



CANADIAN MENTAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION
discovery college
KELOWNA

NAVIGATING GRIEF AND LOSS

Participant Workbook



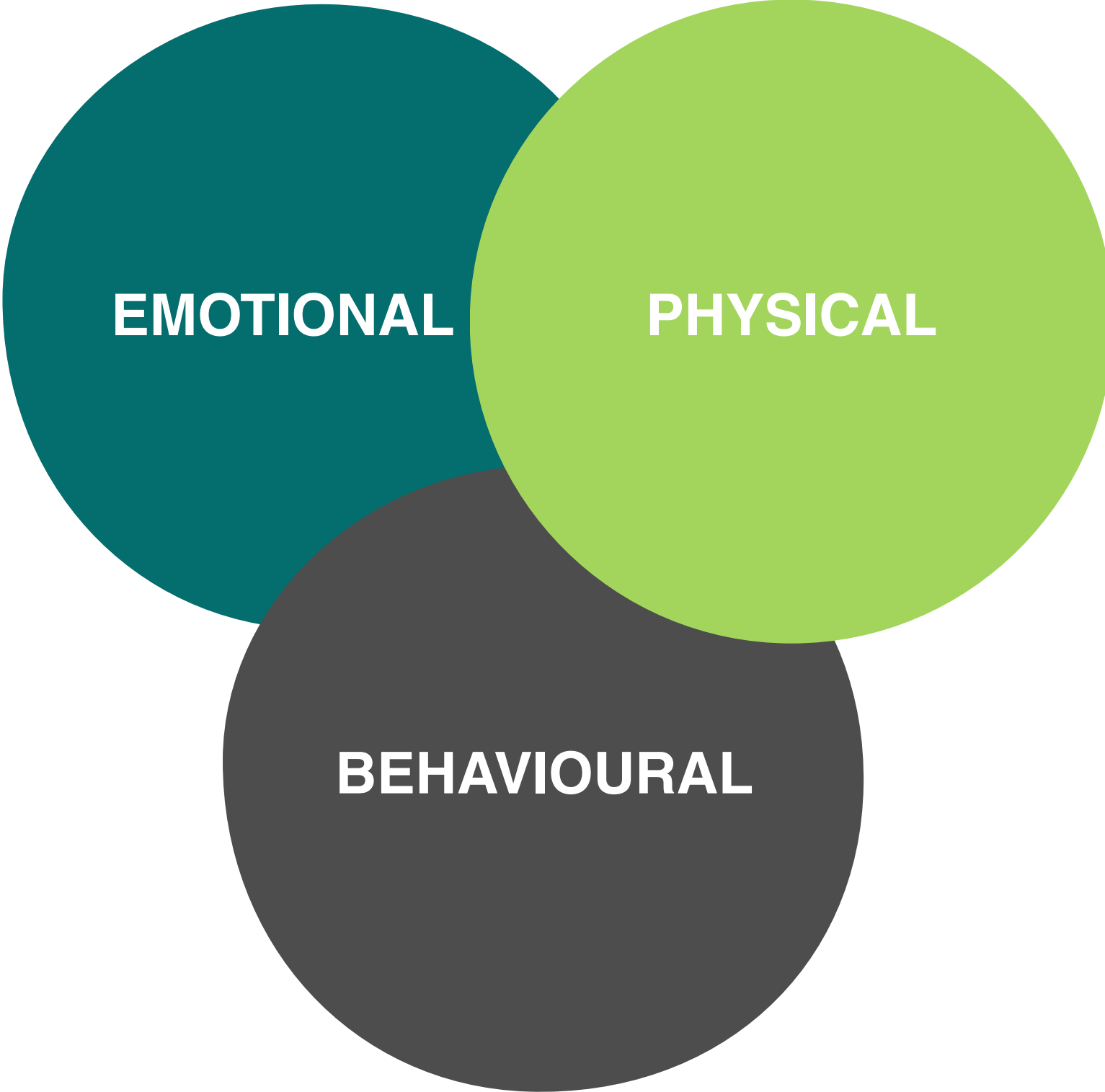
OBJECTIVES

This resource pack is designed to equip firefighters with the awareness and tools to recognize, understand, and support themselves and others through grief and loss—on and off the job.

- Identify emotional, behavioral, and physical indicators of grief in yourself or your crew.
- Learn how to initiate meaningful conversations, offer support without judgment, and avoid common communication pitfalls.
- Discover small, consistent actions that make a big difference, from checking in to offering hands-on help.
- Overview of the five stages of grief and what healthy processing may look like over time.
- Explore resources for additional support.



