

MONTREAL IN MOURNING:  
FACING OUR LOSSES TOGETHER

# GUIDE FOR COLLECTIVE MOURNING RITUALS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC



#### Authors (alphabetical order)

Valérie Bourgeois-Guérin, psychologist, professor at the Université du Québec à Montréal, researcher at the Centre for Research and Expertise in Social Gerontology, CIUSSS du Centre-Ouest-de-l'Île-de-Montréal

Barbara Fillion, occupational therapist, Planning, Programming and Research Officer, Direction régionale de santé publique, CIUSSS du Centre-Sud-de-l'Île-de-Montréal

Zelda Freitas, social worker, Coordinator, Area of Expertise in Caregiving at the Centre for Research and Expertise in Social Gerontology, CIUSSS du Centre-Ouest-de-l'Île-de-Montréal

Étienne Lajoie, family caregiver counsellor, Info-aidant

Dr. Paule Lebel, medical specialist in public health and preventive medicine, Direction régionale de santé publique, CIUSSS du Centre-Sud-de-l'Île-de-Montréal

Camille Poirier-Veilleux, Planning, Programming and Research Officer, Direction régionale de santé publique, CIUSSS du Centre-Sud-de-l'Île-de-Montréal

Isabelle Van Pevenage, sociologist, adjunct professor at the Université de Montréal, researcher at the Centre for Research and Expertise in Social Gerontology, CIUSSS du Centre-Ouest-de-l'Île-de-Montréal

#### Reviewers (alphabetical order)

Dr. Doris Clerc, gerontopsychiatrist, professor, Institut universitaire de gériatrie de Montréal, CIUSSS de Centre-Sud-de-l'Île-de-Montréal

Johanne de Montigny, psychologist in private practice in Montréal

Luce Des Aulniers, anthropologist, professor at Université du Québec à Montréal

André Fortin, psychosociologist, Creative Facilitation and Social Innovation Advisor

Muriel Mailhac, Planning, Programming and Research Officer, Support for Elderly Autonomy Program Directorate, CIUSSS du Centre-Sud-de-l'Île-de-Montréal

Audrey Mailloux Moquin, Territorial Partnership Advisor, Bureau d'intégration des nouveaux arrivants à Montréal, Service de la diversité et de l'inclusion sociale, Ville de Montréal

Randala Mouawad, Head of Department (Acting) , Direction régionale de santé publique, CIUSSS du Centre-Sud-de-l'Île-de-Montréal

#### Linguistic revision

Monique Messier, Planning, Programming and Research Officer, Direction régionale de santé publique, CIUSSS du Centre-Sud-de-l'Île-de-Montréal

© Government of Québec, 2020

ISBN (Online) 978-2-550-87590-1

Legal deposit

Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec, 2020

# FOREWORD

## Acknowledging the disaster and trauma experienced by Montréalers

The authors of this document wish above all to acknowledge Montréalers' hardships since the beginning of the pandemic, especially during its peak in April and May 2020. The following is based on testimonies collected by the authors. The suffering and loss associated with the death of a great many people from COVID-19 largely justifies the holding of collective mourning rituals in Montréal.

### *An invisible and insidious enemy*

The COVID-19 pandemic proliferated in Québec, especially in Montréal, during the winter and spring of 2020. Strict physical distancing and lockdown measures were put in place to protect vulnerable persons. The virus was an invisible and insidious enemy. Not only was it imperceptible and unfamiliar, but it could take a few days before signs and symptoms of the disease appeared. At the beginning of the pandemic, the virus spread silently and began its ravages. With limited coping capacity and insufficient protective equipment at times, individuals and caregivers became vulnerable and defenceless against COVID-19.

### *Seniors in long-term care centres often died alone, quickly and in large numbers*

In long-term care facilities, the virus was devastating, causing the death of many seniors in a short period of time—sometimes in a matter of hours, without relief, completely alone, without their loved ones being notified. In some cases, their roommates watched helplessly as they died and wondered in anguish who would be next. In one CHSLD, for example, nearly half the residents on one care floor died within a few weeks. And while many survived, the hard fight against the virus and isolation left them malnourished, weakened and less cognitively alert. They will have a long hill to climb to regain their former quality of life. During this period, the horrors multiplied to the point where many compared this catastrophe to a war scene from a implausible film script.

### *Staff felt powerless and unprotected*

Health care staff, whose numbers were not sufficient to cope with the extent of the infection among the affected seniors and who worried about their own and their families' health, viewed the situation with fear, helplessness and sometimes a sense of unreality. The virus spread like wildfire. This spread was fuelled by very difficult working conditions, where oftentimes staff felt overwhelmed by the care to be provided. Demand was met by moving from a "hot" floor to a "cold" one, and even from one facility to another, without sufficient transition measures. In addition, adequate protective equipment was often lacking. The staff worked hard—very hard. They also suffered from the loss of residents with whom they had forged a bond over months and years of care, some that they were unable to provide comfort for in their final moments.

