

## A Time to Heal... Turning the Corner

### “Surviving the Loss of a Loved One”

This handbook is given to you to assist you in your journey through the grief process. It is not meant to be read in its entirety, rather, it is meant as a resource. You may not read parts of it at all right now, or, if you do, you may not remember what you have read. Use it as a helpful companion on this most difficult of journeys.

## *Prayer of Those Who Have Lost a Loved One*

*In the name of the Father and of the Son and of The Holy Spirit, Amen.*

*Lord, Jesus Christ, during your earthly life You showed compassion to those who have lost a loved one. Turn Your compassionate eyes on us in our sorrow over the loss of our loved ones. Fill this emptiness until we are together again in Your heavenly kingdom as a reward for our earthly service.*

*Help us cope with our loss by relying on You even more than before. Teach us to adapt to the new conditions of our lives and to continue doing Your will. Enable us to avoid withdrawing from life and make us give ourselves to others more readily, so that we may continue to live in Your grace and to do the task that You have laid out for us.*

*We ask this in Your name. Amen*

*In the name of the Father and of the Son and of The Holy Spirit, Amen.*

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Where Do I Begin?

## INTRODUCTION

Grief is profoundly misunderstood in American society. A story of a young man going to a class because he heard they were talking about grief. He said he was worried about an uncle who was “not recovering from his wife’s death well at all”. The visitor was obviously troubled that his uncle was “still tearful.” When asked how long it had been, the well-meaning nephew replied. “Well, it has already been four months!” He had not yet learned that mourning takes a long time.

Grief is not optional or a sign of weakness. We are created to grieve as we are created to love. Trying to avoid grief will only make grief last longer. The death of someone very close to you can be a life-transforming event that affects all aspects of your life. Grief is a natural human emotion that helps people heal after a period of loss in their lives. It can feel as if your world has been shattered – and in many ways it has. The grief process is the journey between two worlds – the one that is now gone and has to be left behind and a new world that lies ahead of you.

Torn between living in the past and finding the strength to face the future, your first months – and even years – following the death can be particularly difficult. It includes a range of strong and powerful feelings such as shock, anger, anxiety, fear, and sadness. Just when you think you’re getting better, hearing a certain song on the radio or seeing a photograph can release a new wave of emotions.

Grief shakes us to our very core and can often leave us feeling a loss of faith. This handbook aims to help you understand your grief and negotiate through this time of emotional and physical reactions to your loss. Although everybody is different, we can take comfort knowing that others have walked down this path before and we can find solace in this shared experience. All of us will find our own way through, at our own pace, while reaching different landmarks along the way. For some, the pain of loss lingers for years and life seems forever diminished by the absence of the deceased. For other, bereavement is ultimately an enriching journey that makes us more sensitive to the pain of those around us and brings renewed energy to take on new activities.

Our Bereavement Support Group mission is to provide a forum for you to express your feelings in a safe, secure, and confidential environment. This does not necessarily mean that you need to share your feelings. Often times, for the newly bereaved, they “just want to listen”. That is OK. Some attend days after their loss and others attend months after their loss. Some even start attending before the death of their loved one as a preparation for what is ahead. Everyone is different. This handbook is discussed in the support group but it also has useful information if you do not attend. There may be different parts of this handbook that are not relevant to you now but may be helpful in the future. Whether you decide to

participate in a Support Group or not, we will pray that God wraps his arms around you and your family during this difficult time.

## WHAT IS GRIEF?

Grief is our response to loss. Grief is not a single emotion but a wide range of intense emotions that come and go sometimes without warning. Grief affects all areas of our life – spiritual psychological, behavioral, social, and physical. Grief is most commonly talked about in terms of pain but can be expressed in a myriad of factors. When a loved one dies after a long and painful illness, we may even feel a sense of relief that they have been released from their suffering.