SIGNS SOMEONE MAY BE STRUGGLING WITH GRIEF

A Venn diagram consisting of three overlapping circles. The top-left circle is teal and labeled 'EMOTIONAL'. The top-right circle is light green and labeled 'PHYSICAL'. The bottom circle is dark grey and labeled 'BEHAVIOURAL'. The circles overlap in the center and at the intersections of two circles.

EMOTIONAL

PHYSICAL

BEHAVIOURAL

SIGNS SOMEONE MAY BE STRUGGLING WITH GRIEF

EMOTIONAL

- **Intense sorrow and pain:** experiencing overwhelming sadness, despair and a deep sense of loss
- **Difficulty accepting the death:** struggling to believe the loss has occurred or finding it hard to come to terms with the reality of the situation
- **Emotional numbness or detachment:** feeling disconnected or unable to experience emotions, even in the face of a significant loss
- **Intense and persistent longing or pining:** experiencing a strong and continuous yearning for the deceased
- **Anger, resentment or bitterness:** feeling angry towards the deceased and the circumstances of the death or others involved
- **Guilt:** feeling responsible for the death or struggling with feelings of regret or remorse
- **Anxiety or fear:** experiencing heightened anxiety, worry or fear, particularly about the future or their own safety
- **Feeling that life is meaningless:** losing a sense of purpose or direction in life
- **Identity disruption:** feeling like a part of oneself has died or that the deceased's absence has changed who they are



SIGNS SOMEONE MAY BE STRUGGLING WITH GRIEF

PHYSICAL

- **Fatigue and exhaustion**
 - Feeling physically drained and tired, even after getting enough sleep
- **Weakened immune system**
 - Becoming more susceptible to illness due to stress and emotional strain
- **Stomach aches, headaches, or body aches**
 - Experiencing physical discomfort or pain
- **Changes in weight**
 - Experiencing weight loss or gain due to changes in appetite or activity levels



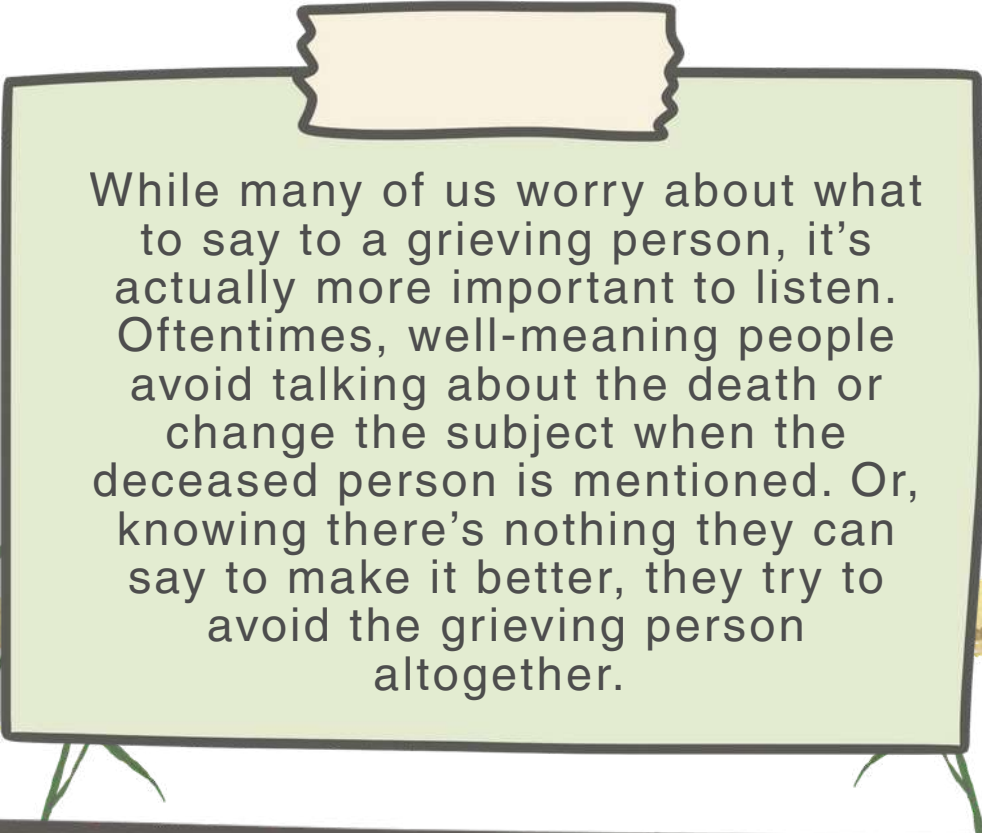
SIGNS SOMEONE MAY BE STRUGGLING WITH GRIEF