It is understandable that some health care staff chose to leave this context of suffering, temporarily or for a longer period of time, aware that they could catch the virus themselves, and possibly infect their spouse, children and parents. Those who remained had to continue to face the situation with courage, day after day, knowing that because of the lockdown, family caregivers could no longer come to their loved one who was counting on them. The stakes were heart-wrenching for all the staff when the virus was at its peak and the needs of patients so great. The suffering experienced was enormous as the experiences of grief multiplied.

### *Workers in precarious situations*

It has been pointed out many times that the health care workers who were on the front line, in the CHSLDs, were primarily from immigrant communities. Many were living in precarious situations, not benefiting from a permanent resident status, as many were refugees with status awaiting permanent residence or asylum

seekers.<sup>1</sup> Scores of these people remained on the job in the CHSLDs. They were already living in an extremely stressful context given their status and had to endure the fear of contamination and disease, and of endangering their families. These are people who risked their lives, after crossing borders and finding work in CHSLDs. Let's not forget that some of them became ill, sometimes seriously, and that some died from their illness—anonymously.

### *Family caregivers on the sidelines*

The lockdown made it impossible for family caregivers to visit residents. In addition, communicating with staff to get news was difficult and sometimes impossible. Above all, this context prevented family members (caregivers) from being present during residents' last moments. This was at times experienced with great hardship by loved ones, causing sadness, anger, helplessness and feelings of injustice not to mention guilt for having been forced to abandon their elder. Added to this distress is not having seen the elderly person after their death or not having been able to arrange a funeral in accordance with religious rites or personal beliefs. Relatives of people hospitalized for causes other than COVID-19 (for example, cancer, severe heart disease or palliative care) were deprived of visits and thus unable to accompany their loved ones in their final moments. It was virtually impossible to say goodbye in any kind of satisfactory way, to see and to touch the deceased person... These families may fear that the deceased person's memory will be overshadowed by the pandemic, and that the funeral will be rushed. Without these elements, the deceased's loved ones may remain suspended in a situation of unreality for longer than normal, which hinders the usual grief reactions.

### *Montréal—the epicentre of the pandemic in Québec and Canada—is suffering*

The majority of deaths occurred in Montréal. Many Montréalers feel sad, ashamed, worried, angry, powerless, disheartened, vulnerable, guilty and confined. There are many questions: could all these deaths have been prevented? If so, how should we have reacted? The difficulties of the health and social services network are exacerbated by the situation and exposed in the media. And while the deaths are the primary source of grief, there are many other hardships as well: loss of jobs and income, loss of friendships, loss of grandparent support for young families, etc. Montréalers' reactions are diverse: some have shown exemplary solidarity, while others have socially withdrawn. Some people are seeking to place blame, while others do not want to look for culprits. Many also question the future: how to make sense of this tragedy? How to find the courage and energy to live? How to go back to work, reunite with loved ones, and live as a community despite fear, anxiety, suffering and fatigue? How can Montréalers recover, console themselves and honour the deceased?

---

<sup>1</sup> Some claimants were awaiting their hearing to decide their refugee claim, while others had been refused and were in the process of having the decision reviewed. In any case, these people were not illegal and had a status, albeit a temporary and precarious one.

# Table of contents

<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>1</b>
Who is this document for? .....	1
Why read this document? .....	1
What is the purpose of the process? .....	1
<b>Definitions for a common vision</b> .....	<b>3</b>
What is grief? .....	3
What is a mourning ritual? .....	3
What is a collective mourning ritual? .....	3
<b>Why hold collective mourning rituals in the context of COVID-19 in Montréal?</b> .....	<b>4</b>
Why mourning rituals? .....	4
1. Say goodbye to the deceased, honour them and acknowledge the loss and associated emotions .....	4
2. Mark a transition and help manage change .....	4
3. Support the bereaved .....	5
4. Nurture a sense of community .....	5
5. Relate to what is beyond our understanding and give meaning to our experiences .....	5
Why have collective mourning rituals in the face of numerous deaths in the community? .....	6
1. Recognize the collective nature of the losses associated with the COVID-19 pandemic and express collective responsibility .....	6
2. Counter isolation and contribute to social cohesion .....	6
3. Build community resilience and empower communities to act .....	6
<b>What are the essential principles for meaningful collective mourning rituals?</b> .....	<b>7</b>
1. Be meaningful .....	7
2. Include the bereaved or citizens .....	7
3. Accommodate diversity .....	7
4. Be visible .....	8
5. Require physical presence and active participation .....	8
6. Be simple, structured, sober and sometimes silent .....	8
Caveats .....	8
<b>What factors can influence the shape of collective mourning rituals?</b> .....	<b>9</b>
1. Objectives .....	9
2. Target audiences .....	9
3. Frequency .....	9
4. Environment .....	9
5. Responsibility .....	9
6. Budget .....	9
7. Protective measures against COVID-19 .....	10
<b>Inspiring examples</b> .....	<b>11</b>
An exemplary ritual: the TRICOTS EN MÉMOIRE project .....	11
<b>An opening full of hope</b> .....	<b>13</b>
<b>Documentary sources</b> .....	<b>14</b>
<b>APPENDIX 1: CHECKLIST FOR A BENEFICIAL AND UNIFYING COLLECTIVE MOURNING RITUAL</b> .....	<b>16</b>

# Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in the deaths of many people in a short period of time.

