

Someone You Love Drove While Impaired

When your loved one is the impaired driver



madd 

**Saving Lives, Supporting Victims
Sauver des vies. Aider les victimes.**



MADD Canada's Mission is to
stop impaired driving and to support victims of this violent crime.

This brochure has been designed to assist families dealing with the aftermath of an alcohol or drug-related crash when their loved one was the impaired driver. It is our hope that this booklet will be of value to you and comfort you during this difficult time.

Please don't hesitate to call us for information or support.

1-800-665-6233

Please see the last page for a list of additional MADD Canada resources and services for victims/survivors of impaired driving.

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Why Should I Read This?

If you are reading this brochure, you are like thousands of people across the country who love someone who drove while impaired. Although you may not have been physically harmed by this decision, your life has been uniquely impacted. The purpose of the following information is to provide you with an overview of some of the issues you may be experiencing. It may feel like life will not get better. We hope this information will help you understand that you are not alone on this journey, and that with time you can find meaning and joy in your life once again.

This booklet should be read with another MADD Canada publication, *Understanding the Consequences of a Loved One's Impaired Driving*, which includes information about the health risks of alcohol and drugs and a more detailed examination of the legal and financial consequences of driving while impaired.

How Should I Use This Information?

If you are reading this, someone you love may have been stopped by police and had his/her licence suspended or been charged with a criminal offence. They may have hurt or killed someone. They may have been injured and you are caring for them. They may have been killed in the crash and you are trying to learn to live without them. Or you may have been in the vehicle with them and are dealing with your own injuries. You may be worried about your finances and facing legal bills that you cannot afford to pay. Whatever happened, you are not responsible for their choices but your life may still be dramatically different as a result. But you are not alone – MADD Canada can help.

This booklet focuses on the unique impact that a loved one's decision to drive while impaired can have on a family. MADD Canada recognizes that there are different challenges that families may be facing after their loved one drove while impaired. MADD Canada defines a victim/survivor as anyone who is impacted by an impaired driving crash. Even if you were not hurt personally, you may be suffering because of the decisions of your loved one. In our eyes, you are worthy of support and assistance if you need it.

MADD Canada has several information booklets on grief, loss, living with injury, dealing with the holidays, etc. We encourage you to read these booklets if they apply to your situation. More information on these resources can be found at the end of this booklet.

The crash may have happened very recently or some time may have passed. In light of this, there will be some information that will not be relevant to you, at least at a given point in time, or may be difficult for you to think about. Thus, we recommend that you read this material when you feel a need to understand your experience, and/or when the consideration of such information feels timely to you. Once you have read what you want, keep the booklet handy, and read it again at another time. Each time you read this, you may get a new insight, or relate to something that you did not relate to before.



Introduction

Impaired driving has a tremendous impact and cost on families, victims and society. It remains Canada's leading criminal cause of death, and one of the country's leading criminal causes of injury. Every day, an average of four people are killed in impaired related crashes and hundreds more are injured. Impaired driving costs society millions of dollars every year in health care costs and the justice system, not to mention the human costs.

Individuals who drink or use drugs and drive endanger themselves, their passengers, other drivers, pedestrians and bicycle riders. Impaired drivers are also a risk on waterways and snowmobile trails. Their conduct has significant social, legal and financial consequences. Coping with a partner, parent or child who drives impaired is not easy, but thousands of Canadian families are forced to deal with it every year. Despite how they may feel or how others might feel about them, families are not responsible for their loved one's decision to drive while impaired.

The Legal and Financial Costs

Most Canadians do not have any experience with the criminal justice system and do not know what to expect. It can be a long and confusing process that is difficult to understand. Sometimes it feels like lawyers are speaking a different language. Your loved one's actions may have an impact on you financially. You may worry about how you will pay the bills or the mortgage. It may cost over thousands of dollars in insurance and legal fees, and more if someone was injured or killed. You may be worried about being sued civilly by the victims/survivors or his/her family.

