support for these feelings is to be available to family members when they need the support, for as long as they are willing to be vulnerable with these feelings. Silence may be the most effective support tool, as it holds no expectation, conveys no judgment and offers only your presence.

**Pain of the absence** –No matter how many years pass, family members will nearly always have a 'back door' for the possibility that the missing loved one will be found or will return. Therefore,

those who provide support need to avoid any reference to loss/grief, and must be very aware of their vocabulary. Any use of words related to death (i.e. 'grief', 'loss'), will definitely block attempts to provide support. Only terms such as 'missing' and 'absence' are appropriate. In addition, it is essential that the present tense be used when referring to the missing person, even if the family member uses a past-tense reference. This does not give you, the person providing support, permission to do the same. It is almost never appropriate for the supporter to use past tense references for at least the first two years of the missing period.

There are many triggers for a family member's emotional response to the absence of the loved one. We have discussed some of them above. They may be physical or non-physical. One of the best supports you may provide to the family is to help them identify the three most frequent emotional triggers. This may be the empty place at the dinner table, the full trash can that is the missing person's chore to empty, or

the missing goodnight kiss. If family members can identify the three triggers which occur most frequently for them, and provide the most emotional pain, the person providing support may be able to help them find better ways to cope with those triggers. An example might be the empty seat at the table. The family may rearrange everyone's place at the table. While there will still be an empty place, it will be in another location, which perhaps won't have the same emotional impact on the family members. Another possibility would be to move the table against a wall so that the empty space is no longer so obvious. The important thing is that the place for the missing person is still maintained, but the emotional intensity of it being empty is lessened by the new positioning.

One of the best ways to assist the family to cope in a better way is by asking them "what would make the empty place at the table easier to tolerate?" The entire family must actively be part of the process for it to have value for them. Asking them to suggest possible solutions, to choose one, and to create a plan

to implement the solution is very helpful. However, the family must make the decisions, not simply go along with what the supporter suggests. As family members improve their ability to cope, they become emotionally stronger, and a sense of control emerges. The family begins to understand that they can control their feelings and not be controlled by them. They can then apply the process to other triggers, and assist each other in dealing with individual emotional triggers.

One caution for the supporter in this process is to be sure the family members want to cope differently. Even verbal agreement does not ensure that the family is emotionally committed to change. Further, the family members may consciously believe they want to cope in a different way emotionally, but resist all efforts to establish new coping patterns. In this situation they need to explore the question “what are you afraid will happen if you no longer feel pain?” Another approach might be “what do you lose if you learn to handle the pain?” What may surface is the belief, on the part of the

family, that pain is a necessary part of this experience, and the reduction of that pain would indicate a lack of caring or continued concern for their missing loved. Another belief may be that the family feels they must suffer as long as the missing person might be suffering. If these beliefs are held by the family, they are not going to be motivated to cope in a better way. This, of course is their choice. While the choice is not a healthy one, helping the family to verbalize these beliefs can be supportive.

As presented earlier, the most important support is a safe place for the family to explore and discuss their emotional reactions about the absence of their loved one. This ‘place’ must be free of expectations or judgment. It must be a place that understands there are no answers, cures or fixes for these emotions, and in no way attempts to provide them.

### **Uncertainty and fear –**

Uncertainty as to the fate of the missing person is, without doubt, a primary emotional issue of the family. Throughout the missing period, the family will create a

variety of scenarios as to where the missing loved one is, and what is happening to him/her. All of their scenarios are within the realm of possibility, and all should be discussed seriously with the family member when presented. One of the reasons for mentally changing the scenario of the missing person’s fate is that the family is preparing for, or rehearsing each possibility. The family is ‘trying on’ each scenario to see how they react to it physically, emotionally and spiritually. Family members need to discuss and process each scenario they create without fear of judgment, ridicule or dismissal due to the discomfort of the listener. They also need the opportunity to express the emotions that accompany each scenario, even though it is only a possibility. This work is best supported by a mental health professional.

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**NOTE:** *As the family processes the scenarios, many of which will be violent and traumatic in nature, it is not uncommon for them to experience a traumatic reaction. In short, family members may become traumatized by the possibilities of the fate of their missing loved one. With each scenario the family creates a picture in their mind. Often this picture is traumatic in nature. The mental picture of a traumatic event is the foundation of traumatization.*

**NOTE:** *The unique characteristic of the trauma experienced by the family of a missing person is that the traumatic event continues as long as their fate is unknown. Most support provided for trauma deals with the aftermath of a traumatic event; however this situation requires that support is provided while the event continues. There is no guideline for support for a traumatic event in progress. If the family member refuses professional support, providing a safe space to allow them to talk will be the best support.*

Theorists suggest that the reason one person is traumatized

by an event for which another person is not, is in how the information is stored in their memory. If the information (picture) is not processed, and is stored in its raw form with all of the intense emotion attached, it is classified as traumatic. Information (picture) which is processed and stored as a 'bad' memory is not traumatic. Based on this explanation, it follows that the person providing support should assist the family in processing each scenario and each picture to reduce the emotional intensity attached to it. This is also known as desensitization. In addition to a variety of talk therapies used for desensitization, there are several complementary therapeutic interventions available to assist in this work including Field Thought Therapy and Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR). Both require specialized training. However, those clients who have benefited from these interventions were drawn to them because the treatments were relatively short term, and the results almost immediate. Another theory of intervention for trauma states that if a client

describes the traumatic picture over and over again, eventually the client becomes bored with it. At that point, the picture is no longer traumatic, and can be re-classified as a 'bad memory'. This approach is a form of Traumatic Incident Reduction, and has been proven to be effective for children as well as adults. These three professional interventions provide an alternative to traditional talk therapy, and should be suggested to family members who may be traumatized.

Uncertainty by nature brings with it a sense of fear...fear of the unknown and fear of the negative possibilities. People become afraid of a situation because they cannot find acceptable alternatives to the apparent outcome. In short, they fear situations in which they can find no hope. However hope can be utilized as an antidote for fear. Assisting the family in finding some point of hope helps to reduce the element of fear. Believing that the missing person is unharmed, or believing that he/she will return are common expressions of hope. Believing that they are remembered by



family and friends is another. The hope may also be for the family; i.e. believing that the family will get through this situation or the family is strong enough to survive this situation. Balancing the fear for the missing person, with hope for someone or something else may well be the only way in which this family can achieve some sort of hope/fear balance. Further, with no time restrictions as to when this situation might end, hope in an event or expectation of the future, whether or not it is associated with the missing loved one, may also serve to balance feelings of fear. Unfortunately, hope may not always be possible for some family members in this situation. When an effort to find a point of hope fails, providing a safe space for the family to discuss and reduce the intensity of the fear is the alternative support.

***NOTE: A family member who is unable to find some element of hope within their life is at risk and needs to be monitored. Professional intervention is essential. The professional providing support must make an assessment of suicide ideation, and perhaps even a contract***

***with the person against self-destructive behaviour. The family member should be involved with the professional in the arranging for other family members to serve as buddies or monitors for themselves, and should be involved in the educational process about when and how to respond to their behaviour.***

For a child family member, the fear and the uncertainty of the situation is usually expressed in fear for their personal safety. This can be expressed in a number of ways; aggressive and defensive behaviour, carrying weapons to protect oneself from being 'taken', withdrawal and social hiding to avoid being 'taken', and often they regress to behaviours of an earlier age when they felt safe (i.e. thumb sucking, bed wetting, baby talk). Children also create traumatic scenarios and pictures which affect their imagination, and can result in dreams and nightmares.

Support for children should be focused on their personal safety. They are afraid that harm may come from outside of the family, and they need increased reassurance and stability from

the parent/adult. Of course, during this time the parent/adult may have withdrawn from the children in an effort to focus on finding the missing person. The children view this withdrawal during their time of greater need as abandonment. Abandonment is a universal human fear, and feelings of abandonment have impact on a child's sense of self-worth, their ability to trust others for support, and their ability to provide support (love) to others. Participation of family members other than the parent may be needed to provide a sense of safety and stability. However, it is strongly suggested that the parent be involved to the extent that they are able.

Assisting the child to name where, what and who are safe helps them to understand that, by turning to what is safe, they have some control over the situation. This helps to reduce their fear. Knowing where to find safety also contributes to their sense of belonging, and reduces their feeling of abandonment.

If professional support can be provided for the children, Play Therapy is an excellent vehicle to

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assist them in dealing with the fears and the issues of personal safety and abandonment. Having the ability to act out situations and fears, and manipulating their outcomes provides an enormous sense of control over the situation. Play therapy also allows a child to play an event into the future, and play out scenarios. This is very similar to the adults 'trying on' scenarios to test their own response to them discussed earlier. In play, a child can enact how they want to react to a situation, and then explore other, perhaps more acceptable reactions. Introducing the idea in play that family members other than the adult can provide for their needs also assists the child in their coping.

In summation, assisting the family with the uncertainty of the fate of the missing person involves dealing with the possible fates of the family member, and the traumatic effects of those possibilities. The person providing support will need to accompany the adult and children through those possibilities, and the pictures associated with them, as often as necessary until the emotional

intensity is reduced to a tolerable level. It is strongly recommended that a mental health professional be involved in providing that support.

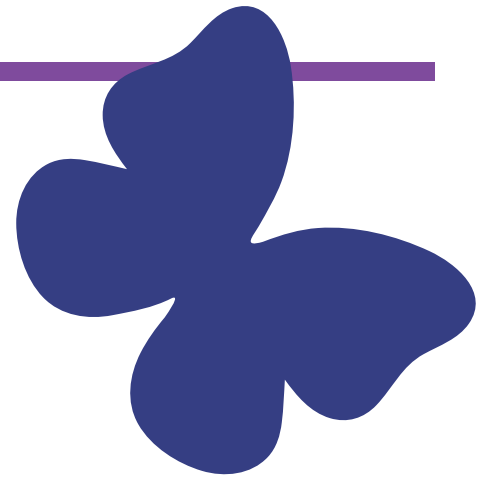
**Guilt** – The family members of a missing person will often spend time talking about what they should have done differently to avoid this situation. Some of the time, the examples they offer are valid, and very well may have changed the outcome of the situation. However, these examples do not dictate that what the family members actually did was 'wrong'. It is important to discover what purpose this exploration serves for the person.

First, guilt is an emotion with which we are all familiar. Guilt is often used as a tool for behaviour modification in parenting, religion, and by society in general. We have experience in dealing and coping with guilt. While it is uncomfortable, it is familiar. Guilt, for the family, may be a safe emotion in which to dwell in order to avoid the onslaught of intense emotions which accompany this situation. Guilt may well serve as a defense

mechanism against those emotions and feelings. This is not unhealthy. It may be what is necessary for the family to function. Over time the family should face and discuss more of the other feelings, and move away from the talk of guilt.

Second, guilt may serve as a filter in the process of creating possible scenarios of the fate of the missing loved one, discussed above. By exploring a variety of situations that may have avoided the absence, the family is setting the mental stage for beginning to consider the possible fates of their loved-one. Again, this is not unhealthy. These discussions should slowly move from what could have been done differently to what may have happened after.

As mentioned above, the 'if only's' presented by the family may be valid, and very possibly would have changed the outcome of the situation. To disregard these statements with platitudes of 'you can't blame yourself' or 'you couldn't have known' is not only inappropriate, but actually disrespectful of what the family member is experiencing. The best response to the 'if only's' is



'perhaps you're right. Perhaps it could have been different. Do you want to talk this through?' It is essential for the family member, at some point in this experience, to resolve this guilt. However, early in the period that the loved one is missing will probably not be the time. The timing of this discussion is up to the individual, and may not be considered until after the 'resolution' of the situation. Your offer asking if they would like to talk it through allows them to know that you are available when they are ready.

When the family is ready to work through the guilt of not protecting their loved one from this situation, a number of supports may be helpful. The most important concepts to be explored with the family are a) what does this event say about them, b) what is their level of responsibility for the situation, and c) are they capable of forgiving themselves?

As the family members attempt to deal with their feelings of guilt, the role of the supporter may be to play devil's advocate, or to introduce another perspective on the situation. One way to do this is to introduce the concept

of 'what does this event say about you?' Allow the person to discuss this point. It might be helpful to introduce a scale of one to ten: '1 you are a lousy family member, 10 you are super one'. Ask the family member to rate themselves on the scale. Then ask the individual to rate themselves on the scale one year before the person went missing. Ask how they think the other family members would rate them today. Then, ask the family member to project forward and rate themselves on the scale for a year from now. There are several reasons for this approach. 1) It helps the family member to see their 'failure' to protect their loved one in terms of or in light of a history of their relationship rather than as a result of one incident. 2) It brings the family member to the reality that they are continuing to have a relationship with the other family members, in spite of the 'failure'. 3) It serves as a vehicle to support the individual to understand that their self-rating has the potential to change in the future.

Another approach, particularly if it is suspected that a predator

is involved, is to help the family separate their 'failure' to protect their loved one from the behaviour of the predator. This may involve basic questions to help the family member view how much their behaviour in the event directly harmed their loved one versus how much the offender's behaviour directly harmed their loved one. This approach is used to assist the family member to see a larger picture than one which exists exclusively of their 'failure'. It presents their behaviour as acceptable and most often non-harmful, and it places responsibility for harm on the predator.