Families, other loved ones, as well as many caregivers are in mourning— a mourning made unique by the climate of uncertainty and the lockdown measures that had to be put in place to slow the spread of the virus.

The Montréal region was particularly affected, as the epicentre of the epidemic in Québec and Canada. To respond to the mourning of the Montréal population, the Direction régionale de santé publique of the CIUSSS du Centre-Sud-de-l'Île-de-Montréal proposes holding collective mourning rituals. They will be a special way to recognize losses, support the bereaved and give sense of meaning to these tragic deaths.

## → WHO IS THIS DOCUMENT FOR?

This document is intended for any person or group who wish to organize a collective mourning ritual event.

## → WHY READ THIS DOCUMENT?

The main objective of the guidelines presented in this document is to inspire and support the approach of the teams who will organize collective mourning rituals so that they can be beneficial and bring people together in the Montreal community.

These guidelines will make it possible to:

- Define basic terminology specific to the field of grief.
- Explain the functions of collective mourning rituals and activities.
- Propose conditions that will allow collective mourning rituals to be meaningful and safe.
- Present different forms of collective mourning rituals and what influences them.
- Present concrete examples of collective mourning rituals.
- Build a case for the organizers of mourning rituals who wish to convince partners to join the project.


## → WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE PROCESS?

The ultimate goal of the process is to prevent the psychological distress and dysfunction that can be associated with complicated and persistent grief.

The suffering associated with the loss of a loved one is part of the normal grieving process. However, grieving or mourning can be intense and enduring. The grieving individual's distress may then interfere with their interpersonal relationships, work, studies or other areas of life. Montrealers experienced several risk factors for complicated grief in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, the sudden and unexpected circumstances of death, the context of multiple deaths, lack of community rituals, lack of support from loved ones, the inability to be present at the time of death, and disagreement or uncertainty regarding the care given to loved ones. To mitigate the impact of these risk factors, we propose holding collective mourning rituals.

Many bereaved people experience their most intense emotions between 3 and 6 months after death, but the emotions can persist for up to 24 months. Rituals may be helpful in coping with the loss during this time, when social support decreases. Collective rituals are mentioned as being helpful by a majority of bereaved people and are recognized as contributing positively to the grieving process.

The values that can inspire the actions of those responsible for collective mourning rituals are:



Care  
Solidarity  
Fraternity  
Respect  
Self-determination  
Inclusion

# Definitions for a common vision

*COLLECTIVE MOURNING RITUAL.* It is important to grasp the meaning of each of the words in this expression in order to better understand the related concepts that form the basis of this document.

## WHAT IS GRIEF?

Grief can be defined as the set of reactions and emotions experienced by a person following a significant loss through death. It is a process of gradual adaptation to this separation so that the memory of the other person is experienced not only in suffering, but also, as applicable, in gratitude for what was shared. Under favourable conditions, this process of inner transformation allows the bereaved person to rebuild themselves in order to gradually start living again.

## WHAT IS A MOURNING RITUAL?

A mourning ritual can be defined as a set of acts, words and objects that acquire a symbolic character, i.e. a special meaning. These acts, words and objects are an opportunity to give death a relative and partial meaning. Their meanings are derived from symbolic legacies, individual interpretations and specific circumstances (here, the pandemic).

## WHAT IS A COLLECTIVE MOURNING RITUAL?

A collective mourning ritual results from the mobilization of a group of people to mark the losses suffered by a community and its members. Such a ritual results from a common reflection created in the image of the group's needs, and frames the experience of individuals and communities, potentially alleviating their grief and helping them to guide the future.



# Why hold collective mourning rituals in the context of COVID-19 in Montréal?

The people who will participate in collective mourning rituals in Montréal will feel the positive and beneficial effects that come from taking part in a collective mourning ritual and group action. However, it is important to remember that you can only control what happens during the event, not how it is experienced individually and the aftermath.

## WHY MOURNING RITUALS?

Rituals at the time of a person's death vary according to cultures, socio-historical contexts, value systems, religions and forms of spirituality. However, they have universal functions and generally have the following objectives:

1. Say goodbye to the deceased, honour them and acknowledge the loss and associated emotions.
2. Mark a transition and help manage change.
3. Support the bereaved.
4. Nurture a sense of community.
5. Relate to what is beyond our understanding and give meaning to our experiences.

### 1 SAY GOODBYE TO THE DECEASED, HONOUR THEM AND ACKNOWLEDGE THE LOSS AND ASSOCIATED EMOTIONS

The mourning ritual provides an opportunity for individuals to say goodbye to the deceased. They can then acknowledge the loss of the deceased and experience the associated emotions. They can take the time to realize and express their attachment to the deceased, what was lost, the stories and lives of the departed persons. Telling the story of the deceased person's life, sometimes with visual aids, also honours the person who gave and who is no longer there, and to retain a shared image of them. These last gestures can ease individuals' grief since they recognize the importance of the deceased and can see in them the sign that "their loved one did not die in vain."

Awareness of what the deceased have passed on to their loved ones and the community can bring out the sadness of loss, but it can also contribute to their resilience through existential learning.