BEHAVIOURAL

- **Changes in sleep patterns:** experiencing insomnia, nightmares, or excessive sleeping
- **Changes in appetite:** losing interest in food or overeating as a coping mechanism
- **Difficulty concentrating or making decisions:** struggling to focus, remember things or make even simple decisions
- **Social withdrawal:** avoiding social activities, relationships, or spending time with others
- **Neglecting personal hygiene or self-care:** not taking care of oneself, such as showering, eating or dressing
- **Irritability or agitation:** becoming easily frustrated, angry or agitated
- **Obsessive thoughts or behaviours:** focusing excessively on the deceased or the circumstances of the death
- **Avoidance of reminders of the deceased:** actively avoiding places, objects or activities that remind them of the loss
- **Difficulty remembering or keeping track of responsibilities:** struggling to manage daily tasks or obligations



HOW TO SUPPORT SOMEONE WHO IS GRIEVING



While many of us worry about what to say to a grieving person, it's actually more important to listen. Oftentimes, well-meaning people avoid talking about the death or change the subject when the deceased person is mentioned. Or, knowing there's nothing they can say to make it better, they try to avoid the grieving person altogether.

The bereaved need to feel that their loss is acknowledged, it's not too terrible to talk about, and their loved one won't be forgotten. One day they may want to cry on your shoulder, on another day they may want to vent, or sit in silence, or share memories. By being present and listening compassionately, you can take your cues from the grieving person. Simply being there and listening to them can be a huge source of comfort and healing.

HOW TO TALK - AND LISTEN - TO SOMEONE WHO IS GRIEVING

While you should never try to force someone to open up, it's important to let your grieving friend or loved one know that you're there to listen if they want to talk about their loss. Talk candidly about the person who died and don't steer away from the subject if the deceased's name comes up. And when it seems appropriate, ask sensitive questions that invite the grieving person to openly express their feelings. By simply asking, "Do you feel like talking?" you're letting your loved one know that you're available to listen.

Acknowledge the situation. For example, you could say something as simple as: "I heard that your father died." By using the word "died" you'll show that you're more open to talk about how the grieving person really feels.

Express your concern. For example: "I'm sorry to hear that this happened to you." Let the bereaved talk about how their loved one died. People who are grieving may need to tell the story over and over again, sometimes in minute detail. Be patient. Repeating the story is a way of processing and accepting the death. With each retelling, the pain lessens. By listening patiently and compassionately, you're helping your loved one heal.

Ask how your loved one feels. The emotions of grief can change rapidly so don't assume you know how the bereaved person feels at any given time. If you've gone through a similar loss, share your own experience if you think it would help. Remember, though, that grief is an intensely individual experience. No two people experience it exactly the same way, so don't claim to "know" what the person is feeling or compare your grief to theirs. Again, put the emphasis on listening instead, and ask your loved one to tell you how they're feeling.

HOW TO TALK - AND LISTEN - TO SOMEONE WHO IS GRIEVING

Accept your loved one's feelings. Let the grieving person know that it's okay to cry in front of you, to get angry, or to break down. Don't try to reason with them over how they should or shouldn't feel. Grief is a highly emotional experience, so the bereaved need to feel free to express their feelings—no matter how irrational—without fear of judgment, argument, or criticism.

Be genuine in your communication. Don't try to minimize their loss, provide simplistic solutions, or offer unsolicited advice. It's far better to just listen to your loved one or simply admit: "I'm not sure what to say, but I want you to know I care."

Be willing to sit in silence. Don't press if the grieving person doesn't feel like talking. Often, comfort for them comes from simply being in your company. If you can't think of something to say, just offer eye contact, a squeeze of the hand, or a reassuring hug.

Offer your support. Ask what you can do for the grieving person. Offer to help with a specific task, such as helping with funeral arrangements, or just be there to hang out with or as a shoulder to cry on.