The person providing support must not expect that having gone through this process the family member will immediately let go of their guilt. In fact, the individual will most often accept some level of guilt or responsibility for this situation, even if it is irrational. While not altogether healthy, this is most probably normal. However, if after taking the individual through this process, they hold onto their guilt as strongly as before, the guilt is probably being used as the defense against other feelings as discussed

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above. Efforts to confront and reduce the level of guilt will be ineffective if the guilt is protecting the family member from more intense feelings.

Forgiving oneself may be possible after a period of time of going through the reframing process discussed above. Keep in mind that the family member may continue to hold themselves responsible for the situation to some degree. Forgiveness, then, becomes a task of learning to accept the total self, which includes having failed to some degree in protecting their loved one. To accept themselves totally, the individual needs to review who they are as a person, and as a family member as a result of this situation. This includes reviewing their belief system, and then fitting their 'failure' into those beliefs. Then the individual needs to see how they can accept themselves in the future. Clearly, this is a longer-term process which is initiated by the adult after the 'resolution' of the situation, and may be better focused if assisted by a mental health professional.

For a child, guilt is often the result of what is sometimes

called magical thinking. The child may blame him/herself for what has happened to the missing loved one, as a result of an argument, statement or thought. Children and even adults often question whether their hurtful thoughts toward someone resulted in the harm that befell them. Often this guilt is not discussed, but the child finds situations in their environment to prove that the myth is true. For example, the adult withdrawing from the children who are present to focus on finding the missing person may be viewed by the 'guilty' child as punishment for having hurt the missing in their thoughts. For many of the issues previously discussed, other family members have been encouraged to fill the role of parent with the children. In the case of the myth of guilt, the parent must work directly with the child. Explaining to the child exactly what has happened to the missing family member in age appropriate terms, and providing reassurance that the child is not responsible and that the parent/adult still loves them is essential. This is the type of issue that can be addressed in the family time described earlier.

In summary, to provide support to the family around issues of guilt, the function of the guilt must be determined; does it serve as a defense against other emotions, or as a filter? Accepting the 'if onlys' as valid and offering the family members the opportunity to talk them through is the first step for support. Effective support often takes the form of reframing the situation so the individual may see their 'failure' to protect their loved one as a single incident of normally accepted behaviour, and the predator's behaviour as harmful and unacceptable. Through this process, the family member may come to a place of forgiving him/herself. Support must also be provided to the parent/adult as they deal with the issues of guilt that may be experienced by the children in the family.

### **ACCEPTING DUAL PERCEPTIONS OF LIFE**

As time passes and the fate of the missing loved one remains unknown, the family begins to separate or compartmentalize their beliefs about life. The family members create for themselves a dual system of values through which to perceive life: one

contains the values and beliefs about the world that were held prior to their loved one gone missing, the other the beliefs about the world which have been accepted as a result of the loved one gone missing. The ultimate example would be 'my loved one will return and everything will be alright' **vs** 'my loved one will never return and life will forever be unbearable'. The family members find him/herself 'vibrating' between these two beliefs, which creates a situation of unresolved internal conflict. Unresolved conflict is one definition of the word 'stress'.

The family is usually able to deal with the present moment with no conflict; the family member is temporarily missing. The conflict occurs in the realm of the future. Beliefs are necessary in part to provide us with a context in which to make decisions about the future. However, when beliefs about the future are in conflict, it becomes difficult to make decisions. As these conflicts cannot be resolved until there is a resolution of the situation, it is necessary for the family to accept two perceptions of the future with separate sets of decisions and

expectations. Family members will view a future that includes the missing loved one, and a future that does not. This may be considered unhealthy from the viewpoint of many mental health models. It is, however, the coping mechanism necessary for the family to continue to function within the current situation, and maintain a sense of future.

**Acknowledging the loved one that is/releasing the loved one that was** – The view of the future that includes the missing person is based largely on the expectations about them. These expectations are usually rooted in the developmental stages of the missing as they grow or age. As individuals grow within the family structure, the family itself grows to accommodate the member's development, and anticipates that growth. Certain events mark these developmental stages; playing on a sports team, committing to a spiritual path, coming of age events, learning to drive, dating, and high school graduation, getting a job, getting married, having children, and raising children are examples. The family expects these events to occur as the missing person

develops. The family must adjust to these events not happening if the loved one is missing.

These expectations should be acknowledged and verbalized, particularly when it becomes apparent that the expected event will not occur in the home. Visualizing the event as it could/would have been, and verbally discussing that vision is very supportive. Just as the family may review memories of activities of the missing loved one, they must also review the memories of their expectations for the missing.

As time passes, and the appropriate time for a particular expectation has passed, it is important that the family accept that development has occurred. As long as the family expects the loved ones' return, they must keep up with the growth and development of the missing person. Therefore, not only is visualizing the events supportive, but visualizing the family member as he/she has developed is necessary as well. The family must remember that the missing person continues to grow, age and change. Education



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about life development may help to strengthen this process.

**Acknowledging a future without the missing person** – The newer set of beliefs are those that accept that the missing loved one will not be present for some period of time. This is NOT an acceptance of the belief that they will not return, but an acceptance that their return will not be in the short-ranged future. This set of beliefs, then, allows the family to make plans for the future without the presence of or the return of the missing person. What makes this tolerable is that the family has adopted an acceptance of delayed gratification; the loved one's return will be delayed.

As before, when the appropriate time for events or developmental expectations has passed, the family will benefit from visualization and discussion: visualizing how the event could/would have happened, and visualizing how the missing person has developed. In both constructs, it is important that the family keep the relationship current, and not hold onto the image of the missing as they were when they went missing.

Holidays, birthdays and other annual family events are difficult times for the family of a missing person. In addition, the anniversary of the date when he/she went missing is an extremely difficult time. For holidays, the absence of the loved one tends to be dealt with in extremes; the family is either so consumed that the holiday is avoided or ignored, or the holiday becomes another missing-person-centered-event. While adult family members may be able to accept these options, the children in the family find the holidays to be one more situation in which their needs are seconded by that of the missing person. The adult may be so afraid of the pain of facing a holiday without the missing person that they announce that the holiday is canceled this year. Or, the adult may go all out for the holiday, in case the missing loved one returns at the last moment. One healthy approach to the holidays is for the family to have a present or memento for the missing member at each event, and save it. In this way when the person does return, the family can show how they were included in every family holiday while they were missing.

As time passes, the memento may become an item or activity donated, in the loved one's honour, to a family or child in need. Photos of the item or event are often kept as the archive to show the missing loved one on their return. In addition, during the holiday period the adult and the person providing support must agree to monitor the amount of time which focuses on the missing person, and balance it with time spent on the family members who are present. The parent will need this support as they may not be able to change the focus of their attention on their own.

The anniversary date of when the loved one went missing is often viewed by the family as a reminder of their failure to protect him/her, or to find them. The emotions of the adults are very volatile at this time. Support comes in helping to prepare the parent in advance for this day. Suggesting an event or activity which honours the missing loved one can serve as a way in which the family can effectively focus and stabilize their emotions. This activity also provides a platform from which hope for

the future can be verbalized. Again, the adult and the person providing support must ensure a balance in the amount of time focused on the missing loved one and the time focused on other family members when hope for the future is being discussed. Over time, the anniversary of the missing date becomes the vehicle by which the family re-news their quest to find the missing person, and to be sure that they have not been forgotten by family, friends, the community, and the law enforcement officials. The one way that the family can be sure that their loved one lives on is in assuring that his or her memory is not forgotten.

### **CREATE LONG-TERM COPING STRUCTURE THAT INTEGRATES BOTH PERCEPTIONS**

As long as individuals believe that the missing will return, they will utilize this dual belief system. As time passes, it will become the norm for the family to picture two possible futures, and discuss the loved one alternating between the two perspectives of the future as 'still missing' or 'when he/she has returned'. While this allows the family to function, make

decisions about the future, and perhaps even move ahead with the life of the family, the more comfortable the family is with a coping pattern utilizing a dual belief system, the more difficult it will be for that family to accept the possibility that the loved one will not return, even in the face of evidence.



### **SPECIAL NEEDS OF CHILDREN**

Previously in this chapter some of the needs of the children in the family of the missing person have been discussed. This section will present other important needs that children experience not only as children, but throughout their life time. The supports that are suggested in this chapter

are offered for children, and for adults who were children when the female family member went missing. For many now adults, these needs still have not been met.

We will discuss the needs of children within the family of the missing following the topics described above.

### **Re-Establish Structure**

It is important that the person providing support not assume that they understand what normal functioning is for the family of a missing person. The perfect family succeeds in establishing a structure based on effective communication, cohesiveness in the internal relationships, and a collective sense of unity in the face of outside dangers. There are very few perfect families. To assist a family to achieve normal functioning, the person providing support must understand what normal-functioning was for this family before the loved one went missing. To further expand on this idea, it is also necessary to know what the children consider normal functioning, as their perspective may differ from that

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of the adult. Straightforward questions to children about the family's communication patterns, internal relationships, and their sense of belonging to a family unit will provide this information.

As discussed earlier, the emotional and physical structure of the family must be re-established. In the case where the family structure was weak before the loved one went missing, introduction of a strong sense of structure will be beneficial to this family beyond the context of the missing person. In looking at emotional and physical structure, we see the needs are expressed differently by the children than they were by the adults.

### **Emotional structure –**

Depending on their age and development, children may not have the capacity to label and describe their feelings. Therefore, their perception of the family's emotional structure may be expressed more through their reactions to people and situations than through verbal communication. One example is the feeling of being totally disconnected from the family. The

child may feel left out, ignored, and/or emotionally abandoned. The expression of this feeling may be physical withdrawal and isolation from the family or acting-out behaviour with the result of gaining attention. Even if that attention is negative and disciplinary, the child sees it as attention. Another example is the need on the part of the child to find a safe place amid the chaos of the family. Safety usually involves another 'being'; a person (real or imaginary), pet, or toy that becomes personified as human. Safety with this entity is usually established in private play initially, but will be exhibited more and more openly and in front of others as this new found safety begins to balance the child's fear of the actual situation. This may also include fear for personal safety as the child seeks to avoid what happened to the missing person happening to them. Again, as the adult appears to be ineffective at protecting or finding the missing family member, a child may seek out some other entity as a protector or, conversely, for whom they can play out the role of protector.

Children may also become overwhelmed as they recognize the multiple losses or changes that have occurred. Their world has completely changed and stability no longer exists. Without strong support and reinforcement of that which is stable, the child may again react through withdrawal or acting-out behaviours.

It is important to understand that all children from infant to later adolescence react in some way to the family's response to a loved one gone missing. A pre-verbal infant reacts to the physical changes in their care-giver as a result of the situation; increased heart rate, change in body taste and body odor, change in pitch of voice, change in nurturing/holding behaviour. Again, the infant will become fussy (acting-out) until it feels overwhelmed at which point it may become lethargic (withdrawal). Toddlers may become very clingy, demanding attention and then isolate themselves when feeling rejected or ignored. They are reacting to what is happening in their environment more than to the event of the missing person. School-aged children

begin to express through their vocabulary (though limited) and their play. For children, play is the way to process high intensity situations. They can play out as many different endings to an event as they want, as they are trying to process what is actually happening. The play may become aggressive and/or isolated. However, a school-aged child that refuses to play is in great emotional jeopardy and professional assistance should be sought as soon as possible.

To a child, the parent/adult is their emotional stability and provides the emotional structure for the family. The adult's reaction to a loved one gone missing becomes the basis of the children's learned response to crisis. The adult's reaction also provides a sense of assurance or fear to the children. When a parent begins to seek inappropriate support outside of the family, or turns to self-destructive behaviours such as drinking, drugs, or over/under eating, children will withdraw as the adult no longer seems safe. If the parent stops showing support to the children, or stops providing basic care for them, they will

begin to care for themselves and each other, and begin to exclude the parent from their family structure.

The key emotional support for children in all of these instances is the establishment of safety. Children must feel safe to thrive and grow. Adults often admit to the fact that they abandoned the children in the pursuit of finding the missing loved one. If the parent is unable to provide a sense of safety, another extended family member must fill that role. Interaction with the children should be in their own home, and play must be encouraged and monitored. The person providing support must also be able to explain to the child in age/development appropriate language why the parent and environment are in turmoil. The person providing support must also, to the extent possible, encourage the adult's interaction with the children. Without the parent's interaction, the relationship between the children and the person providing support may begin to replace the former family unit.

**Physical structure** – All families have some level of

dysfunction; this is normal. When a situation occurs such as a family member going missing, these dysfunctions become exaggerated. Without corrective action, these dysfunctions begin to grow in impact and create other dysfunctions. When the dysfunction within a family begins to outweigh the family's ability to function, children often see this as losing their entire family. To the child the new normal, the new mission or purpose of the family, is about the event of the missing person. There is nothing else to do at home but the activity of finding the missing member. The children begin to blame the missing loved one for 'messing everything up'.