### 2 MARK A TRANSITION AND HELP MANAGE CHANGE

Ritual can be a starting point for recovery and renewal, for changes in identity, role or routine related to the loss. Rituals can become vehicles in the processes of transformation, transition and continuity. These processes are the basis for coping and recovering from bereavement. Rituals can also provide a sense of security for the bereaved through the order and structure they provide during the period of change.

Also, energy can come from reflections nourished by the ritual and by the presence of loved ones, and lead the individual to an action that could help them better master the changes and uncertainties caused by the loss, which would be beneficial to the grieving process.

### **3 SUPPORT THE BEREAVED**

Rituals surrounding death clearly have the function of supporting the bereaved and leaving room for the importance and gravity of the ordeal they are going through. It is important to take the time during rituals—whether interpersonally or informally—to recognize the range of emotions that may be experienced (e.g., distress, anger, guilt, helplessness, but also, on occasion, relief) and the many losses resulting from the death of a loved one. Emotions can be expressed through a piece of music, a text, a poem or a drawing that can be created by the bereaved. Being a silent or participatory witness to the expression of emotions related to the loss provides an opportunity for individuals participating in the ritual to show sympathetic attention and warm solidarity with the bereaved, which can alleviate their feelings of being abandoned by the deceased. The exchanges and support offered, through their resonance over time, can strengthen the bereaveds’ confidence in their ability to get through these difficult times. In this sense, they help prevent a complicated and persistent grieving process.

### **4 NURTURE A SENSE OF COMMUNITY**

Mourning rituals reaffirm the importance of social ties within a community and the community’s support for individuals going through difficult times. By being physically present during a ritual, members of a community share a meaningful experience. The resulting sense of belonging could contribute to greater social engagement and participation in the community and, in so doing, to better health of its members. By coming together in this way, the community is demonstrating its desire for sustainability as a unity.

### **5 RELATE TO WHAT IS BEYOND OUR UNDERSTANDING AND GIVE MEANING TO OUR EXPERIENCES**

In all cultures, it is when members of the community are lost that the “enigma of life and death” is transmitted and that individuals reflect on the path of existence. Ritual is a place where discussion about death is facilitated. It can then be a question of its existential reality and how to welcome it.

Rituals set up a system of meanings and social codes (meaning framework) that situate death in an all-encompassing experience by referring to human history, its ways of interpreting trials and its links with nature and art. In this context, the suffering of loss can be revealed without being denied, and can also be part of a “larger sense of meaning.” The use of the elements (water, earth, air and fire) can be combined with spiritual (e.g. flower, flame, circle) and religious symbols that attribute another life to the departed. In all cultures, contemplation, the creation of beauty and various beliefs establish links between the living and the dead, and thus acquire soothing virtues. This link to a “larger order” seems all the more crucial when death occurs unfairly or is experienced as such, as might be the case in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

## WHY HAVE COLLECTIVE MOURNING RITUALS IN THE FACE OF NUMEROUS DEATHS IN THE COMMUNITY?

Unlike many sudden deaths in the community, the COVID-19 pandemic is being experienced in global synchrony over a fairly short period of time. While this contributes to citizen distress, it has also led to the implementation of various strategies to counter it. These strategies have had collateral damage such as not being able to see a loved one before they died and not being able to share grief in the presence of loved ones. At a collective level, the establishment of rituals has three main objectives:

1. Recognize the collective nature of the losses associated with the COVID-19 pandemic and express collective responsibility.
2. Counter isolation and contribute to social cohesion.
3. Build community resilience and empower communities to act.

### 1 RECOGNIZE THE COLLECTIVE NATURE OF THE LOSSES ASSOCIATED WITH THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND EXPRESS COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY.

The pandemic and its consequences have affected everyone in communities near and far, whether through illness or imposed measures, including widespread lockdown. However, the crisis has highlighted social and health inequalities, especially those affecting older, isolated people needing support. In most cases, emotions related to the situation are strong and shared by many groups in the community. By participating in collective mourning rituals, individuals can express that they are stakeholders in the COVID-19 pandemic and are aware of its consequences and inequalities. Taking part in collective action is also an opportunity to take a stand to improve the living conditions of certain more vulnerable groups.

### 2 COUNTER ISOLATION AND CONTRIBUTE TO SOCIAL COHESION

By mobilizing around bereaved people, community members encourage them to feel that they are part of a “whole”—a group that shares their emotions, recognizes their losses and wants them to feel that they are not alone. During a ritual, the most vulnerable people can also be identified and offered support.

The collective ritual also plays a role in maintaining or restoring a certain harmony between individuals in a community (social cohesion) by bringing them together to experience similar emotions, carry out actions together and, above all, achieve a shared goal. The individuals in the group can project themselves beyond each person’s personal experiences—all of which are valuable—sharing their convictions and reaffirming their collective experience.

### 3 BUILD COMMUNITY RESILIENCE AND EMPOWER COMMUNITIES TO ACT

The ability of communities to solicit and utilize their resources is central to addressing and preventing worsening the consequences of a crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Organizing and holding a collective mourning ritual is an opportunity for them to do so. They can see their strengths and their power to act on the situation, and develop new collective skills. Communities can also capitalize on the desire to learn together from this crisis to bring about collective action. This is a step toward recovery from the trauma experienced by many and toward a future with opportunities for development.