You may be torn – knowing your loved one should take responsibility for what he/she has done but you also want to protect them from harm. If there is a criminal case, you may be called as a witness (i.e. you knew your loved one was drinking before the crash).

If your loved one was one pulled over by police for suspected impaired driving, there may be a variety of consequences. If there was no crash and no one was hurt, police can still lay Criminal Code charges or they may decide to proceed with various provincial and territorial sanctions, including: lengthy licence suspensions; mandatory education, assessment and treatment orders; and mandatory alcohol ignition interlock orders (much of this may depend on what province you live in). Your vehicle may be impounded and his/her licence may be suspended.

If criminal charges are laid, he/she will need a criminal lawyer which can be very expensive and cost your family thousands of dollars. There are a variety of potential sentences if he/she is found guilty that can range from fines and probation to prison time. Penalties can increase with multiple convictions and will definitely be more severe if there is a crash and someone was injured or killed. Remember that the lawyer represents the accused, not you (even if you are paying the bill), so you may not be able to get all the information you feel you are entitled to.

If someone died or was seriously injured because your loved one drove impaired, he/she is likely going to prison. If you decide to continue to support him/her, then you will have to find out about how to visit your loved one in prison, the rules/hours for visiting, etc. This can be another confusing and challenging bureaucracy to figure out. You may have to travel to visit him/her depending on what prison they are sentenced to. This may be very stressful for you so be sure to take care of yourself. You may be worried about their safety and mental health if they are sent to prison. He/she may be released before the end of their sentence and have to live in a halfway house and abide by certain conditions, like not to drink or communicate with certain people and seek treatment. If they violate these conditions, they can be returned to prison.

After an impaired driving conviction, insurance rates are likely to rise steeply and coverage may be affected. Impaired drivers may be sued for damages they have caused.

There may be consequences for child custody and access decisions which are based on the best interests of the child. A parent's misuse of alcohol or other drugs is a factor that courts consider in granting custody of a child or visitation rights. Your loved one may not be able to travel outside Canada if they have a criminal conviction. They may have difficulty finding a job and have to wait several years before they can apply for a record suspension (pardon) which can cost hundreds of dollars.

For a more comprehensive explanation of these issues, please consult our booklet, *Understanding the Consequences of a Loved One's Impaired Driving*.

If Your Loved One Was Killed

If your loved one was killed in an impaired driving crash that they caused, your emotions may be overwhelming and confusing. You may be overwhelmed with sadness that they are no longer in your life one moment and then filled with anger at them the next. You may feel like you are going crazy. Not only are you dealing with the grief of losing your loved one, you are dealing with the guilt and anger because your loved one caused the crash.

Grief is a natural, human reaction to separation from those we love. Be assured that there is a wide range of thoughts, feelings, and behaviours that are considered to be *normal reactions to an abnormal situation* such as the one you have experienced - you are not going crazy. Despite what we have all heard, there are no “stages” of mourning that everyone goes through. Grief is one of the most personal experiences you will encounter and can be impacted by numerous factors, including your personality, the nature of the relationship with the deceased, the impact of other loss experiences you may have had, the circumstances of the death, etc.

Grief is not something that happens to you. You have many choices in the process of coping with, and grieving, this loss. This loss will challenge your assumptions about the world and you will have to incorporate this loss into your perspective in a way that allows you to perceive the world in balanced or reasonable terms again. You may also be questioning your loved one, the decisions they made and the person you knew and loved. Their death feels so senseless.

The sudden and violent nature of your loved one’s death may complicate your grief; it may be so overpowering that your entire world will be turned upside down. There was no chance for you to anticipate this traumatic loss. Because there was no chance to say goodbye, you may find yourself consumed with your most recent interactions with them, both good and bad, and possibly troubled by your memories about these last encounters.