As was discussed earlier, the most basic establishment of physical structure is through the creation and reinforcement of daily routine. The creation of the schedule or time-line is the tool best suited to accomplish this. The person providing support should follow that information. For an adult, establishing a schedule, and therefore a structure, provides a guideline for behaviour. For a child, this structure provides security

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and safety. Children who are in school should continue attending school as part of that structure. However, their teachers and counselors must be provided with relevant information so they are able to provide appropriate support for the child within the school setting. Even so, schools cannot be expected to have the capacity to provide for the specific mental health needs of the child. These needs are best met by a professional. Children should also be granted access to the adults they most trust within the school, to provide an extra sense of security.

### **ACCEPT THE TEMPORARY ABSENCE**

The temporary atmosphere immediately following the absence of the family member is one that threatens the child's sense of security at home. For the child, the chaos and turmoil that is created when adults are reacting to the absence of the loved one may be more difficult to experience than the absence itself. Exposure to law enforcement personnel, their uniforms, equipment (guns, hand-cuffs, etc.) and their personalities may be extremely

jarring to a child. If the law enforcement personnel appear to be a threat to the child's security of home, a distrust begins to develop that may well follow the child into adulthood. Often, law enforcement personnel do not include the children when interacting with the family, further alienating them.

The attitude of the law enforcement personnel is also observed and reacted to by the children. Many times law enforcement personnel assume that the missing person has simply walked-away. This often leads to a less intense reaction on the part of the personnel. Children see this as a lack of caring or concern by the personnel. Conversely, it may be protocol for law enforcement personnel to treat everyone, including the adult family members, as suspects until proven otherwise. This attitude is also seen as threatening by the children. This threat comes from the very people they have been taught to trust; law enforcement personnel. While these personnel are doing their job, they may not realize how their behaviour and questions

are interpreted by a child whose loved one is missing. If possible, law enforcement personnel (or their representatives) should take time to explain their presence and behaviour to the children, reinforcing a basic level of trust. If this is not possible, an adult family member should fill this role, and, whenever possible, encourage the law enforcement personnel to interact directly with the child.

Another way in which the children may react to the temporary environment that is created by the adults is through a desire to help. Just as is true with adults, the child needs to do something to feel included, and to have a sense of control over the situation and their environment. By being included in the activity, the child also has a sense of what to expect, rather than being unprepared for the changes which will continue to occur within the family and the environment.

Open discussion and communication within the family and between family members is another means by which to include the children, and reduce

their anxiety. This is discussed in more detail below.

### **FILLING THE ROLES OF THE MISSING PERSON**

Children very often find themselves filling the roles of the missing person. They may have been assigned some of the chores or tasks that the person used to do as a necessity to maintain the daily functioning of the family. They may find that the adult compares them to the missing person, and may see this as an indication that the adult wants them to be more like the missing family member. The child may observe the painful reactions of the parents, and believe that the parent will feel better if they act more like the missing. Or, because the missing person is receiving so much attention, children may act like the missing one in an effort to also receive some of that attention.

As discussed earlier, it is never healthy for the children to try to become the missing person. When they are assigned roles and responsibilities that once belonged to the missing one, it should be done with the

explanation that these things need to be done, and the child is being chosen to do them because they are the best qualified, based on who they are. They should also be encouraged to do the task differently, or their own way as much as possible. However, the child's performance of the task should never be compared to the performance of the missing person.

When a child attempts to assume or fill the identity of the missing person, every effort should be taken to reinforce the child's own qualities and uniqueness. It is important to help the child understand that, during this crisis, he or she is valuable to the family, and their role is necessary for the family to stay strong.

### **REVIEW PERSONAL BELIEFS OF THE 'STATUS' OF THE MISSING PERSON**

Children should be encouraged to talk about what they believe has happened to the missing family member, as well as their reaction to the changes in their environment. Children often find themselves protecting the feelings of the parent by not expressing what they truly

think and feel. Through open communication the children are better able to normalize and understand the behaviour of the adult, and the family can begin to learn new coping skills as a unit. As attention continues to be focused on the missing loved one, strong communication within the family allows the children to believe that their needs are equally important. As discussed previously, family time, when done consistently, serves as a point of communication. The person providing support should encourage and advocate for this open communication.

In addition to their individual beliefs as to the status of the missing person and their beliefs about other members of the family, children also react to and are influenced by the attitudes they face outside of the family. The community at large has its own opinion about the missing person, often based on how the event has been presented by the press, media or gossip. The family may receive overwhelming support from the community or critical judgment. The attitude of the adult community is mimicked by their children who interact

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## A LOVED ONE GONE MISSING – AMBIGUOUS LOSS

with the children, primarily in school. Whether positive or negative, it is impossible to protect the children from these community attitudes. It is important, then, to help the children understand the attitudes and have a safe place to talk about their reactions to these attitudes.



Play therapy is an excellent tool to allow children to work through their thoughts and feelings about the event. In addition, children of all ages also benefit from peer support groups or interaction of some sort with other children

of missing persons families, to compare and normalize their experiences and reactions. If formal support groups are not available in the area that the children live, internet chat rooms and telephone buddies are available. HOWEVER, it is imperative that a responsible adult check out these contacts and question their security procedures to ensure the safety of participants from predators masquerading as a child.

As time passes and the loved one remains missing, the children's beliefs about the status of the missing, and their relationship to him/her changes. As the child grows and moves on with his or her life, leaving the missing person behind, they begin to feel some guilt in doing so. This guilt is reinforced each time that they recognize that their parent still has a dual sense of future; one of when the missing person returns, one in which the missing has not yet returned. The child may feel guilt that they are not including the missing family member into their future. While most children believe that they will see the missing person again, at some point they

accept the fact that they won't know their loved one when they do. Support, again, comes from interacting with other children of missing persons families to normalize and process these thoughts and feelings.

### **FEEL THROUGH THE PAIN OF THE ABSENCE, UNCERTAINTY/ FEAR AND GUILT**

**Pain of absence** – Children of families of missing persons often adopt behaviours which help them to avoid feeling the pain of the absence. They are at high risk for alcohol and/or substance abuse later in life. They may also engage in workaholic behaviour. Children may also attempt to block their memories of the missing person.

For some children these are learned behaviours, based on observing how their parents and other adults coped with the situation. Other children may participate in these behaviours as self-medication. Appropriate role modeling by adults, as well as providing the children opportunities to talk honestly about their thoughts and feelings during the event teaches them how to work through the pain of the absence in a healthy way.

**Uncertainty and fear** – Out of their experience of the missing person, the children develop an uncertainty as to who to trust. The adult appears to be unable to protect or locate the missing loved one. In the process the adult appears to withdraw from or abandon the child. The child, therefore, begins to lose trust in their primary care-giver. When this basic level of trust is eroded, children find that they are unable to establish trusting relationships throughout their lives. If police and other law enforcement personnel appear to the children to be a threat, they may find it difficult to trust and interact positively with authority figures later in life.

Fear is a significant part of the children's experience. Often, they fear that whatever happened to their loved one will also happen to them. In addition, all of the examples of perceived lack of safety presented above result in feelings of fear. Suggestions have already been presented as to how to establish a sense of safety. The person providing support should utilize this information.

**Guilt** – Perhaps surprisingly, feelings of guilt are not common

among the children of missing persons families. Unless they were directly involved in the event of the loved one gone missing, children do not blame themselves for the situation or for the chaos it may have caused.

### **CREATE LONG-TERM COPING STRUCTURE**

While children do not maintain the same dual sense of future that the adult holds, they do create for themselves structures or patterns of thinking which assists them to cope into the long-term future. When considering children of all ages, we find that these patterns begin in childhood, and continue into adulthood, if the family member is still missing.

Children create their coping structures through adapting the relationships they have with the people affected by the loved one gone missing. The first of these relationships is the one they have with the missing person. Children may vacillate between believing the missing person is alive or dead. This is different than the parent/adult's coping which utilizes a dual sense of future. Children are not concerned with

the possibilities of the future as much as how to perceive the missing one in the present moment. However, regardless of whether the children believe the missing person is alive or dead, they continue to count the missing as a current member of the family ('I have a sister/brother'). Children also may hold on to personal items of the missing loved one for as long as they are missing, even if they are attempting to block out all memories of the missing family member. Additionally, some children maintain relationships with the close friends of their missing loved one, as a means by which to keep their memories of them alive.

Children of all ages become aware of the impact that the person gone missing has on their own sense of self. Searching behaviour may become part of who the child grows to be, and part of their life. For some, there is a continued need for resolution of the case. One of the struggles that occurs is seeing how current missing persons cases take priority over the case involving their family member. Over time, the children may even come to believe that their case



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is not as important as current ones. These children may find that they become absorbed in the information about current cases so as to compare it to their own, or they may ignore these cases completely so as to avoid the feelings which might be uncovered. Regardless of how the continuing search manifests in the children's life, it has significant impact on their relationships as well.

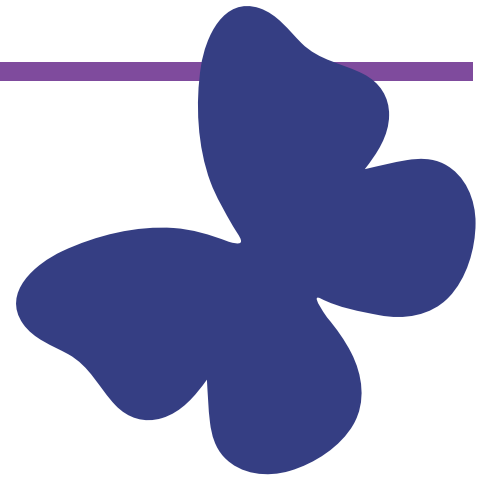
Another long-term concern children have as they age and prepare for the future is the possibility of projecting their fear and sense of lack of safety onto their children. Adult children talk about their desire not to be over protective of their own children, while at the same time wanting to insure their children's safety. The effect of the missing family member has the potential of generational impact. In addition, if the child has turned to drugs, alcohol or other self destructive or avoidant behaviours, the generational impact of this coping is also substantial.

Regardless of the relationship (with the missing person, with self, with others, with

subsequent generations, with God), the child must develop coping skills that allow them to develop these relationships in healthy ways. Most children learn these skills from their parents/ adults. However, in the situation of a missing loved one, the adult may not be the healthiest role model, or may not be available to the children. Many children end up seeking therapy for these issues later in life, or simply take on mal-adaptive behaviours. They are able to verbalize characteristics of themselves that they attribute directly to the missing situation; lack of confidence, inability to trust, and an inability to establish intimate relationships are examples. Providing mentoring, life skill coaching or counseling and traditional coping mechanisms for the child as they grow through childhood are excellent resources to mitigate these outcomes. The responsibility to suggest these supports and to see the necessity for them will probably fall to extended family members, elders and traditional teachers, and the larger community.

### **MISSING OR DECEASED? ESTABLISHING A PERMANENT RELATIONSHIP WITH THE LOVED ONE**

As mentioned above, without the dual sense of future held by the adults, a child struggles with the issue of whether the missing person is alive or dead. A common feeling among children is that 'missing is always there, dead is something from which you can move on'. If the loved one is still considered missing, there is nothing to validate their existence. When someone is dead there is a certificate to validate them. When a family member is missing, there is no symbol for remembrance. If someone is dead, there is a marker, headstone or some recognized place for remembering. The person providing support may assist the child in helping to create these symbols. One example would be requesting a periodic written statement from the police that says the case is still open and the family member is still considered missing which provides documented status of the person. Annual birthday celebrations (rather than memorial services) acknowledge the life of the missing without



suggesting that their life is over. A public plaque, garden, bench or tree in honour of the loved one provides a symbol of their life, without giving credence to whether they are living or dead.

Whether the missing person is alive or dead, the child also needs for their loved one's life to have value or meaning to this point. There are a variety of ways for this to be accomplished such as scholarship funds to the development of programs, volunteer activities and organizations to support other families. For a child, continuing the search insures that the loved one is not forgotten, and establishes a mechanism in the loved one's name to insure that their life has meaning.

In summary, how the child responds and reacts to the missing situation depends in large part on their perception of how well the parent/adult can protect them or the missing person. The effects of these perspectives, if not addressed in childhood at the time of the event, have significant long-ranged impact on their ability to trust authority, establish intimate

relationships, and even in rearing their own children. While children do not maintain the dual sense of future that their parents utilize to cope, they may experience guilt at moving on/growing, leaving the missing female behind. The act of searching may continue in some form throughout the child's lifetime.

#### **IF THE MISSING CHILD WAS ABDUCTED BY A FAMILY MEMBER**

If the missing person is a child, and is abducted by a family member (or a close family friend), the motivation is very often not about the welfare of the child. Unfortunately, issues of custody are often more about issues of control between the adult family members involved. For the person providing support it is good to remember that in this situation there is only one victim and that is the child. Child welfare is an issue of well-being and is under the jurisdiction of human or protective services. Child custody is an issue of control and is under the jurisdiction of the legal system. For the parent whose child is missing due to abduction by another family member, support

should follow the suggestions in the previous sections; work to Re-establish Structure, Release the Child that Was / Accept Child that Is, Resolve the Pain of the Absence, Uncertainty and Fear, Reassess the Role of Guilt, Acknowledge the Developmental Expectations of the Child's Future, and Re-establish a Single Perception of Future as discussed above. Another major support to the parent is to assist them to learn about the 'system', and how to utilize it to help in this situation.