# What are the essential principles for meaningful collective mourning rituals?

Many forms of mourning rituals can and have been held since the beginning of the pandemic. However, in order for these mourning rituals to be truly relevant and have an impact on the bereaved and the participants, certain criteria must be respected:

1. Be meaningful.
2. Include the bereaved or citizens.
3. Accommodate diversity.
4. Be visible.
5. Require physical presence and active participation.
6. Be simple, structured, sober and sometimes silent.

## 1 BE MEANINGFUL

To be adopted by a group, a ritual must be symbolically meaningful for the group. To achieve this, the group must agree on the objectives and approach. During the process of agreeing on a common basis, the group members' commitment and motivation to participate in the ritual is strengthened.

It is also important for the group to determine what they want to emphasize in the meaning of the ritual. They must have an idea of the symbolism to be used. Using a symbolic object, physical or not, seems to be an essential element in order for rituals to be beneficial. Examples include a candle, a piece of music or a poem.

Since a symbol can have several meanings, it is essential that the organizers explain the meaning attributed to the acts, words or objects associated with the rituals, while leaving room for individual interpretations.

### Tip

To avoid reinventing the wheel, organizers of a collective mourning ritual can draw inspiration from symbolic approaches already carried out in similar circumstances, but at other times and places. The group can create an amalgamation using several sources of inspiration adapted to its situation, infusing the new ritual with unique meaning.

## 2 INCLUDE THE BEREAVED OR CITIZENS

Recognizing the strengths and capacity of citizens to take action to analyze and deal with collective situations they consider problematic is essential. Citizens must participate in the co-creation and conduct of rituals. Leveraging citizens' resources helps to improve their mental health and identify the most appropriate solutions.

## 3 ACCOMMODATE DIVERSITY

The collective ritual is the result of a collective reflection. It takes into account the views of different individuals, their experiences and their combined strengths while rallying them around common goals. This allows stimulating and rich exchanges not only in the preparation but also in the performance of the ritual.

#### 4 BE VISIBLE

A ritual that is publicized allows a greater number of individuals to enjoy the benefits of participating in the event. It is also a ritual where more people will be able to recognize and validate the experiences of the bereaved. This validation can help them identify their suffering and deal with their feelings in order to move through the grieving process. Thus, the visibility of the event can contribute to the resilience of the bereaved.

#### 5 REQUIRE PHYSICAL PRESENCE AND ACTIVE PARTICIPATION

Being physically present at the event provides the opportunity for individuals to share emotions at the same time and in the same place. Bereaved people often know that they are not alone in experiencing difficult times, but during a ritual in the presence of others, they become fully aware of this. During collective mourning rituals, each individual can take advantage of the energy released by the group.

##### Tip

In the context of COVID-19, large gatherings are not permitted. An event could bring together a large number of smaller groups to respect restrictions and ensure everyone's safety.

Furthermore, recovery is an active, not passive, process. When each participant has the opportunity to be active during the ritual and to do something, they can tangibly express their feelings, their sense of belonging to the group and their commitment to the objectives. The actions proposed to participants must be adaptable to everyone's particularities or preferences.

#### 6 BE SIMPLE, STRUCTURED, SOBER AND SOMETIMES SILENT

The simplicity and sobriety of the words, actions and their sequence are required to leave room for emotions and the achievement of the priority objectives targeted by the ritual and to respect its sacred aspect. Moments of silence are also an integral part of the ritual. They help to integrate what is felt there and are pivotal moments between the different stages. In addition, the fact that the ritual is structured provides some sense of security that is important for the bereaved.

##### **CAVEATS**

- Collective mourning rituals should not be an opportunity for protest, nor a happening. They must respect the solemn, if not sacred, character of this type of event. These rituals should not be monopolized by people pursuing other goals (e.g. building personal or political sympathy).
- Collective mourning rituals must respect the privacy and boundaries of the bereaved. Everyone grieves in their own, intimate way. For example, the bereaved should not feel obliged to testify about their experience in a group ceremony.
- Collective mourning rituals can bring out difficult emotions in participants. Support resources must therefore be offered during the event in order to intervene quickly and adequately with people in difficulty.
- To achieve a goal, it is often recommended to take "one small step at a time" and to stick to a modest scale. This applies all the more in a pandemic context, since resources are already stretched to the limit and fatigue is building up among citizens and workers. A small event will sometimes be the preferred option.

# What factors can influence the shape of collective mourning rituals?

Mourning rituals can take many forms depending on the context. The following are various factors that may determine the format of the collective bereavement ritual chosen:

1. Objectives
2. Target audiences
3. Frequency
4. Environment
5. Responsibility
6. Budget
7. Protective measures against COVID-19

## 1 OBJECTIVES

Collective mourning rituals can serve several purposes. Various initiatives have already been launched to bid farewell, to acknowledge the existence of the deceased or to show the support of organizations or communities for the bereaved. The *objectives* identified will certainly influence the shape of the event.