People also describe a sense of “unfinished business” in a larger way, regretting things that were, or were not, said or done. The violent nature of your loved one’s death, and the possibility that their body was badly disfigured, also may be involved in thoughts and imagery that you find particularly difficult to ignore. If you were in the vehicle with them, you may have flashbacks or vivid memories of the scene that you play over and over again in your mind.

Your loved one's death was preventable and because they caused the crash, you may be very angry with your loved one. Anger is a normal way to protest against what has happened. You may also be angry with other people who you think should have done more to stop your loved one, including yourself. While it is important to understand that anger is a very common experience in grief, it is equally important to express these feelings in ways that are not harmful to you or the others in your life.

It is important you stay connected to other people. In addition to the support of those closest to you, you also may find that involvement with others who have gone through a similar experience, by participating in an organized support group, may provide you with a unique sense of companionship, and of being understood and accepted. Try to find ways to express your thoughts and feelings in whatever way you are comfortable with. Give yourself permission to grieve, but also to take a break from these intense and painful times. There may be times when you find yourself laughing or thinking about something else. You should not feel guilty if you turn your attention away from your grief for a while.



If Your Loved One Was Injured

Impaired driving injures tens of thousands of people every year. Injuries range from scrapes and cuts to broken bones to catastrophic injuries that change a person's life forever. If your loved one was injured, you not only have to deal with the legal consequences of his/her actions, but their injuries and recovery.

If you are feeling angry, give yourself permission to feel angry! You have that right! It can be helpful to express how you feel. Suppressing your feelings can increase your frustration and impact your grief. You may have unanticipated outbursts and/or have symptoms of clinical depression. You may experience physical changes like gaining or losing weight, or getting sick.

If you do not have someone to talk to about how you are feeling, you may find release from writing your feelings down in a diary or journal. Some people benefit from attending support groups of persons who are also recovering from injury.

After the crash, you may have had to see your loved one in the hospital in pain and this can be traumatic. You may have experienced shock, anxiety, and terrible dread. They may not be fully healed or still struggling with their injuries. They may never fully recover. You may have to spend a lot of time helping your loved one recover and/or care for them during this time. They may not be able to work and you may have to take time off to help care for them which can add to the financial stress you are already feeling.

They may be frustrated with their condition, especially if their recovery is slow. You may be equally upset because they caused this. It is important for both of you that you stay healthy.

Seeing the one you love suffer so much can break your heart. Ongoing physical care of the victim/survivor coupled with worries about what the future holds can be both physically and mentally exhausting. Get regular medical check-ups, and spend some time each week with healthy people you love and who love you. Maintain your social relationships and be with your friends when you can. Don't be shy about asking them to help you with care of the victim/survivor.

If Someone Else Was Injured or Killed

If someone was injured or killed as a result of your loved one's impaired driving, your emotions may be more complicated. Your anger at your loved one and your own guilt may be more intense. The legal consequences for your loved one will also be more severe.

You likely feel empathy for the victim/survivor and their family. You worry about their wellbeing and you want to make their pain stop but you cannot even though you may feel partly responsible.

The victim/survivor or their family may say things publicly about your loved one. They may want him/her to go to prison for a long time. You may understand how they feel but you are also worried about your loved one and their words hurt you.

Other people may say things about you or your family, especially if the driver was your child. They may question the kind of family you are or the kind of person who would continue to support someone who killed or injured an innocent person in an impaired driving crash. All of these situations can add to your stress and impact how you cope with your day-to-day life.



I Feel So Guilty...

Your guilt may feel overwhelming at times, especially if your loved one hurt or killed someone or he/she was hurt or killed. You may not want to ask for help because you do not think you deserve it. You may not think help is available for you because you are related to the driver.

You will ask yourself a lot of “what if” questions. What if I had not let him drive? What if I had been home that day? What if I had been a better parent, spouse or sibling? If you knew your loved one was impaired before driving, you may ask yourself why you had not done more to stop him/her.