#### **IF THE MISSING CHILD WAS ABDUCTED BY A NON-FAMILY MEMBER**

Abduction by a non-family member is not about control but about the exploitation of the child. The same information provided above should be followed to support the parents and family of a female child in a non-family abduction. The next chapter provides information on supporting this family when the child is located, and when the child is located and returned.

The background is a solid teal color. Overlaid on this are several large, overlapping, organic shapes in a darker blue color. These shapes are irregular and fluid, resembling watercolor splashes or soft-edged blobs. They are positioned primarily on the left and center of the page, creating a layered, abstract composition.

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# Supporting families of the located

## A LOVED ONE IS LOCATED

### WHEN THE PERSON IS LOCATED

When the missing person is located, the family is confronted with new challenges. Coping now involves the process of re-integrating the missing one into the family. This is a two-fold task as the person has to adapt to the new family structure, and the new family structure has to adjust to include the missing loved one. The longer he/she has been missing, the more difficult this process will be. The family will also need to develop new coping skills if the family member is located but does not physically return to the home or family. This may occur due to involvement by protective/foster care services, a behaviour reform or rehab environment, or due to legal/criminal confinement, for example. Or, the family member may choose to not return. Further, the method by which the person went missing will have a significant impact on the family's ability to adjust to the family member being located, or being located and returned. The most common methods by which a person goes missing are that he/she walked away, or they were abducted. All of these situations present unique opportunities to provide support.

If the family member walked away (or ran away in the case of a child) and has returned, it is recommended that the family and individual seek professional counseling or at least neutral mediation. This can be provided by a professional, a respected elder, or traditional healer. The loved one that returns is different than the one who walked away. The family that he/she is returning to is different than the family before they went missing. The family structure and the missing person have to adapt to these changes as they reintegrate. Trust has to be re-established between the loved one and their family as they address why he/she chose to leave, and why they chose to return. There is also the concern of family members that he/she may choose to leave again. It may also be true that the individual uses the threat of leaving again to manipulate the family. This process of adapting occurs whether the missing person is simply located or if he/she has been located and has returned to the family. Having a neutral person such as an elder who is respected by all parties, or a professional to assist in this

reintegration allows for the setting of rules, boundaries and guidelines for everyone involved.

No matter how the loved one went missing the adjustment to each other begins at the first interaction between the individual and family members after he/she is located, or located and returned. If the missing loved one is located but not returned to the family, the focus of the conversation for the first thirty minutes should simply be the expression of 'I love you. I'm glad you're back. I'm glad you're safe'. The person providing support may need to work to help them maintain this focus. Family members naturally want to know what has happened to the person while they were missing, and will want to ask about this. It is important to understand that the individual may have been involved in activity that they feel guilt, embarrassment, or even fearful about. They may be afraid of being judged, or they may have been traumatized by the activity. It is important to let the individual talk about their experience when they are ready. When they are ready to talk about their experiences,

# Supporting families of the located

## A LOVED ONE IS LOCATED

the located loved one needs for the family to validate their experiences immediately; to openly discuss, validate and process the experiences of the person while they were missing. It is imperative for the family members to validate not only the person's experiences, but how those experiences have changed them. It is also important to be sure that the family will not judge missing loved one for what may have happened to them. The person providing support must explain these points to the family and missing person, and help them to follow these guidelines.

The family and the individual, at the time of this first interaction, may both be reeling with uncontrolled emotions; anger, fear, relief, love, frustration, humiliation, powerlessness. The first few moments of this encounter will set the tone for the new relationship. To set the appropriate, healthy tone the guidelines presented above should be followed.

### **WHEN THE MISSING PERSON IS LOCATED**

#### **Re-establish structure**

The physical structure for a family which has had a family member gone missing, and is located (but not returned) may undergo very little change, particularly if they have been following the information for physical structure presented in Chapter 1. They, of course, would abandon their physical activity of searching for the loved one. The roles, structures and schedule that the family has adopted while the person was missing can now be continued and perhaps even refined to more permanently exclude the daily presence of the located loved one. If there is a possibility that he/she may eventually return, they will need to fit into what is now the new normal for the family, rather than the family trying to return to its former patterns. Until that happens, the primary change in the schedule will be the inclusion of visitations with the located loved one, if that is going to occur.

If the loved one is in an agency setting the family will need to

follow the visitation rules of the agency. In a sense, the family must have the permission of the agency in order to interact with their loved one. The family may experience anger toward the individual for causing the situation that includes the agency involvement and/or anger for the agency which has control over their interaction with their loved one. Support comes in allowing the family to verbalize this anger about the person and about the agency, and discussing how to better accept the current situation. This often comes from actively attempting to see the situation differently and finding the positives in the situation. If the individual will eventually be returned to the family, this can be seen as a time when plans can be made by both parties to ease the reintegration of the person back into the family.

The loved choosing to stay at another location (with threats of leaving again), is an indication of some unsettled discord, and visitation will need to be negotiated and planned directly with them. The family and the loved one are equals in this negotiation. One way to support



them is having both parties set and agree to a regular visitation schedule. Including the presence of a mutually trusted third party at all visits may also provide support.

The more difficult work for the family is the re-establishment of their emotional structure. The family no longer needs to think in terms of a dual perspective of the future and will slowly stop doing so. The pictures and the possible scenarios of the person's fate that the family had envisioned can be released and the family may move on from them. However, if the family still holds on to those mental pictures, further professional intervention will be needed to process them. This is particularly true if the individual is not yet ready to talk about their experience, and family members are left to surmise what occurred.

An appropriate support to assist the family in coping with the situation of a located loved one is for them to review the status of the individual, the family, and themselves individually now that the loved one is located. Often, the family may not have had the

time to process all that occurred or all of the information that was learned when the person was located. Discussions in family meetings and in couple's time are necessary for the family to process the new information and the new situation. Appropriate questions for discussion are 'How do I view my relationship to this family member now that they are located?' 'Has my view of the family changed as a result of this experience?' 'How do I feel about the fact that our located family member is not present with us?'

As mentioned above, the physical structure of the family may remain intact when the loved one is located but not returned. If the new emotional structure was formulated as described in Chapter 1, it may very well be healthier than the original state of the family. With supporters and extended family members monitoring and guiding the family's emotional responses and relationship changes as they occurred, positive dynamics in the family will have been created. However, if the new family dynamics were not guided in a healthy way, it is strongly advised that the family seek counseling,

with or without the presence of the located loved one.

### **RELEASE THE LOVED ONE THAT WAS, ACCEPT THE PERSON THAT IS**

It is natural for the family to attempt to interact with the located family member in the same way as before he/she went missing. While the rest of the world has continued to move and develop, the missing person often remains unchanged in the memory of the family. As time passes while he/she is missing, the family needs to be reminded that their loved one has continued to grow and mature. The family should be encouraged to think of the missing one in terms their chronological age and developmental stage. When the person is located (but interaction is limited), their behaviour may seem confusing to a family who has not 'kept up' with their loved one chronologically. In addition, whatever the missing one experienced while away will also change the way they perceive their world, and the way they respond to it. The resulting behaviour may add to the frustration of the family

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## A LOVED ONE IS LOCATED

members who are trying to re-connect with the 'former' individual.

Understanding how the individual has grown or changed will be augmented by any information the located person is willing to offer about his/her missing time. The more information the family can acquire, or even create based on the information available, the more the family can accept the person the located loved one has become. A family that avoids listening to the experiences of their located loved one is making a choice to hold on to their memory of who the individual used to be. Again, the family meeting is an excellent place for the family as a whole to discuss the change in the located individual, as well as the developmental process and experiences the located loved one encountered. As stated above, the more actual information provided by the located person to the family about their experience, the more quickly and completely the located individual can be accepted by the family.

### **RESOLVE THE PAIN OF THE ABSENCE, UNCERTAINTY AND FEAR**

Information about the experiences of the missing loved one is not only important for the family to be able to accept who he/she has become, but to also resolve the uncertainty and fear they had about what was happening to them as discussed in Chapter 1. While he/she were missing, supporting the family may have involved their envisioning all possible scenarios of what the missing person could be experiencing. Processing these scenarios allowed the family to file them away as bad memories. For the family members that did not have the opportunity to process these scenarios, the pictures may still be very intense. When the loved one is located, several of these scenarios and bad memories can be dismissed simply because he/she is located. However, many of the scenarios/memories continue to be possibilities of what the person endured until information is available from them. If the located individual is willing and able to discuss their experiences, family members can resolve and dismiss

the inaccurate scenarios/memories, and mentally create the actual scenario based on the information from the person. If, however, interaction with the located loved one is restricted and information is not available, the family may have to place these scenarios on hold until more information can be acquired, or decide for themselves which scenarios are accurate and which are not, based on the limited information available. The family members who have difficulty processing these scenarios after the individual is located may need professional support to avoid the traumatic effect the scenarios may have on them.

For the entire family, the pain of the absence can easily be replaced with anger when their loved one is located but not returned. If it is learned that the missing person 'chose' to walk/run-away, the family again feels coerced and becomes angry about the experiences and emotions they encountered while he/she was missing. The fact that the person has been located but has not returned, (whether it is his/her choice or not), becomes

further indication of their 'lack of concern' for the family. Anger is a natural reaction to the circumstances at hand and should be validated. However, this anger is based on the assumption that the individual purposely set out to hurt and manipulate the family. In reality, it is more likely the missing family member was more focused on themselves than the impact of their behaviour on the family. Therefore, assumptions that the individual intended and or planned the family's emotional pain may be erroneous. Due to the family's anger, the located loved one may be perceived as a 'villain'. If the anger goes unchecked, it may grow and expand to the point that the family decides the individual should not return, and that any future relationship with them should not be encouraged. While this may not actually be verbalized, the family's behaviour may send clear messages to the located person that they are not welcome.

One block to resolving the pain of the absence is concern for the safety of the individual in their current location. While the

location of the loved one may be known, uncertainty and fear as to their safety may still be active issues. This is particularly true if the person is choosing to remain in an environment that is potentially harmful, but threatens to run away again if the family tries to intervene. Families often find that, without actual proof of harm to their loved one, their reports to the authorities about *potential* harm go un-heeded, particularly if the individual has run/walked-away. If the family decides to take some physical action themselves to remove their loved one from the environment, they may find that they are arrested for criminal intent. The family becomes frustrated, angry, and perhaps overwhelmed as the system that is supposed to help them ends up allowing their loved one to be hurt. This may spur the family on to constructive behaviour such as challenging and changing the system, or destructive behaviours such as attempting to enforce their own will outside of the law. They may also engage in self-destructive behaviours such as drinking, drug abuse (prescription and illicit), and/or other high risk

behaviours. Support in this situation comes by monitoring the family's behaviour, supporting appropriate challenges to the system, and openly challenging destructive behaviour. Because this situation and the system's reaction to it does not appear to follow the 'rules' about what is best for the loved one, the family's ability to think rationally about this situation may be impaired. Family members in this situation should be considered as 'high risk' for harming others, and possibly harming themselves.

### **REASSESS THE ROLE OF GUILT**

Once the missing person is located, the guilt which had been experienced by the family should be reviewed and re-assessed. As discussed in Chapter 1, guilt may have been used as a defense mechanism, or as a filter through which to consider the fate of the individual. Now that he/she has been located, the defense guilt may no longer be necessary, but valid guilt will need to be addressed.

The family, in probing how the individual went missing, may experience guilt about this. The guilt may be legitimate and



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should always be discussed with the family. Information from the located loved one is extremely helpful in this process. However, if that input is not available, the family will need to process their guilt based on the information which is available.

Should the family believe that the located individual is currently in danger, the guilt experienced by them may still serve as a filter, or as a defense. If the person's current environment is viewed as extremely dangerous, the family may well continue to utilize guilt as a defense mechanism to avoid the feelings of anxiety and the feelings of anticipation about the impending harm to the loved one, over which they have no control. For the person providing support, the same interventions should be utilized that were presented in Chapter 1.

### **ACKNOWLEDGE DEVELOPMENTAL EXPECTATIONS OF THE LOVED ONE'S FUTURE**

As the family adjusts to the fact that their loved one has been located, and observes the growth and the development that their loved one has experienced

while missing, it is important to remember that he/she and the family will continue to grow from this point forward. While the present moment is filled with negotiation, adjustment and perhaps feelings of anger, resentment and frustration, there is a reason for this work; to continue growing with the located individual into the future. In supporting a family through this difficult time, reminders of the located person's current development, and the growth and developmental expectations which will take place in the near and long-ranged future helps to put the current struggles in a larger context. This context reminds everyone involved that there is an ultimate goal, and that what is occurring in this moment will change as they all continue to grow. This approach to the current situation reframes it as one of many situations that are yet to come.

### **RE-ESTABLISH SINGLE PERCEPTION OF THE FUTURE**

The family no longer needs to maintain a dual perception of the future. They can now perceive the future in a way that can include the located individual, even at

another location. The future may include integrating him/her into the family mentally and physically when appropriate. Again, supporting this family should include a review of the located individual's current development and a reminder of his/her future developmental growth. This combined with information from the located person assists the family in abandoning the dual perception of the future for a single one.

If a family member continues to hold a dual perception of the future when the individual has returned, and/or avoids talking about a future that includes them, they are not adjusting well, and may have some mental health issues. This person needs professional help.