## 2 TARGET AUDIENCES

Mourning rituals can be practised on different scales (small or large group) and for different groups. For example, they may bring together people from a neighbourhood, employees of a business, citizens of a city, residents of a nursing home, seniors, or simply an ethnocultural or religious community.

## 3 FREQUENCY

The collective mourning ritual can be held once, repeated over time or presented as a succession of events. The evolution of the pandemic may influence the organizers' choice of ritual frequency.

## 4 ENVIRONMENT

Collective mourning rituals can take place in a variety of settings: in the workplace, in schools, in residential resources, in the community, etc. However, the place chosen for the ritual should be peaceful and beautiful. The ritual can take on its full force and meaning in a calm environment conducive to concentration.

## 5 RESPONSIBILITY

Organizing a collective mourning ritual is often easier when a leader is clearly identified. Note that this person may change along the way. For example, different partners can take turns taking the leadership. However, it is helpful for the selected leader to be able to build partnerships, mobilize individuals and seek funding.

## 6 BUDGET

The budget available for the organization and holding of the ritual is an important factor. Here are various examples of funding sources to explore: foundations, private donors, sociofinancing, religious communities, ethnocultural groups, the borough, government calls for projects, etc.



## PROTECTIVE MEASURES AGAINST COVID-19

The ritual chosen must comply with current health regulations so as not to contribute to the spread of COVID-19. Given the changing situation, organizers are encouraged to consult the [Québec government](#) website.

*The appendix contains a checklist for carrying out beneficial, unifying collective mourning rituals.*

# Inspiring examples

Here are some examples that meet some or all of the above principles.

Some health care centers arranged for designated location for remembrance of the deceased. Photographs, in addition to, personal and significant objects, were put on display. Others sought the participation of families to write anecdotes, reminiscences or stories of the deceased to create a collective work to be unveiled at a later commemorative ceremony.

In several Montréal neighbourhoods, *community organizations* organized the projection of luminous artistic creations on building walls.<sup>2</sup> It was an opportunity for small gatherings to share and celebrate the community's losses.

Funeral service *companies* held virtual, poetic and musical ceremonies, led by a public figure in memory of the departed. These ceremonies were highly publicized and brought together large numbers of people virtually.<sup>3</sup>

Here are some other ideas:

- Collectively create an object symbolizing the people who died from COVID-19 that could be distributed as part of a ritual. The public could then obtain it to show their support for the bereaved.
- Set up a route dotted with stations in memory of the deceased.
- During a ceremony, a stone garden could be laid out. This would be composed of stones laid down by each bereaved person in an aesthetic whole. This space would become a place of recollection where mourners could return each year on the same date.

## AN EXEMPLARY RITUAL: THE TRICOTS EN MÉMOIRE PROJECT

### **Creation of a giant collective scarf in memory of the people in the SOUTHWEST-VERDUN neighbourhood who died during the pandemic**

This example of a collective mourning ritual respects the main principles outlined above. It is a community-based and inclusive project.

Accompanied by a community organizer, bereaved citizens living in the Southwest–Verdun neighbourhood came together virtually to organize a collective mourning ritual on a human scale to mark the deaths related to the COVID-19 pandemic since March 2020.

The instructions were simple: all bereaved persons who wanted to do so were invited to knit a piece of scarf (12 inches wide by 24 inches long; the type of wool, its colour, and type of stitch were left to the bereaved person's discretion). People who did not know how to knit could learn from volunteer knitters. A knitter was made available to those who had limitations or were unable to do so.

<sup>2</sup> <https://montreal.ca/actualites/une-premiere-dans-ville-marie-un-projet-qui-illumine-les-murs-de-sainte-marie?fbclid=IwAR3DikEJqhtG1Irlq3BArUVB5oe9MKJEq8U- AI3pmaV52v7-zMFu-uP1d4?fbclid=IwAR3DikEJqhtG1Irlq3BArUVB5oe9MKJEq8U- AI3pmaV52v7-zMFu-uP1d4>

<sup>3</sup> [http://mi.lapresse.ca/screens/ee244809-efdf-46f1-91fa-86e95f5478f9\\_7C\\_0.html](http://mi.lapresse.ca/screens/ee244809-efdf-46f1-91fa-86e95f5478f9_7C_0.html)



Each piece of scarf was knitted in memory of a person who died in the COVID-19 pandemic so that they would not be forgotten. It was also possible to embroider the name of the deceased.

While the work was initially individual, the pieces assembled and sewn together form a giant collective work, powerful in meaning. It is a form of art therapy (knit therapy) that produces a finished, concrete product with singular elements that can be identified and form a whole. The benefits of knitting are many and have allowed the bereaved to be in the present moment, in a state of meditation or remembrance. Knitting requires concentration on a repetitive movement offering a moment of relaxation to the person who is doing it. It also allowed the bereaved and their families to participate in a common project while respecting physical distancing, share their grief with other bereaved people, break their ongoing isolation, and forge ties with other participants.

A travelling exhibition of the collective work is planned at the time of writing. It will be a time to bring communities together in remembrance of the deceased; the closing moment of this collective mourning ritual.