Expect to feel guilty because it is normal to ask ourselves these questions. But think rationally about the event and what your responsibility is. If there are components of the crash for which you may legitimately be responsible for, deal with that but be fair to yourself and be careful about taking full responsibility for the decisions of someone else.

The guilt you feel may be made worse because other people make you feel this way. Media coverage may have an impact on your family and your children. The media may say negative things about your loved one. Victims/survivors impacted by the incident may express strong feelings about him/her. You may feel some of this is unfair because you know the driver and while you do not condone what he/she did, you know that decision does not define him/her. You know there is a different side and know some of the good things he/she has done in the past. While he/she must be held accountable, they are still your friend, sibling, child or parent.



I Feel Like I Am Guilty By Association....

There is a negative stigma attached to impaired driving that unfortunately can also impact family members of the driver. Members of your community may ask questions about what kind of family the driver must come from to have done what he/she did. These comments and feelings will hurt you but they do not make you responsible for what happened. You may be embarrassed by your loved one's actions and you may feel shame about what he/she did. People may ask you how you can still support him/her. You may feel you are guilty by association.

Even if your loved one did not kill or injure anyone, you may still feel shame if you have to drive him/her everywhere because they lost their license. Or your children may have to explain why there is an interlock system in your car or why their Mom or Dad cannot drive everyone to practice.

There may be tension among family members in response to what has happened. Some may continue to support the driver and others may choose not to. They may isolate themselves from you as well.

I Feel So Angry....

You may feel very angry with your loved one. If you were injured, you may be dealing with injuries he/she caused. If someone else you loved was killed, you may blame that loss on your loved one. If your loved one hurt or killed someone you do not know, you may feel grief and sadness for them and their family. You may have to take time off work to care for your injured loved one.

You may find it very difficult to forgive, which may cause you more guilt. You may not be able to support them, especially if they do not take responsibility for what they have done and the harm they have caused. You should not feel obligated to forgive and you must focus on your own needs.

You may feel betrayed and in disbelief. This behaviour may not be consistent with the person you know; it may be out of character and you may have difficulty understanding why they made the decision they did. If this is something that they have done before, then it may be something they need professional help with. It may be something you warned them about.

If you were injured, you may have trouble accepting what has happened to you and the impact it has had on your life. It may be hard to recover physically or emotionally because you focus on the past and how this was so preventable.

I Can't Deal With This....

Yes you can!!!

You may be tempted to isolate yourself. You may not feel that you deserve services that may be available in your community or that you are not eligible for them because you are related to the offender. In MADD Canada's eyes, you are a victim and survivor who deserves support even if you do not see yourself that way.

These are all normal reactions. It can help to talk openly about your injuries and your feelings and seek help. If you are having trouble getting through the day, try to break it down into small timelines. For example, "I just need to get through to the next half hour, the next hour, until noon, etc."

Surround yourself with those that love and care about you. You may feel very alone. Choose people who understand what you are going through. Call a trusted family member, a close friend or a neighbour to be with you, on the phone or in person. Call your local MADD Chapter or the MADD Canada National Office. We're here to help.

Ask for help. Go easy on yourself. Recognize that you may not be able to do all the things right now that you used to do. Friends and family members want to help but don't know what they can do. Ask them to help with the groceries, walk the dog, pick the children up from school, make phone calls for you, or write thank you notes.

Go online for support materials. Many websites offer information on grief and bereavement. Some have online support groups. Check your local resources (i.e. 211) to see what community programs may be available for you.

Know that you will experience many different feelings. This is common and to be expected. You are not going "crazy". You are a normal person experiencing something abnormal.

Some signs that your grief may be straying off track include extreme avoidance or downplaying of the process of mourning (for example, quickly proceeding with all of your usual activities, staying extremely busy, or seeing yourself as trying to "replace" the lost loved one), feeling "stuck" in the extreme feelings (e.g., overwhelmed by constant sadness, anger, guilt and so on, or over relying on alcohol or drugs), or finding yourself unable to function at all in the various

realms of your life, especially as the months and years have gone by. These are only a few of the ways that may indicate that your suffering is going in an unhealthy direction. Even if you are not sure whether your experience is normal or not, you may want to consult with a trained professional. The goal for seeking such assistance will be to help you to establish a normal or healthy grief process again.