### **WHEN THE LOVED ONE IS LOCATED AND RETURNED**

#### **Re-establish structure**

The new normal experienced by everyone in the family must now change enough to include and reintegrate the missing person. This does not mean going back to 'normal' or the old way of feeling and acting. It is impossible to



'go back'. Each of the individuals involved in this family as well as the relationships between them have changed. There are now new emotions involved in the relationships and new dynamics. Individuals and families that attempt to re-establish life as it was before the loved one went missing are in denial of the changes and growth which has occurred, and are attempting to create an unhealthy environment.

A family member that has been located and returned will need to be incorporated into the new physical and emotional family structures. This will affect each individual in the family. Adding the returned loved one's needs and responsibilities into the schedule will require compromise on everyone's part. Family meetings become even more essential as a forum to encourage negotiation and venting of emotional stress. Resentment on the part of family members is natural as they perceive that they are being forced or coerced into changing again because of the loved one, particularly if he/she walked/ran away. This resentment and frustration may be focused at

the returned individual, or at each other. Issues of fault and blame arise as the larger family struggles to achieve a new balance. Professional support may be of great benefit at this time for the entire family. The most important task for the family now is to understand that all relationships within the family will be different. The second task for the family is to learn to honour and nurture those new relationships.

These two tasks are particularly important for the family. While wanting to react toward the returned individual as they would before he/she went missing, the family must understand that this is not the same person. The experiences that he/she encountered while away have changed them. So too, the family is no longer the same having gone through the experience of a missing member. If the individual walked/ran away, the issues which caused them to leave must be confronted, addressed, negotiated and/or resolved. This may result in resentments on everyone's part as each person perceives that they are being manipulated or coerced by the

other. The focus between the individuals may then become one of control rather than negotiation. Support or mediation by a neutral party is a necessity in this process, and can be provided by an elder or respected community member.

There are clear indicators that the process of integration is not progressing in a healthy way. One is individual family members turning away from the family and gravitating to outside alternatives for support. This is particularly true if the integration process is filled with conflict and unsupported relationship development. Children may spend time with other families, or in some symbolic way 'run away' themselves. They may turn to peers and high risk or self-destructive behaviours including over/under eating, drug and alcohol abuse, and sexual activity. In addition, adults may follow these same behaviours, finding comfort or solace outside of the family, and in self-destructive behaviours. Open communication and external professional support are strongly advised for a family struggling in this process.

# Supporting families of the located

## A LOVED ONE IS LOCATED

### **RELEASE THE LOVED ONE THAT WAS, ACCEPT THE ONE THAT IS**

The need for acceptance of the family member that is returned is immediate, as he/she is present in the home. With the individual returned to the home, the information as to their experiences will be more readily available. The loved one's presence assists in promoting the acceptance of who they have become. However, the information presented above about releasing/accepting the returned loved one applies here as well.

### **RESOLVE THE PAIN OF THE ABSENCE, UNCERTAINTY AND FEAR**

For the family of a loved one that is returned, resolution of the pain of uncertainty and absence happens quickly. As the returned one begins to fit into the new family structure, the future of the family appears more certain. However, one block to this certainty is the concern that this person, or another family member may go missing again. As recommended above, professional support for the entire family is essential.

Many emotional dynamics and possibilities are occurring within the family at this time, and they are not capable of mitigating all possible problems. Professional support to the family as a whole will empower it to take care of and support itself.

Resolution of the pain and of the fear in part depends on the ability and willingness of the returned individual to discuss his/her experience. This may happen slowly as he/she may fear judgment or recrimination (punishment) for their behaviour while away. Support in this situation should be to dissuade the individual's fear of recrimination, and serve to establish trust between he/her and the family. This can be accomplished through an agreement between them that anything which occurred during the absence is free from judgement. As the returned loved one becomes more and more trusting of the agreement, they will feel more comfortable discussing their experiences. As he/she reveals these experiences, the family can resolve their fear of what might have occurred, accept

what actually occurred, and set up appropriate supports for their loved one and the family's emotional, physical, medical and spiritual well-being based on those experiences.

While all parties may agree to not judge the behaviour while the person was missing, if their behaviour was illegal and law enforcement personnel approach family members about that behaviour, everyone needs to understand how the individual family members will respond to law enforcement.

### **REASSESS THE ROLE OF GUILT**

If the family member walked/ran away, mediation should be provided to all involved to negotiate the reasons for the individual leaving. In this process, the behaviour of all parties is confronted, addressed and commitments are made to change those behaviours as necessary. Again, this support can be mediated by an elder or respected community member. Participating in this process will allow the family to explore the guilt they may have experienced about the family member leaving. If the returned loved one's

experience involved physical or mental harm, family members' guilt (if any) should be addressed, and balanced with a plan which will provide for the individual's current welfare (medical,

family member is located and returned. The 'magical thinking' is no longer valid as the child begins to understand how the individual went missing. If the child does feel some

when the loved one has returned, as direct interaction with the children and family allows for resolution or validation of issues of guilt.



Self-forgiveness is a difficult task for both the returned loved one, and the family members. They must define forgiveness, identify the criteria necessary for self-forgiveness in this circumstance, and then measure themselves against that criterion. Often, it is easiest to support this by helping the individual to 'project out' onto others; what would self-forgiveness look like for person X, what steps could they take to forgive themselves, and how will they know when they have forgiven themselves? Once the individual has created an idea of self-forgiveness for someone else, they can then start to use it for themselves.

mental, etc.), and for the future relationship between him/her and the family members. The validated guilt is verbally labeled, confronted, and balanced with a plan for change and moving forward.

responsibility for the loved one going missing, these issues should be discussed. Once again the family meeting format is an excellent place for children to gain accurate information about the returned individual, and to verbalize their feelings, concerns, even guilt. The family meeting is even more beneficial

The person providing support must offer the time and safe place for the individual to discuss these issues. There are two approaches to forgiveness that may be helpful in this situation. The first is for the individual to be able to separate themselves from their behaviour. Example: you can love someone but hate

Guilt experienced by children is usually minimized when the

# Supporting families of the located

## A LOVED ONE IS LOCATED

their behaviour when they are drunk. The second is to be able to accept themselves as a whole person, in spite of and including one unacceptable characteristic or event. Example: someone can be respected for their career, community involvement, and personality which may include the fact that they were once unfaithful to their spouse. Through these approaches the returned individual and/or family members may discover that their 'offense' does not define them, and is not their only quality. They may come to discover that they are human, and have made mistakes as all humans do. From this point the individual may become able to accept the 'offensive' behaviour, and move on, striving to never repeat it.

### **ACKNOWLEDGE DEVELOPMENTAL EXPECTATIONS OF THE LOVED ONE'S FUTURE**

While meeting the daily needs of the family, the process of re-integrating the returned individual is occurring. In this situation there is a hesitancy to think in terms of the future, as day to day life takes most of the family's focus. Having had

the experience of a loved one missing, the current moment which includes the returned individual is savoured and valued and is considered safe. As a result of their experience, the future may not be viewed as being as safe as the present moment. Family members may adjust from a dual sense of future to avoidance of the future. However, for the family to consider what the future looks like with the returned individual is healthy and should be supported. Again, this reframes the current situation into being one of many situations which will evolve, develop and grow.

Another benefit of considering and reviewing the developmental expectations of the individual is that it serves as a coping skill for the family. A family that acknowledges the future development of the members of that family, is more adept at growing itself, and supporting the growth of all of its members.

### **RE-ESTABLISH SINGLE PERCEPTION OF THE FUTURE**

The family no longer needs to maintain a dual perception of the future, but can now perceive a

future that includes the returned loved one. Supporting this family should include working to accept who he/she is now, as well as who they will grow and develop into. This combined with information from the returned loved one assists the family in abandoning the dual perception of the future for a single one.

Maintaining a dual perception of the future, with the loved one being present, or long-term avoidance of thinking about the future are warning signs that a family member is not adjusting well, and may have some mental health issues. This person needs professional help.

### **IF THE LOVED ONE WAS ABDUCTED BY A NON-FAMILY MEMBER**

As discussed in the previous chapter, non-family abduction of a loved one (adult or child) is about the exploitation of that individual. If the individual is located and returned after this type of abduction, the fate of the abductor will have significant impact on the returned individual and the family. The abductor may be apprehended and held accountable, may

not be apprehended, or may be apprehended but not held accountable (released). Each of these possibilities has a unique impact. The family may find that the return of the loved one has fostered a life centered on the capture, prosecution and sentencing of the abductor.

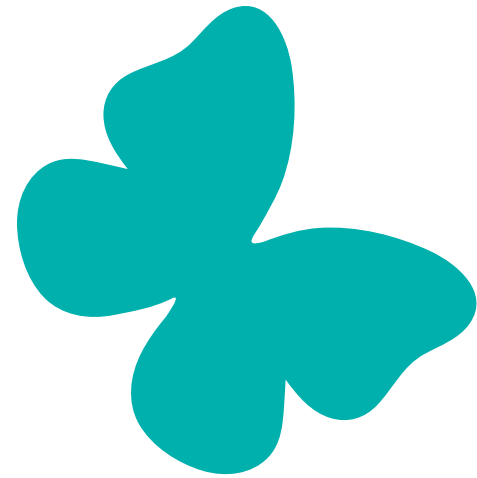
If the abductor is not apprehended, or not held accountable, issues of personal safety will need to be addressed for every family member. Family members, as well as the returned individual, may fear for their own safety at the hands of the perpetrator. They may also fear for other potential victims of this perpetrator. Support comes in assisting the family to establish what, who and where is safe, and talk about ways of making themselves safer.

Time and resources may have to be spent by the family as the system attempts to hold the abductor accountable after being apprehended. Time that the individual and family members spend with lawyers, time in court, costs for travel, lodging, and the loss of money for time away from their jobs are a few examples of

the costs incurred by the family in this situation. Support for this family may be creating a space where family members may vent frustrations and concerns about the legal process, discuss the costs of pursuing justice, and frequent review of the reasons for continuing this activity. Resentment by others in the family as a result of the time and resources still being focused on the returned individual should continue to be addressed openly in family meetings. Extended family members and friends may need to continue to provide for the nurturing and care of the family during this time.

As we have worked through this chapter addressing the location, and location and return of the family member, it is also important to recognize that the person providing support understand their own needs and limitations; a support person who gets involved beyond their capacity is no longer a support, but another casualty of the missing situation. A person providing support should remember that support for the family must come from a variety of sources and is not

the responsibility of just one person. One of the best ways that a person providing support can support themselves is to encourage the family to utilize several different avenues of support.



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# Supporting families of the murdered

## A LOVED ONE GONE MISSING - FOUND MURDERED

**W**hen the missing loved one is found murdered, the family must undergo an almost impossible emotional shift. Several factors about the death itself impact the grief reaction of the family. One factor is the condition in which the loved one's body is found, if it is found. This has a bearing on the family's ability to change from a dual sense of future (the loved one will have returned/the loved one will still be missing) to a future in which the individual will never be physically present. When the murdered person and/or their personal effects can be easily recognized and identified, the family has more evidence on which to base their emotional shift to grief. If the missing one must be identified through scientific or forensic means, the family may feel that they do not have concrete evidence on which to build their acceptance of the death.

In addition to the ability to identify the loved one, the physical evidence of how he/she was murdered, and what they experienced before their death will also have a great impact on the family's ability to accept the

individual's death. An indication of a traumatic or violent experience prior to the murder creates a traumatic response in family members. The trauma endured by the individual must be processed by the family before they can grieve the death. This is true of all traumatic losses. Individuals cannot grieve as long as they are traumatized, afraid or processing a trauma. This is one reason why supporting the discussion of the possible scenarios of what may be happening to the loved one, presented in Chapter 1, is essential. By creating the possible scenarios while he/she was missing, the family has experienced processing a trauma.

Finally, the status of the perpetrator also impacts the family's ability to begin to grieve the death of the loved one. If the perpetrator is unknown, or their whereabouts are unknown, family members are often driven by a sense of unfinished business to bring the perpetrator to justice. In addition, family members may well develop traumatic responses which

include a strong sense of fear for their own personal safety at the hands of the perpetrator. As discussed in Chapter 2, support for the family must focus on helping them discover who, what and where is safe.

Often, a child who experiences intense fear will regress to the behaviour of the last age in which they felt safe. This regressive behaviour often adds to the grief and anxiety of the rest of the family at this time, but must be recognized

as an indication of fear. The parent or primary care-giver (as opposed to other family members) must address this with each child and assist them in identifying their safe places. While other family members can provide this support, it is the parent/caregiver who is the symbol of family safety. The unity of the family may be damaged in the long term if extended family members attempt to fill this role. The parent must be supported in accepting the responsibility of assisting the children in the establishment of their sense of safety.



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If the perpetrator is in custody, the family may be faced with a long period of court activity. With this activity comes a great expenditure of time, money and energy. As stated in Chapter 2, support for this family consists of assisting them to understand the system in which they find themselves, and reality testing to be sure that they understand all of the costs involved. Many family members consciously decide to delay their grieving until the perpetrator has received his or her 'punishment'. They may focus their entire life on the capture and conviction of the perpetrator. This is often seen as waiting to grieve until the universal order of things is re-established; chaos has been replaced by justice. Unfortunately, many perpetrators are never captured or are not found guilty due to technicalities. Because the family members had not considered these alternative outcomes, they are at risk of being stuck in this emotional place. The longer they put off grieving the murder of their loved one, the more difficult it is for them to accept the reality of the death. This is not emotionally healthy. Support in this situation is in encouraging the family

members to discuss all possible outcomes of the capture and prosecution of the perpetrator in advance.