Opposite: Promotional poster of the event for the recruitment of knitters (June 23, 2020)

Below are examples of sections of the collective scarf knitted and embroidered in memory of the people who died from COVID-19.



Projet de tricot pour commémorer les nombreuses personnes âgées décédées de la COVID 19 dans le Sud-Ouest et Verdun (Montréal)

## LE FOULARD DE LA MÉMOIRE

Tricoter un bout de foulard en **mémoire** de chaque personne disparue, **décédée** seule... en contexte COVID, pour vivre un deuil collectif, **ne pas les oublier**...



Bonjour tout le monde,  
Ce serait super si nous pouvions avoir un contingent de tricoteurs.euses pour tricoter une écharpe chacun.e qui serait cousue aux écharpes des tricoteurs.euses du Sud-ouest/Verdun pour former une guirlande géante. Chaque morceau d'écharpe porterait le nom d'une de ces personnes décédées de la COVID... qui pourra ensuite faire l'objet d'une exposition mobile... C'est un projet en co-construction... Bienvenue.e.s !

**Consigne :** Tricoter une écharpe d'environ 12 po de large et 24 po de longueur.  
Utiliser n'importe quelle laine et n'importe quel point.

**Personnes contacts :**

- Pointe-Saint-Charles : Viviane Freedman, 514-938-8036
- Ville-Émard-Côte-St-Paul : Mya, 514-816-7395
- Petite-Bourgogne et Saint-Henri : CÉDA, Francine Campeau, 514-596-4422
- Saint-Henri : Centre communautaire des femmes actives : Alice, 514- 989-7320
- ACHIM (Ville-Émard-Côte-Saint-Paul) : Stéphanie, 514-362-7221 poste 230
- Verdun : Centre communautaire des aînés de Verdun : Marie-France, 514-509-6376
- ROPASOM : 514-989-8226

Si vous connaissez des personnes intéressées, invitez-les à nous joindre. Solidairement.

Activité issue du ZOOM AÎNÉS – RDV tous les mercredis 10 h 30, <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86236355846>  
ROPASOM et TCRAV (Concertations aînées du Sud-Ouest et Verdun)



# An opening full of hope

The COVID-19 pandemic hit the Montréal community hard.

In the past, Montréalers have demonstrated their ability to deal with adversity. Although the situations are not comparable, Montréalers were able to adapt and show resilience during the October crisis, École Polytechnique massacre, ice storm, shooting at Dawson College and the maple spring student protests.

Whatever ritual you choose, do it #AllTogether!

# Documentary sources

ARUP and THE ROCKEFELLER FOUNDATION (2015). *City Resilience Framework*. London: Arup International Development. Retrieved from <https://www.rockefellerfoundation.org/report/city-resilience-framework/>

BERGERON-LONGPRÉ, M. and A. BERTRAND-CESCHÊNES (2020). “Quels sont les impacts de la pandémie sur les personnes et les intervenants endeuillés ou confrontés à la mort ?”, *Bulletin d'information hebdomadaire du Centre de recherche en santé publique*, vol. 1, No. 8. Retrieved from [https://mailchi.mp/ssss.gouv.qc.ca/cresp\\_questions\\_vol1\\_n8](https://mailchi.mp/ssss.gouv.qc.ca/cresp_questions_vol1_n8)

BOURGEOIS-GUÉRIN, V., I. VAN PEVENAGE, J. LACHANCE, R.-A. BLONDIN and A. MARQUIS (2018). “L'expérience du deuil chez les personnes âgées : la fréquence rime-t-elle avec l'aisance ?” in Anne-Marie Séguin, Patrik Marier and Véronique Billette (eds.), *Le vieillissement sous la loupe: entre mythes et réalités*. Québec: Presses de l'Université Laval, p. 213–220.

CASTLE J. and W. PHILLIPS (2003). “Grief Rituals: Aspects That Facilitate Adjustment to Bereavement.” *Journal of Loss and Trauma*, vol. 8, p. 41–71.

CHÉRON-LEBOEUF, R., L. RACHÉDI and C. MONTGOMERY (2016). *Mort et deuil en contexte migratoire : Guide d'information*. Montréal, METISS team. Retrieved from <https://sherpa-recherche.com/wp-content/uploads/Mort-et-deuil-en-contexte-migratoire.pdf>

UNITED NATIONS WORLD CONFERENCE ON DISASTER RISK REDUCTION (2015). *Sendai Framework for Action for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030*. Geneva: United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction. Retrieved from [https://www.preventionweb.net/files/43291\\_sendaiframeworkfordrren.pdf](https://www.preventionweb.net/files/43291_sendaiframeworkfordrren.pdf)

DES AULNIERS, L. (1997). *Itinérances de la maladie grave : Le temps des nomades*, Paris, L'Harmattan.

DES AULNIERS, L. (forthcoming, September 2020). *Le Temps des mortels. Espaces rituels et deuil*. Montréal, Boréal.

FANCOURT D. and F. SAOIRSE (2019). *What is the Evidence on the Role of the Arts in Improving Health and Well-Being*. Copenhagen, WHO.

GRONDIN J. (2003). *Du sens de la vie : essai philosophique*. Montréal, Les Éditions Fides.