If you would like to seek counselling, one of the best ways to find such assistance is through someone else who had a positive experience with a therapist. This may be someone you know and trust who received this assistance themselves, or it may be someone like a family physician who has developed a list of resources over their years of practice. Local hospitals and family service agencies also may be able to offer such support.



What Do I Say to the Kids...

Talking to children about difficult issues is never easy but it is important to be as honest as you can be based on the child's age. Be sure to reassure children that they will be taken care of and that they have not done anything wrong. It is okay to say "I don't know," even to our children. We don't always have all the answers.

Encourage your child to talk to you or someone they feel comfortable with about how they are feeling and ask any questions about things that are worrying them. Let children know it is okay for them to still love and care for their parent or aunt/uncle or grandparent even though he/she made a wrong decision. It does not mean they are a bad person.

If your loved one goes to prison, you will have to decide what you tell him/her about that and if you will take your child to visit him/her.

Resources

This section contains information on resources which may assist you and your loved one. First, we outline the services offered by MADD Canada. Second, we list contact information for agencies that provide educational, assessment, treatment, or support services across Canada.

(a) MADD Canada Resources

MADD Canada is a national organization that has regional offices and local Chapters and Community Leader groups across Canada. We publish a broad range of materials, including information on: the criminal justice system and victims' rights; impaired driving statistics, legislation and policy; coping with trauma, loss and bereavement; dealing with injuries and youth and parent support services and programs. Among other initiatives, MADD Canada provides direct support and programs to victims/survivors of impaired driving and their families.

Please feel free to contact your local MADD Chapter, Community Leader group or the National Office at 1-800-665-MADD (6233). A complete list of MADD Canada's Chapters, offices, publications, and services can be found on its website: madd.ca.

- *Adult-Sibling Grief*
- *Child-Sibling Grief*
- *Coping with Life After Injury*
- *Grandparents' Grief*
- *Holidays and Hope*
- *Living with Burn Injuries*
- *Living with Spinal Cord Injuries*
- *Living with Brain Injuries*
- *Men and Mourning*
- *Parents' Grief*
- *Spousal Grief*
- *Survivor Guilt*
- *Teenagers' Grief*
- *Helping Children Cope with Death*
- *Trauma, Loss and Bereavement*
- *Understanding the Consequences of a Loved One's Impaired Driving*

(b) Canadian Families and Corrections Network is a nationally incorporated Canadian charity offering support and information to families affected by criminal behaviour. Services include toll free information and referral services to families; informational publications for families; policy and program development; Visitor Resource Centres; staff and volunteer training. Telephone: (613) 541-0743, toll free English: 1-888-371-2326, French: 1-877-875-1285, email: national@cfcn-rcafd

(c) Policy Centre for Victim Issues created the Victim Services Directory (VSD) to help service providers, victims/survivors and individuals locate services for victims/survivors of crime across Canada. See <http://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/cj-jp/victims-victimes/vsd-rsv/index.html>

(d) Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies works with and on behalf of women involved with the justice system, particularly women in conflict with the law. See www.elizabethfry.ca for contact information for offices and its programs. Telephone (613) 238-2422, toll free at 1-800-637-4606, email: CAEFS@web.ca

(e) John Howard Society has 65 offices that provide assistance to people involved with the justice system, particularly those in conflict with the law. See www.johnhoward.ca for contact information for offices and services across Canada. Telephone: (613) 384-6272, email: national@johnhoward.ca





For more information or assistance:
Visit MADD Canada's web site at
madd.ca
email info@madd.ca or call 1-800-665-6233, ext. 222.

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