**NOTE:** *Children and other family members who expected some return to normalcy once the missing loved one was discovered deceased may become angry or begin acting-out when the family's focus is diverted to the capture and prosecution of the murderer. They may continue to feel abandoned or less valuable when there is nothing else to be done for the deceased individual, but the situation still garners the family focus. Their life, which was re-arranged by the searching for the missing loved one, is now re-arranged by police and court schedules. This is a period of extremely high risk for the continuity of the family. Support is in helping them to balance their time with the family, not allowing it to be usurped by the judicial situation. Family counseling with a professional should also be a consideration at this time. If family members separate themselves from the family, focused on the court proceedings, the family unit may continue to grow without them. The end result*

*is that these family members are not only deprived of the opportunity to grow with the loved one who is deceased, but miss the same opportunity to grow with the core family as well.*

### GRIEF

#### Definition and Models

One of the most accepted definitions of **grief** is 'the process of adjusting to a loss'. Grief is not a feeling, but a process that may include every possible human feeling. This process occurs over time as the individual encounters triggers that remind them that the loved one is no longer present. There is no time limit on grief. Grief over the death of a loved one will continue to some extent through the survivors' life time; as they grow and age there will be new experiences that the murdered loved one should have shared with them. The survivor will need to again adjust to the loss.

There are many **models of grief**. These are guidelines developed by researchers to suggest the appropriate pattern that grief should follow. While they can be helpful, it is good to remember that everyone's grieving process



is different. As long as one's grieving process does not significantly interfere with their ability to live life or their well-being, they are probably on the correct path for them.

Most models of grief developed in some way out of a perspective known as Attachment Theory. This theory was first developed by John Bowlby in the 1950s. In essence he states that all mammals have a basic reaction when they are separated from something to which they are attached. This reaction includes an initial response of numbness and disbelief, and behaviours of searching and pining for the individual. The survivor may also lash out in anger at anyone or anything that appears to be keeping them from their loved one, or disrespecting the loved one in some way. Bowlby goes on to say that depression sets in when the survivor acknowledges that they will never be physically reunited with their loved one. He then states that recovery occurs when the survivor makes a new attachment to a person, activity or a cause. If you have experienced a loss before, or have supported someone who

was grieving, you very likely saw some of these behaviours. They are normal grieving behaviours.

One of the most accepted models of grief is known as the **Tasks of Mourning** developed by William Worden. He states that there are four tasks that a person accomplishes when they are grieving in a healthy way. These tasks do not happen in any particular order, and may be interrupted by another task, then re-engaged at a later time. One of the tasks is *accepting the reality of the loss*. This is the on-going process referred to above where the survivor has to accept the loss in every aspect of their life. So, the first time an experience occurs after the loss, the survivor has to experience it without the deceased loved one, and adjust to the loss in this experience. *Experiencing the pain of grief* is another of the tasks, and is focused on the emotional pain of the adjustment process. While this pain is emotional, it is good to remember that there is also a physiological reaction of the body to grief, brought about by the stress of the situation. Another task is *adjusting to an environment in which the deceased*

*is missing*. This task focuses on all of the activities for which the deceased was responsible, or was characteristically performing. Upon encountering one of these tasks the survivor now has to decide if they can fill this activity, if they have to find someone else to do it, or if it can be left undone. The decision the survivor makes may be revisited and changed at a later time. The final task is *emotionally relocating the deceased and moving on with life*. Here the survivor adjusts from interacting with the decedent physically, face to face, and decides how to interact with them through memory, belief that the decedent is in a defined after-life, is watching over them, or that there is no longer a connection between them. Again, the survivor may revisit their decision on this task and change it at a later time.

While there are many ways to approach or perceive grief, the information provided above will serve as a good understanding for the person providing support. This information can serve to show the person providing support what is normal grieving and what should be encouraged and facilitated.

# Supporting families of the murdered

## A LOVED ONE GONE MISSING - FOUND MURDERED

### TRAUMATIC LOSS

#### Defining Traumatic Loss

There is some controversy over what defines traumatic loss. Some believe that it is a loss that occurred as a result of a traumatic event. If this is true, then a loved one gone missing where there is no event, or there is an unknown event, could not be considered traumatic. For others the trauma in traumatic loss refers to the survivor's reaction. For the purpose of this publication **traumatic loss** is any loss characterized by the survivor experiencing a traumatic response (see below) based on the meaning and value that person gives to the event. With this definition, a survivor who has a traumatic reaction due to their female loved one having gone missing and located murdered, has experienced a traumatic loss even though that survivor may have no or limited knowledge of the events that occurred.

#### Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

Until 2012 the American Psychological Association criteria for a diagnosis of PTSD stated that the individual had to witness

the traumatic event, in person. In 2012 this requirement for exposure changed to include hearing that a traumatic event happened to a loved one. The criteria also now states that being repeatedly exposed to the aversive details of the traumatic event also meets the exposure requirement for a diagnosis of PTSD. The knowledge that a missing loved one has been located murdered, qualifies as exposure to a trauma. But, going further, the images that family members have created in their minds based on the knowledge of the murder become aversive details.

#### Traumatic Response

An individual exposed to a traumatic event has a physiological reaction to that information. This physiological reaction then results in a change of behaviour of the individual. If this physiological/behavioural reaction does not meet the criteria for PTSD, it is referred to as a traumatic response.

The **physiological characteristics** of a traumatic response, stated briefly, involve the hypothalamus releasing

a hormone that stimulates the pituitary gland, which releases a hormone into the bloodstream to stimulate the adrenal glands. These release adrenaline and cortisol. Cortisol is the stress hormone, and the hormone responsible for the physiological changes that result in behavioural changes. The more intensely the individual reacts to details of the event, the more cortisol is released into the system, and the more intense the behaviour change. From this point, cortisol affects the brain by shutting down the hippocampi (responsible for short term memory, learning, concentration, etc.) so that the amygdalae (fear and anger center) can fire unhampered. This is the basis for what is known as the fight, flight, freeze reaction. Cortisol also shuts down the immune system to conserve energy for the fight, flight, freeze response.

As a result of this physiological activity brought about by the release of cortisol, the individual exhibits particular behaviours. For the person providing support, these behaviours are the symptoms which indicate that the individual is experiencing a

traumatic response. The more intensely the individual reacts to the event, the more cortisol is released into the system, and the more pronounced the symptoms or **behavioural characteristics**. These characteristics include; difficulty concentrating, reduced ability of short term memory, difficulty learning new material, increased negative world view, and the inability to sleep. The individual will also exhibit increased anger, and their anger response will be out of proportion to what made them angry. Repetitive thinking (thinking loops that repeat), expecting something else negative to happen, feeling they no longer fit in the world, detaching from their feelings, and exhibiting depression in the form of lack of motivation are also characteristics that result from increased cortisol levels. Finally, indications of a compromised immune system such as difficulty in fighting colds and viruses, increased physical pain, delayed healing of simple bruises and minor injuries also indicate a traumatic response.

The general rule is – if an individual has three or four of

these characteristics, which come and go, the individual is experiencing a normal human life. If the individual has 4-5 (or more) of these characteristics, they are consistent, and they have been increasing in intensity over time, the individual is most likely experiencing a traumatic response.

The key to supporting this individual is in assisting them to reduce their cortisol levels. This is easier than it may appear. Cortisol levels are reduced by the release of endorphins into the system. The effect of the release of endorphins is immediate, and the individual will experience an immediate decrease in the severity of the behavioural characteristics. The best way to release endorphins into the system is through exercise.

Any exercise that involves using both sides of the body is best; walking, bicycling, aerobics, stair-master, treadmill, elliptical, etc. The individual should engage in the activity enough to increase their heart rate and break a sweat.

Other activities that result in the release of endorphins include

laughing (even just pretending to laugh), being in the presence of someone who nurtures you, and feeling good about yourself (acknowledging things that you have accomplished). Because the release of cortisol is constant for a person experiencing a traumatic response, the activity to release endorphins needs to be consistent as well. To stop the traumatic response and the release of cortisol, one has to be able to change the meaning and value that they are giving the event – change their perspective of the event. This is best done through counseling.

### **Needs of Survivors of Traumatic Loss**

When the death of the loved one is traumatic, as in the case of the murder of a female family member, the family and family members have specific needs. Information about the murder, and the situation leading up to it is vital for survivors. Resolution of the open-ended questions who, what, when, where, why is of primary importance. When individuals are traumatized, or having a traumatic response, two characteristics are present; they do not feel in control of the

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situation, and they do not feel safe. The more information they have about their loved one's murder, the more they feel in control and safe. When there is no information available, the family members will need support in coming up with what they believe must have happened, based on the information they do have.

The family and or family members may also need assistance in negotiating the many systems in which they now find themselves such as law enforcement, courts, funeral industry, etc. Interacting with these systems can be overwhelming for someone who is experiencing a traumatic response. Having the assistance of an elder, or community member with knowledge of these systems, and who can walk through the process with them is extremely helpful.

The family will also become aware that they are now no longer referred to as the family of a missing person, but are now seen as the family of a murdered person. This may not seem important, but what

family members find over time is they are often identified by the murder first, and not for their own accomplishments or characteristics.

The person providing support may find it advantageous to assist family members to seek out medical follow up, to be sure that the activity dealing with the loved one's murder, physical, emotional and spiritual, has not done harm to the survivors. In addition, the family may be experiencing sudden financial strain as a result of the murder. Assisting the family in finding local support or establishing mechanisms such as a Go-Fund-Me page on the internet will be valuable.

Supporting a family adjusting to the reality that their missing female family member has been murdered, will need many of the resources of the community; elders, shaman/healers, folks who can facilitate traditional ceremonies and rituals, and community members at large.

### PROVIDING SUPPORT

#### Re-Establish structure

**Physical** – The physical structure for a family which has had a

family member located murdered may undergo very little change, particularly if they have been following the information for physical structure presented in Chapter 1. They, of course, would abandon any physical activity in searching for the loved one. The roles, structures and schedule that the family had adopted while the individual was missing, which allowed them to continue to function without his/her presence, can be continued and reinforced. Those roles and relationships can now be referred to in more permanent terms, and can be reviewed and refined to permanently exclude the physical presence of the deceased person.

**Emotional** – As mentioned above, the emotional structure of the family very often becomes chaotic. One characteristic that heightens the sense of chaos is their expectation of support from others, in and outside of the family. These expectations are often disappointed with statements such as "well, you must be relieved to know one way or the other" and "you always knew this was a possibility, so you must have prepared yourself". These statements



are seen by family members as minimizing the loss and devaluing the murdered loved one.

The family must now adjust from a dual sense of future, to one which does not and will not include the physical presence of their loved one. For some families, the former dual sense of future without their loved one may have already incorporated the possibility that the individual was deceased. In this case, the adjustment to a single sense of future may not be so difficult. However, many family members will not be able to incorporate death into their sense of future. Even more difficult is accepting the concept that their loved one was murdered. For these families, the death is truly unexpected and sudden. Support for these families would be similar to that of any family having a member die suddenly. Support includes helping the family adjust from the emotional structures of 'missing' (temporary) to 'murdered' (permanent), and resolving the trauma of the murder.

The family may, in the beginning of this adjustment, vacillate between thoughts of dual future and thoughts of the death. Helping them identify which thoughts are old thinking (dual future) and which are current (death/murder) can be helpful, when done in a non-judgmental way. Statements such as "I remember when you used to say that" and "I'm sure the old thoughts can be comforting" help the family to identify when they are thinking in terms of dual sense of future. Statements such as "It must be difficult to accept that thought" and "learning to think in this new way requires a lot of effort, doesn't it?" are supportive when the family is adjusting to thoughts of the murder of the female.

Another way in which a family can support the change in the structure from the emotions of 'missing' to the emotions of 'dead' is the creation of memorial moments throughout the year. These are times in which the family plans in advance to remember and to honour the deceased loved one. Most often these moments correspond with birthdays, holidays, family

events and the anniversary dates of when the murdered individual went missing, his/her death (if known), and/or when their body was found. These memorial moments are created to specifically reflect and honour the characteristics of the individual. They can be as simple as serving their favorite dessert with the statement "I'm serving Sally's favorite dessert tonight to include her memory into this event". And/or they can be as elaborate as traditional ceremonies, or reviewing pictures of previous holidays which included the loved one, with each survivor relating a memory of them. Support for this type of activity comes from ensuring that the memories are well balanced – the good and the not as good. As time passes and the family adjusts to this loss, these memorial moments will be fewer in number, and will take up less focus. Elders, healers and traditional ceremonies are very helpful in this process.

Establishing the loved one's date of death may serve as another way to assist the family in changing their emotional structure. When the body is

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found, it is often difficult for authorities to establish the date of death; it falls between when they went missing and when the body was found. In this case the family must decide on the date of death based on the forensic information that is available. The date of death serves as a marker, a defining point that is essential in the grieving process. The process experienced by the family through choosing the date of death strongly supports their emotional transition from missing to dead. (It is important that the chosen date of death does not fall on any other celebration date. Mixing celebrations de-values each of them.)