TIP: Do Something while you talk. It could be going for a walk or cooking food. The key here is to be open to engagement. Perhaps you like playing board games. Talking "shoulder to shoulder" can be a lot easier than face to face. This is especially true with teenagers and men.



WHAT TO AVOID SAYING TO SOMEONE WHO IS GRIEVING

“It’s part of God’s plan.” This platitude can anger people. Often, they’ll respond with, “What plan? Nobody told me about any plan.”

“Look at what you have to be thankful for.” They know they have things to be thankful for, but right now they are not important.

“He’s in a better place now.” The bereaved may or may not believe this. Keep your beliefs to yourself unless asked.

“This is behind you now; it’s time to get on with your life.” Sometimes the bereaved are resistant to getting on with because they feel this means “forgetting” their loved one. Besides, moving on is much easier said than done. Grief has a mind of its own and works at its own pace.

Statements that begin with “You should” or “You will.” These statements are too directive. Instead you could begin your comments with: “Have you thought about...” or “You might try...”



OFFER PRACTICAL ASSISTANCE

It is difficult for many grieving people to ask for help. They might fear being a burden to others, or simply be too depressed to reach out. A grieving person may not have the energy or motivation to call you when they need something. Instead of saying, "Let me know if there's anything I can do," make it easier for them by making specific suggestions. You could say, "I'm going to the market this afternoon. What can I bring you from there?" or "I've made beef stew for dinner. When can I come by and bring you some?"

Try to be consistent in your offers of assistance. The grieving person will know that you'll be there for as long as it takes and can look forward to your attentiveness without having to make the additional effort of asking again and again.

There are many practical ways you can help a grieving person. You can offer to:

- Shop for groceries or run errands
- Drop off food
- Help with funeral arrangements
- Offer to stay in the person's home to take phone calls and receive guests
- Help with insurance forms or bills
- Take care of housework (cleaning, laundry, etc.)
- Watch their children or pick them up from school
- Drive the person wherever they need to go
- Look after the person's pets
- Go with them to a support group meeting
- Go for a walk with them
- Take them to lunch or a movie
- Share an activity (sport, game, puzzle, art project etc.)

STAGES OF GRIEF

Although everyone copes with loss in different ways, there are five commonly defined stages of grief. The stages were first described by Dr. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross in her book *On Death and Dying*. They help provide a framework for the complex thoughts, behaviors, and emotions that are often experienced with the loss of a loved one.

While these stages should not be thought of as resolute — not everyone experiences these stages in the same way or in the same order, if at all — understanding them can help you make sense of the emotions you may be feeling.

DENIAL

Denial refers to the period of grieving during which a person refuses to accept the reality of a situation. Denial is different than not understanding. It is a defense mechanism that helps us protect ourselves from the shock of the upsetting hardship. A period of denial can be normal and even helpful during the grieving process, as we work to process a difficult situation. Examples of denial include:

- refusing to accept or acknowledge the death
- refusing or avoiding the topic in conversation
- stating the loss is not true, or that the source of the news is unreliable.

ANGER

Once a person comes to understand the information they received, and accepts the reality of a death, they often experience anger. Anger can be a natural response directed toward oneself, family members, doctors, God, or even the deceased. Anger is a normal part of the grieving process, though it may seem hurtful or offensive to loved ones. Often, anger is just a manifestation of grief, and can present itself in various ways. For example:

- blaming a medical doctor for not preventing an illness
- blaming family members for a lack of care or support
- feeling anger toward God or a higher spiritual power
- feeling angry with oneself or blaming oneself for the death
- experiencing a short temper or loss of patience.

STAGES OF GRIEF CONT'D

BARGAINING

When we experience grief, we often feel hopeless and overwhelmed. It is common to be overcome by statements of "what if" and "if only," as we experience a loss of control over what is happening. During the bargaining stage of grief, a person attempts to negotiate or make compromises. We try to make agreements with ourselves, or a deal with a higher power, in exchange for feeling less sad or having a different outcome. Bargaining is often irrational. Examples of bargaining include:

- "If only I had brought her to the doctor sooner, this would have been cured."
- "If only I had been around more, I would have noticed something was wrong."
- "God, if you bring him back, I promise I will never lie again."

DEPRESSION

Depression is a feeling of sadness and hopelessness that often results with the loss of a loved one. While the earlier stages of grief help to protect us from the emotional pain experienced with loss, often these feelings are inevitable.