HANUS, M. (2003). “Morts et deuils collectifs.” *Études sur la mort*, No. 123, p. 11–20.

HOLMES, E.A., R.C. O'CONNOR, V.H. PERRY, I. Tracey, S. WESSELY, L. ARSENEAULT and E. BULLMORE (2020). “Multidisciplinary research priorities for the COVID-19 pandemic: a call for action for mental health science.” *The Lancet Psychiatry*, vol. 7, p. 547–560.

INSTITUT NATIONAL DE SANTÉ PUBLIQUE DU QUÉBEC – COMITÉ EN PRÉVENTION ET PROMOTION – THÉMATIQUE SANTÉ MENTALE (June 2020). *COVID-19 : la résilience et la cohésion sociale des communautés pour favoriser la santé mentale et le bien-être*. Québec, INSPQ.

INSTITUTE OF MEDICINE (2015). *Healthy, Resilient, and Sustainable Communities after Disasters: Strategies, Opportunities, and Planning for Recovery*, Washington, D.C.: The National Academies Press.

JAVEAU, C. (2003). “Retour sur les rites piaculaires : pratiques et rôles dans l'immédiat et à distance.” *Études sur la mort*, No. 123, p. 69–78.

- MAGIS, K. (2010). "Community Resilience: An Indicator of Social Sustainability." *Society and Natural Resources*, Vol. 23, No. 5, p. 401–416.
- MITIMA-VERLOOP, B.H., T.M. MOOREN and P.A. BOELEN, "Facilitating grief: An exploration of the function of funerals and rituals in relation to grief reactions." *Death Studies*, 2019. DOI: 10.1080/07481187.2019.1686090
- NEIMEYER, R. (2014). "A social constructionist account of grievance: loss and the narration of meaning." *Death Studies*, vol. 38, No. 6–10, p. 485–498.
- O’SULLIVAN, T.L., C.E. KUZIEWSKY, W. CORNEIL, L. LEMYRE and Z. FRANCO (2014). "The EnRiCH Community Resilience Framework for High-Risk Populations." *PLoS Currents*. Doi: doi:10.1371/currents.dis.11381147bd5e89e38e78434a732f17db
- ROMANOFF B.D. and M. TERENCE (1998). "Rituals and the grieving process." *Death Studies*, Vol. 22, No. 8, p. 697–711.
- ROUDAUT, K. (2012). *Ceux qui restent, une sociologie du deuil*. Rennes, Presses Universitaires de Rennes.
- SHEAR, M.K. "Grief and mourning gone awry: pathway and course of complicated grief." *Dialogues in Clinical Neuroscience*. 14, No. 2, p. 119–128.
- THOMAS, L.V. (1991). *La mort en question : traces de mort, mort des traces*. Paris, L’Harmattan.
- THOMAS, L.V. (1993). *Mélanges thanatiques : deux essais pour une anthropologie de la transversalité*. Paris, L’Harmattan.
- THOMAS, L.V. (1985). *Rites de mort. Pour la paix des vivants*. Paris, Fayard.
- THOMAS, L.V. (1979). *Mort et pouvoir*. Paris, Payot.
- VIENS N. (2020). *Guide pour les personnes endeuillées en période de pandémie*. Montréal, Formations Monbourquette sur le deuil, Université de Montréal. Retrieved from [https://praxis.umontreal.ca/public/FAS/praxis/Documents/Formations\\_sur\\_l\\_accompagnement\\_des\\_personnes\\_endeuillees/Guide\\_deuil\\_pandemie.FR.pdf](https://praxis.umontreal.ca/public/FAS/praxis/Documents/Formations_sur_l_accompagnement_des_personnes_endeuillees/Guide_deuil_pandemie.FR.pdf)

# APPENDIX 1: CHECKLIST FOR A BENEFICIAL AND UNIFYING COLLECTIVE MOURNING RITUAL

## WHAT FORM OF COLLECTIVE MOURNING RITUAL FITS OUR CONTEXT?

1. What are the objectives of the collective mourning ritual we want to implement?

---

---

2. Who is the target audience?

---

---

3. What is the desired frequency of the ritual?

---

---

4. In what kind of environment will the ritual take place?

---

---

5. Who will be responsible for organizing the ritual?

---

---

6. What is the budget needed or available for the organization and performance of the ritual?

---

---

7. What are the protective measures against COVID-19 to be observed during the ritual and how can these be taken into account in the chosen form of the ritual?

---

---

## DOES THE FORM OF RITUAL CHOSEN...

- Explain the meaning attributed to the acts, words or objects associated with the ritual?
- Include a symbolic object, whether physical or not?
- Include bereaved or citizens in its organization?
- Take into account the diversity of the Montréal community?
- Include activities to be visible to as many people as possible?
- Include at least one moment of physical presence of the participants?
- Require active participation of the participants at some point in the ritual?
- Is the form simple?
- Is the form sober?
- Is the form structured?
- Leave room for silence?



**Centre intégré  
universitaire de santé  
et de services sociaux  
du Centre-Sud-  
de-l'Île-de-Montréal**

**Québec** 