Some families choose to accept the date that the person's body was found as the date of death. The individual is pronounced dead at that time, and that is the date which is entered on the Death Certificate. This date carries with it many conflicting feelings for the family. It is the date that conclusively marks the end of their life, and the end of the searching for their loved one. It is also the date that marks the end of their suffering, and the

end of 'not knowing'. The family may react to the anniversary of this date as a trigger which brings up images of the trauma their loved one suffered. Or, the family may see the anniversary of this date as marking when 'it was all over'. As time passes, most family members begin to view the date the body was found as the symbol of the end of life, the end of searching, the end of suffering....all of the above. Support is in providing the family the opportunity to review those thoughts, and discussing the feelings that are associated with them. For the family member who reacts to the anniversary of the date the body was found as a trigger to re-experience the traumatic events suffered by their loved one, allowing them to talk these images through is supportive. Ending this by asking the question 'where is she now?' pulls them out of the trauma, and into the current day. It helps them to accept that the individual is no longer experiencing the pain or suffering of their death, and is in his/her afterlife – whatever the family member perceives after-life to be. If the family member continues to stay in the traumatic images,

professional intervention is necessary.

A final support to changing the emotional structure of the family is the disposition of their loved one's personal effects; clothing, jewelry, etc. While the person was missing, these items became symbols of the hope for their return and supported the dual sense of future. Now these same items become symbols of something else. To some families these personal effects now represent unfulfilled hope, failure and death. For other families the individual's effects become symbols of their life. In either case, what these items symbolized facilitates a process of change for the family.

The decision to keep or dispense with the belongings of the deceased family member may follow traditional customs as recognized by an elder. If the family does not follow the traditional guidelines, the decision of what happens to the belongings should be left up to the next of kin: the spouse, or the parents of the murdered child. As long as keeping the items is not interfering with the

family's ability to live life, they can be kept for as long as they serve the purpose of supporting the grieving process. They are no longer clothes, jewelry, or personal items, they are now symbols of the memories of the loved one, similar to the role that photographs and home videos play in grieving. As the family adjusts to their death, many of these items may be given away or discarded. However, a few are always kept as reminders of memories. At some point the family will very probably wish they had something tangible to which to attach their memories of their loved one.

### **REPLACE THE PAIN OF THE ABSENCE, UNCERTAINTY AND FEAR WITH GRIEF**

One of the accepted tasks of grieving is to feel through the pain of the grief. However, in the situation of a missing person, the family has been experiencing the pain of 'missing'. Now that pain must be shifted from the pain of missing to the pain of death/murder.

**The pain of the absence** – While their loved one was missing, the pain of absence was about the

present moment, now. With the possibility that the individual may return in the future, the absence was immediate, and the pain was about the immediate absence. When their loved one is found murdered, the absence becomes permanent, and the range of the pain now includes the long term future. Temporary coping mechanisms no longer apply and acceptance of the permanent absence is necessary.

Accepting the permanent absence involves changing from the dual sense of future to a single future that no longer, and will not again, include the loved one physically. However, thoughts of their loved one existing on a spiritual plane are encouraged to develop. Many traditional ceremonies may assist in this process. The thinking shifts from "if he/she has not returned by then" to not considering them in future events at all. The family which has been completely consumed with thoughts of their missing loved one, must now change to thinking about them in the context of the past; no more expectations, only memories. The hope that was once held for the return of their loved one

must now be shifted to other concerns of the future. Support for this family is in assisting them to identify other points of hope; these include hopes for the children in the family, hopes for the family itself, hopes for other family members, hopes for oneself, and even hopes for the murdered loved one in their after-life. A family member who loses their hope after the murder of their family member is at extremely high risk and should be closely monitored for new or increased self-destructive or excessive behaviours. Professional support should be utilized in this case.

**The pain of the uncertainty and fear** – With the discovery that their loved one has been murdered comes the end of the uncertainty about the future of the person and the end of the fear about the status of the loved one on a physical level. However, if a family member refuses to accept the death, and continues to hold a dual sense of future, immediate professional help is needed.

The family, so used to feeling fear and uncertainty, may try to



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maintain that feeling in another way – concern for their loved one’s spirit. The family may discuss concerns of needing to know that wherever the individual is (in death), and that he/she (his/her spirit) is all right. In an effort to deal with this type of uncertainty and fear, the family should consult their elders and healers, and utilize the appropriate traditional ceremonies. However, some may seek out spiritual practitioners from a variety of other spiritual paths (such as psychics and mediums). This is not necessarily a bad thing, though they may find that in their vulnerable state they are an easy target to be exploited by unscrupulous practitioners. In addition, families who seek out answers about their loved one’s after-life status through these alternatives are rarely satisfied with the answers they receive, and they keep on searching. This activity usually ends only when the family can find the answer about the status of the after-life of their loved one from within themselves, based on their own values and belief systems. Support for these family members includes being non-judgmental about where they

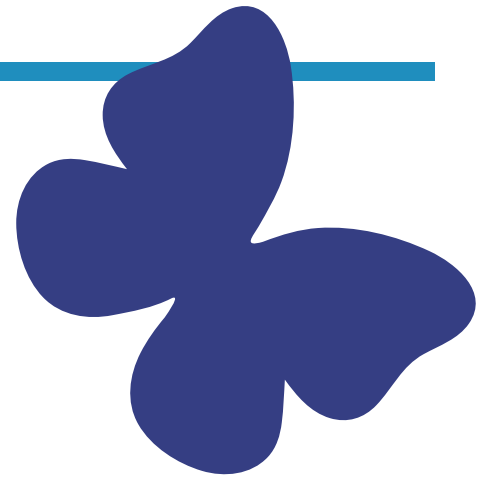
go to seek out answers (as long as they are not being exploited), and when they have received an answer from one of these sources, helping them to process it. This involves working with the answer received, and testing it against the family’s beliefs, their perspective of the individual, and how this answer honours the person, family and parent.

Previously we discussed supporting the family in transferring their hope from the individual to others. Often, fear is the opposite of hope, and it is easier for the family to maintain their fear than to find hope. These family members create disastrous scenarios, talk about the bad things that might happen, and may limit the family’s participation in the world to protect it from these possible evils. Overprotection is the product of uncontrolled fear. Support for this family member is to help them to recognize or label their fear statements. Once identified, then it is important for the family member to re-state the thought in a positive or hope-based way. An example would be the family member making the following statement: “They

are predicting heavy snow this afternoon, so you shouldn’t go anywhere today. You might have a terrible accident.” Supporting this family member would be in assisting them to recognize this as a fear-based statement and to create a new one such as: “They are predicting heavy snow this afternoon. While you’re out keep an eye on the weather. If it starts snowing heavily, find a safe place and call me to let me know where you are.”

### **REASSESS THE ROLE OF GUILT**

Similar to what we discussed in Chapter 1, when the loved one is found murdered the family may use guilt as a defense mechanism, or there may be a legitimate issue of guilt surrounding their loved one gone missing. Support comes from asking the family members what they could have done differently so that the result would have been different. If no reasonable change in their behaviour would have brought about a different result, their guilt is irrational and is a defense mechanism. This is healthy and normal, as it allows the individual to function without being overwhelmed by the feelings associated with the grief



of the murder immediately after the loved one is found deceased. Guilt is something that we all have experienced many times, and we know how to deal with it. However, over time the family members should talk less about their guilt and more about the feelings they are experiencing as a result of grief. In other words, they stop hiding behind the familiarity of guilt and start working through the pain of grief.

On the other hand, if a change in the family member's behaviour would have created a different result, and there is legitimate grief, they might now be assuming full responsibility not only for the loved one gone missing but for their murder as well. Support comes in acknowledging and validating the legitimate guilt and assisting the family member to separate out that for which they are responsible from all of the rest. (See Chapter 1 for details on this process.)

**Forgiveness** – Many sources in the outside world place an expectation on the family to forgive the perpetrator. Religious folk, friends and family, even

the mental health community make statements such as “you must forgive this person to heal”, or “good people forgive”. Forgiveness is not about healing or about being a good person; forgiveness is about trust. If person-A hurts person-B, person-A must acknowledge that they have hurt person-B, and person-B must trust that person-A is committed to not hurting them again; this allows person-B to forgive person-A. Based on this formula, when people place the expectation of forgiveness on the family of a murdered loved one, it is most often an unachievable expectation. The family members then feel they are ‘bad’ or ‘wrong’ when they are not able to forgive, and these feelings become enmeshed with the other feelings about the loved one and their murder.

The family can, however, come to a point of acceptance. That is, to be able to accept the perpetrator for what and who he or she is with no expectation. Do not expect them to feel the pain that the family feels as a result of their action. Do not expect the perpetrator to grasp or even

care about the consequences of their action. Do not expect them to be sorry or remorseful for their behaviour. When a family can accept these concepts, they can move past the perpetrator in their grief. One way is to ‘turn the perpetrator over’ to spirit, God, a higher power of some sort. It is the family's desire or need for the perpetrator to feel or acknowledge the pain that they have caused that keeps the family focus ‘stuck’ on the perpetrator. To support a family in this process, the person providing support should reinforce the concepts stated above. In addition, asking the family member the question “Who is in control of what you are feeling right now? You or the perpetrator?” when appropriate, helps the family to recognize how much they may still be attached to the perpetrator.

Conversely, in some cases the family may *want* to forgive the perpetrator. As long as this is the desire of the family, and not the result of an external expectation, then forgiveness should be supported. Forgiveness in this case is defined differently than developing trust in the

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perpetrator but comes from the family's trust in their belief system. Therefore, utilizing traditional prayer, ritual and/or activating the 'grace' of spirit, God or something larger than man serves as the vehicles to this forgiveness. Support comes in assisting the family to identify and verbalize their beliefs about forgiveness, and then assisting them to create the physical activity (ritual or ceremony) to manifest it.

In some cases the family may need to forgive the murdered loved one whose behaviour or life style may have led to their own murder. If this is the case, supporting the family is similar to the re-framing for guilt discussed in Chapter 1. Questions and discussions that help to remind the family that 1) their loved one's primary intention was self-centered and not to hurt the family, 2) their loved one's goal was not to suffer or be murdered when they made their choices, and 3) that given the total circumstances, the person behaved the best they knew how with the information they had at the time, all can help the family to forgive their loved one's behaviour.

Finally, the family members may need to forgive themselves. The process and support necessary for this is discussed in detail in Chapter 1. The goal of forgiving one's self is the same as in forgiving another discussed above; the family member must recognize that their own behaviour of self-blame is hurtful to themselves, and they must commit to not continuing to hurt themselves. These family members then must learn to trust themselves to keep that commitment, and to act differently in the future should a similar situation arise.

### **ACKNOWLEDGE THE PICTURE OF 'LOST' TIME WHILE THE LOVED ONE WAS MISSING**

One block to the family accepting their loved one's murder is the lack of information as to what happened to them during the time they were missing. During the search for their loved one the family may have been able to acquire pieces of information about this time. Forensic information may also be available about the actual death of the individual. However, the family may need to focus on filling in

the blanks in this information after being notified of their loved one's murder.

Gathering as much information as possible after a death, particularly if the death was the result of a trauma, is a common activity for the survivor. Collecting information and understanding what happened becomes a means of control over the situation. While this searching may sometimes approach obsession, overall it is a healthy indication that the family is working to accept the death. Family members who actively avoid information about the 'missing time' of their loved one are probably in denial of the death and are working hard to maintain that denial.

When the family has collected all of the information available to them, they must then fill in the gaps. As humans, it is very difficult for us to accept holes in a story. The family creates the threads that connect the facts. Ultimately, they must create the picture in their mind of the missing time. If the information suggests that their loved one was the victim of trauma, the



traumatic scenarios that family members created as discussed in Chapter 1 must now be reviewed, and reconsidered in terms of the gathered information. The family must also create and connect the information based on their knowledge of their loved one. Support in this process comes from encouraging these discussions. However, the person providing support must be sure that they are capable of fully participating in these discussions before starting. It can be counter-productive and even harmful to the family to feel safe to begin these discussions, and then have the support person withdraw because of their discomfort with the discussion. It can also be counter-productive and even harmful to the person providing support to put themselves in an emotionally difficult activity. If no one in the sphere of family or friends can support these discussions, the family should seek professional support.

In this process the family is often is making up facts to fit the information at hand. One of the fears experienced by family members is the possibility of making up the wrong facts;

that they are making up an incorrect accounting of what happened, and they are concerned that the facts they make up may dishonour or disrespect what their loved one actually experienced. Support in this case comes in assisting the family to understand that whatever story they create is temporary, until new information becomes available. The question to ask family members is "What story-line is acceptable to you for today?" They can, and very well may, change the story-line at will, until they find the one that is the most acceptable to them. This story-line will become permanent over time and become family history, as it becomes clear that more information will not be forthcoming.

Once a story-line for the missing time is accepted, it must be processed, just as it would if the family had witnessed the scenes first hand. If the pictures are traumatic, the family must process the trauma before they can grieve the murder of their loved one. Creating the story should have, to a large extent, assisted in this process. If the pictures created by the story are

not traumatic they will need to be reviewed repeatedly in the grieving process, discussed below.