Symptoms of depression include:

- feelings of sadness
- loss of interest in activities you normally enjoy
- changes in sleep
- significant changes in weight
- lack of energy
- feeling agitated or restless
- feeling worthless or guilty
- decreased concentration.

Feelings of depression are a natural reaction to grief. Following the loss of a loved one, acute grief can impact your functioning for a limited time.

Bereavement can lead to prolonged grief disorder if these feelings persist and continue to cause significant impairment and distress in your life for more than a year. Prolonged grief disorder is a diagnosable medical condition and can become disabling if not managed appropriately.

ACCEPTANCE

Considered the fifth and last of Kübler-Ross's stages, acceptance refers to the period of grief when we finally come to terms with accepting the reality of our loss. When we have reached this stage of acceptance, we no longer deny or struggle against our grief. During this time, we work to focus our energy on celebrating the life of our loved one, cherish the memories that were shared, and make plans for moving forward.

COMMUNITY RESOURCES

CENTRAL OKANAGAN HOSPICE ASSOCIATION (COHA)

The bereavement program offers a diversity of support to help anyone who is grieving the loss of a loved one. All of our programs are offered in a safe and respectful space to share, listen and receive compassionate support from others. See their website for articles, resources, podcasts and more.

Website: <https://hospicecoha.org>
Address: [200-1890 Cooper Rd, Kelowna](#)

Upcoming Programs Spring & Summer 2025:

- Bereaved parent grief group
- Spousal loss grief group
- Evening adult grief group
- Grief and yoga

Contact Andi Harvey, Bereavement Services Coordinator (250) 763-5511 for more information and to register.

LAKE COUNTRY HEALTH

Lake Country Health offers a variety of events, workshops and support groups. See their upcoming events page on their website for upcoming grief support groups and other activities.

Website: <https://www.lakecountryhealth.ca>
Phone: (778) 215-5247
Email: office@lakecountryhealth.ca

GRIEF SHARE

GriefShare is a faith based small group study, meeting over a 13 week period designed for individuals after the loss of a loved one. Covering topics such as Self-Care, Grief & Your Household, Hope & Resilience, and much more. Meetings are hosted at various churches in Kelowna.

Phone: Joanne Bonk at (250) 860-7077
Email: griefcare@springfieldfuneralhome.com
Website: <https://www.griefshare.org>

SPRINGFIELD FUNERAL HOME

Springfield Funeral Home offers a library of articles and videos on grief as well as a list of local community resources providing grief support.

Address: 2020 Springfield Rd, Kelowna, BC
Phone: (250) 860-7077
Email: contact@springfieldfuneralhome.com
Website: <https://www.springfieldfuneralhome.com/grief/>



COMMUNITY RESOURCES

MOMS STOP THE HARM – HEALING HEARTS GRIEF SUPPORT GROUPS

Moms Stop The Harm (MSTH) is a network of Canadian families whose loved ones have died from drug related harm, or who are struggling with substance use. Healing Hearts is a free peer facilitated bereavement support group for individuals, families and friends who have lost loved ones to help them cope with the journey from grief to healing.

For inquiries and registration email:
KelownaHealingHearts@gmail.com

Website:
<https://www.momsstoptheharm.com/healing-hearts-groups>

COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS

The Compassionate Friends group meets monthly and offers support in the grief and trauma which follows the death of a child; no matter the age or cause. They understand that people cannot be hurried through grief and the pain cannot be just taken away. They will help grieving parents understand more about this life altering experience. This meeting is geared for adults and children are not encouraged to attend.

Monthly meetings are held on the 2nd Thursday of each month from 7-9 pm and although designed as drop in, it is encouraged that new people call Linda at (250) 807-2487 or send an email to kelowna@TCFCanada.net to let her know you will be attending.

Address: Meetings at First United Church – 721 Bernard Ave, Kelowna, BC V1Y 6P6
Phone: Linda at (250) 807-2487
Email: kelowna@TCFCanada.net
Website: <https://tcfcanada.net>

BC BEREAVEMENT HELPLINE (BCBH)

BCBH is a non-profit, free, and confidential service that connects the public to grief support services within the province of BC. Please call the BC Bereavement Helpline and speak with one of the volunteers for information on our bereavement support groups, agencies, and peer-based support.

Your call is free, confidential, and anonymous. BCBH will help you find the most appropriate support for your specific type of loss.

Helpline: (604) 738-9950, Monday - Friday 9am - 5pm
Toll free: 1-877-779-2223
Email: contact@bcbh.ca