### **RESOLVE THE LOVED ONE THAT WAS/IS/WOULD HAVE BEEN CONTRADICTION**

Grief is the process of adjusting to a loss. When a person dies, the family must grieve not only the memories of the deceased, but they must also grieve the expectations they had for their future with the deceased. The older the deceased individual, the more the grieving will focus on memories. The younger the deceased person, the more the grieving will be focused on expectations for their future. For a loved one that was missing, the family finds themselves vacillating between remembering them as they last saw them, seeing them as they would be today, and envisioning how they would grow and develop into the future.

Memories of the past are best processed when they can be verbally discussed. Support for the family when they are remembering their loved one before he/she went missing is

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provided by simply listening to their memories and stories. Those which carry the greatest emotional intensity will need to be told over and over. Therefore, the person providing support may hear these memories many times. Unfortunately, some family members often tire of hearing these stories, and become unavailable when others still need to review them. In addition, after about six months following the discovery of the loved one's murder, family and friends who were not closely associated with them become uncomfortable hearing the family's continuing pain, and actually pressure them to hide their grief. The family is supported by being reassured that their grief is necessary and important, and does not follow the time-table or expectations of others. Providing support means providing a place where the family can freely continue to tell their memories and stories.

### **Acknowledge developmental expectations of the loved one** -

Envisioning their loved one as they would be today is necessary so that the family members can create an image that they can accept, and then grieve (adjust

to its loss). Similarly, the image that the family creates of the deceased person as he/she would look in the future provides the family a symbol that they can use to adjust to the loss of their loved one's future. The person providing support will know that this is happening when they hear the family members making statements such as 'You look so much like your mother/sister, father/brother (the loved one)' or 'I'm sure my loved one would have looked very much like her grandmother/grandfather had he/she lived to be that old'.

Another way that family members might create these images of the deceased female is to compare her to her friends and family members of what would be her same age. The family may continue to stay in contact with the female's friends as they mature and grow, to foster these images. Once an image is formulated, the family can better adjust to the loss of the female's future; they can adjust to the loss of the developmental expectations of their loved one.

**Re-grief** - A family never finishes adjusting to the loss of their loved

one. This grief process continues to some degree throughout the family members' lives. As their loved one would have grown older there are specific events that would have occurred in their life. The developmental expectations discussed above serve as reminders that refresh the family's grief, or trigger a re-grieving process in the members. Re-grief is the process of adjusting to a loss from a new perspective, or a new developmental level. This period of grief usually does not last as long as the original grieving, and is not as intense. Developmental expectations such as the time when the loved one should be acquiring their driver's license, or graduating from high school, or getting married, or having children, anniversaries, having grand-children, or retiring are all times during which the family would be involved in the individual's life in a particular way. These are markers of the growth and development of the individual. When they are murdered, the family still reacts emotionally to these chronological times because their loved one is not present for them. Some family members

will have a more intense re-grief reaction than others. Support for these family members comes through educating them about re-grief and the developmental expectations that trigger it, as well as allowing them a safe place in which to discuss these expectations and the feelings associated with the grieving when these times arrive. Further, as these expectations are developmental and predetermined, the family can prepare themselves in advance for the re-grieving they will experience as the developmental events and times move closer. The person providing support can assist in the planning of these activities, rituals or ceremonies.

### **ESTABLISH A PERMANENT RELATIONSHIP WITH THE DECEASED LOVED ONE**

While the family will never finish grieving, there are characteristics of grief that can be made stable, and which lessen the intensity and prevalence of the pain of the loss. As presented earlier, one of these characteristics is believing that, wherever their loved one is after death, they is all right. The family needs to believe that their loved one is

not in pain or suffering in their current state. In addition, family members need to create mental pictures for themselves of where the loved one is; heaven, universe, bardo, nature. Even if the family does not hold any religious, traditional or spiritual beliefs of after-life, they need to have a sense of where the loved one exists. Perhaps the final resting place of the murdered loved one will serve in this way. Sometimes, this need is satisfied by occurrences in everyday life; the bird that has been visiting the window sill every day, the picture that keeps going crooked on the wall, lost things being found, flowers and plants suddenly blooming. Each of these can be interpreted as being the result of their loved one's presence. Another approach is for the family to do something that can represent their loved one's presence such as leaving a light on, burning a candle, planting a tree or a garden. Having a physical thing or place often serves as a symbol of their loved one's presence and status after death.

Finding their loved one's body and providing for its final resting

place also assists the family in establishing a permanent relationship. The act of laying the remains to rest is the final physical act of caring and loving that can be offered to the murdered individual. Through this activity the family can show them that they were always loved and never forgotten throughout their ordeal. Knowing that their loved one has been laid to rest with love and compassion helps the family to accept that they are now alright, and helps to balance the idea of the brutality of their murder. When a family is not able to make this final act of caring, a great void is left unfilled. There are very few substitutes for filling this void. Some families may continue futilely searching for their loved one's remains, or attempt to help others in similar situations as a means by which to fill this need, with varying degrees of success. The only support that can be offered in this situation is to provide the family member's opportunities to talk about their need to find their loved one's remains. This subject will need to be discussed for as long as the body remains missing – no matter how many days, weeks, months, years or decades.

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In addition to how their loved one is, and where they are, often the family needs to establish what their loved one is doing in their current state. Family members may come to believe that their loved one is with other deceased relatives. Or, they may believe that their loved one is looking out for family and friends. The activity in which the family believes their loved one is participating is usually based on some characteristic, talent or desire of the loved one.

How their loved one is, where they are and what they are doing are all subjective. There is no proof that any of these characteristics exist. Therefore, a family member that utilizes these approaches to cope with the murder of their loved one is in full control of these characteristics. They become the permanent characteristics of their loved one in the process of grief. The family finds that they can relate to and count on these characteristics of the deceased person, just as they related to and counted on their personality and characteristics while they were alive. Support for this family is in validating their need for

these beliefs. Support should be non-judgmental and accepting, even if the person providing the support does not have the same beliefs. Traditional rituals or ceremonies which support this process should be utilized.

### EFFECTIVE SUPPORT FOR TRAUMA

Earlier in this chapter we discussed the traumatic response, and that many of the symptoms are created by the elevation of the stress hormone cortisol in the body. It was presented that the reduction of cortisol immediately reduces the intensity of the symptoms. Suggestions of activities that result in the reduction of cortisol were provided.

These activities are also effective coping mechanisms. **Coping** is what one must do when they cannot change a situation but must learned to live with it and incorporate it into their life in a healthy way. Coping is not fixing the situation, or even taking away the pain of a situation such as the murder of a loved one, it simply helps us to live with the situation. Coping mechanisms are the activities we do to help

us live with the situation. There are unhealthy coping mechanism that are self-destructive such as addiction, gambling, and high risk behaviours. But, for the person providing support, having knowledge of positive, healthy coping mechanisms is essential. Healthy coping mechanisms also help to reduce cortisol levels.

**Traditional activities** should be considered as the first line of coping mechanisms for indigenous families. Returning to and reconnection with nature to feel grounded, establishing a supportive relationship with an elder or shaman/healer for guidance, doings sweats and sweat lodges to purify, and using traditional prayer to help foster hope and reduce fear and anger are some examples. Drumming, chanting, dancing, smudging all release endorphins and bring down cortisol. Also understanding the use of storytelling as a way of working through traumatic pictures and discussing feelings is very beneficial. This is only a partial list of traditional coping mechanisms. There are many many other rituals, ceremonies and activities that are of benefit

for supporting a family of a murdered indigenous person.

**Stress management** techniques are helpful for a person or family that is already experiencing stress. These techniques help to release endorphins and reduce cortisol levels. Some of these include; going for a 10 minute walk (fast enough to raise the heart rate and just break a sweat), deep breathing (inhaling longer than exhaling to energize, exhaling longer than inhaling to calm down), being around someone who is nurturing and caring, and taking a time-off from electronics (cell phone, ipads and computers). Visualizing some activity or place that is relaxing or joyful is helpful (traumatic pictures in the mind causes the body to have a traumatic response, visualizing positive images causes the body to relax). Other stress reducing activities are listening to music (with positive lyrics), watching a funny viral video, social interaction (face to face), and progressive muscle relaxation (tightening and releasing muscle all over one's body to ultimately relax the body). Participating in any craft or hobby that uses both

hands or use of both sides of the body reduces stress. Finally, yoga is extremely useful in managing stress as it utilizes several of the activities mentioned above. For the person providing support it is important to remember that one never hears about 'curing stress', one hears about 'managing stress'. Stress happens. The degree to which stress will affect us is directly related to the number of stress management skills we know and employ.

**Resiliency** is living a life style that keeps stress from developing. A resilient lifestyle is built using both the traditional and stress management skills on an on-going basis before stress occurs. The foundation of a resilient lifestyle is *self-knowledge and insight*. Knowing oneself well enough to know the situations, people, and events that result in stress, allows one to prepare for these situations in advance. One way of doing this is by visualizing the up-coming encounter or event and rehearsing mentally the most healthy, appropriate way to respond to it. Repeating this mental rehearsal until it is comfortable will allow the person to naturally

do what they have mentally rehearsed when the situation arises. *Having a sense of hope* is also an element of resilience. Entering into a challenging situation without believing in the possibility of success or positive outcome is setting oneself up to fail. In addition, experiencing hope physically shuts down the part of the brain responsible for fear and anger. The more hopeful, the more difficult it is to feel afraid or angry. Good, strong, *positive relationships* further foster resilience. Friends who are also striving to be resilient are an excellent support. People who only see the negative in life and tend to ruminate in it will quickly destroy others' efforts to be resilient. Finally, having a *personal perspective and sense of meaning* is a fundamental part of resilience. Knowing that one is in the right place in the universe doing what they are meant to do at this point in life helps to build a sense of safety and self-confidence necessary to be resilient.

**Family resilience** can also be developed and supported. The resilient family is one in which every individual member is committed to the family, and will



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put the family first in times of difficulty and challenge such as a missing family member. Another factor of family resilience is the ability of family members to interact positively with each other in crisis, even if they don't all like each other. A family that deals with each situation as it comes rather than by living by strict rules is more resilient. A resilient family is one where all members communicate directly with each other rather than through one family member. Research shows that a family with a sense of spirituality, a relationship with something larger than man (not necessarily religious) is resilient. A resilient family is one in which the members stay connected with each other even if they are a great distance apart, and interact

directly with each other when they are physically together. Finally, a resilient family is one that can work well together toward a common goal, even if they don't all necessarily like each other. The person providing support for this family may help them to focus on any one of these elements to help the family as a whole to be more resilient.

In this chapter we have discussed how factors of the death influence the family's grief response, and how the family must shift from a dual sense of future to a future without the physical presence of their loved one. We looked at how the family may continue to hold onto the feeling of fear rather than accept the pain of grief, and

the role of hope in that process. The point was made that the need to forgive the perpetrator is valid only if it is the desire of the family member, but is not valid if it is the expectation of others. The importance of supporting the family as they create a picture of how their loved one would have looked in the future was presented, as well as the importance of preparing the family for the times and triggers of re-grief. We saw how the family may need to create a relationship with the loved one wherever they may be in death. The concept of a traumatic response was presented, listing the symptoms and providing several examples of how traditional coping mechanism, stress management techniques and building resiliency can help the family to function in the wake of the murder. In each of these processes it is important for the person providing the support to do so in a non-judgmental way, regardless of their personal beliefs. The person providing support must also be conscious of taking care of themselves. If no one is available to the family who can provide support without judgment, professional support should be acquired.

# Conclusion

WE BEGAN THIS MANUAL STATING THAT THERE HAS BEEN NO MODEL OR GUIDANCE AVAILABLE TO PROVIDE SUPPORT TO THE FAMILY OF A MISSING AND OR MURDERED INDIGENOUS WOMAN OR GIRL OR OTHER MISSING PERSON. WE ALSO STATED THAT THE EXISTING MODELS OF GRIEF AND TRAUMA DO NOT TAKE INTO CONSIDERATION THAT THE GRIEF AND TRAUMA OF A MISSING PERSON CONTINUES TO DEVELOP AND EVOLVE AS LONG AS THAT PERSON IS MISSING. THE GOAL OF THIS MANUAL HAS BEEN TO SHOW HOW TO SUPPORT SUCH A FAMILY WHEN THEIR LOVED

ONE IS MISSING, WHEN THEY ARE LOCATED AND RETURNED, LOCATED AND NOT RETURNED AND WHEN THEY ARE LOCATED MURDERED. THE SUPPORT FOR EACH OF THESE SITUATIONS IS DIFFERENT.

IN ADDITION, IT IS THE POSITION OF THIS MANUAL THAT ALL FORMS OF SUPPORT COME FROM TRADITIONAL VALUES, RITUALS, AND COPING MECHANISMS. THE NON-TRADITIONAL INFORMATION PRESENTED HERE IS TO VALIDATE THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE TRADITIONAL WAYS.

MAY THIS MANUAL HELP TO GUIDE THOSE PROVIDING SUPPORT TO FAMILIES OF MISSING AND MURDERED INDIGENOUS WOMEN AND GIRLS AND OTHER MISSING PERSONS AND THAT THEY MAY BETTER COPE WITH AND MOVE FORWARD FROM THEIR TRAGEDY IN A HEALTHY WAY.

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Beside you through grief's journey