Grief can be felt over the sale of a home or the death of a celebrity, but the most intense grieving is usually brought on by the loss of somebody close to you, whether a child, parent, spouse, sibling, friend, or pet. An overwhelming feeling of loss, combined with a strong yearning for the deceased, can produce a deep sense of emptiness and a sense that a part of you has died. You may feel confused about who you are and your sense of purpose without the deceased. Things that used to seem important may not feel like they matter so much anymore.

Even when we've had a long time to prepare for a loved one's passing, the initial response to the death is often shock and disbelief. Often, the grieving process starts with diagnosis. This feeling may last a few days or much longer, marked by numbness and alienation from others. As shock gives way to awareness, we start to come to terms with the full scope of our loss.

Then we must endure a year of "first" – birthdays, holidays, and anniversaries before we begin to reconcile the loss and engage in rebuilding our lives.

## YOU CANNOT **NOT** GRIEVE

Grief is not one of those things that you can push aside and it will go away. You cannot **not** grieve. We can say “I won’t grieve” and put on a strong exterior. The bottom line is grief is the natural and healthy way to allow your feelings to surface. We try to avoid grieving for many reasons.

- We don’t know how
- We protect our loved ones by not show our grief
- We can’t address the overwhelming loss
- We think if we intellectualize the loss our pain will go away. You need to feel your grief not think through it.

Attempting to resist your feelings or bury them will simply delay your healing. Knowing this can bring comfort to your healing. It will free you to express your emotions now.

You Cannot **Not** Grieve

*“We are healed of a suffering only by experiencing it in full”  
Marcel Proust*

## THE “RIGHT or NORMAL” WAY TO GRIEVE

There is no right or wrong way to grieve. Grief is expressed and experienced very differently from person to person and from culture to culture. You may feel that there is a “proper” way to grieve, but there is usually a range of reactions, even within the same family.

Be careful not to judge or blame others for what you might perceive to be indifference or lack of overt emotion – much of the grieving process takes place in private, when we’re alone. For example, many people report that they find themselves crying while driving. In that private space, away from the scrutiny of family, many people encounter a sudden release of emotions.

Because grief is so painful, some people try to put on a brave face and “get over” the loss by denying the pain. Studies show that when people don’t deal with the emotions of grief, the pain does not go away. It remains with you and can resurface later in unrecognizable and sometimes destructive ways. That’s why it’s important to acknowledge the pain and let it take precedence over whatever else you may be doing. This is your period of mourning – don’t fight it or try to fit it into your schedule.

*“Everything you feel and experience in your grief is normal and you are not going crazy”*

## HOW LONG DOES GRIEF LAST?

Grief – A Journey Into the Unknown: Who would willingly go on a journey where the destination and time of arrival are unknown? Grief is such a journey. No one can predict when you will engage life fully again, or what shape your life will take when you do. Uncertainty about the duration of the grief process is difficult for some people to bear. Many bereaved people and their friends are tempted to develop unrealistic expectations regarding the length of this process. Popular books and media coverage on the topic may, if not properly interpreted, serve to reinforce these unrealistic views.

Time of Arrival – Unknown: Our Western culture tends to rush the grief process. Most major employers, for instance, allow only two or three days “bereavement leave”. After three weeks, three months, or one year, you may find yourself saying to yourself “certainly by now I should be feeling better”. Family and friends may reinforce this message. Keep in mind that for many bereaved people the most difficult period is often from three to eight months following the loss. And, depending on the nature of the loss, it is not unusual for bereaved people to take from one to two years to regain a real sense of stability in their lives. If you feel that you have recovered from your loss at three or six months, terrific. But, if you still feel shaky, understand that you are definitely within the normal range of responses to this type of life crisis.

Destination – Unknown: Thomas Wolfe’s book “You Can’t Go Home Again” accurately describes a major lesson that the grief process teaches us. We tend to hold onto the past, particularly when we have suffered a painful loss. The truth is that we cannot return to the past. We can learn from the past, we can cherish our memories, but we need to appreciate today and set our sights on the future.

The journey of grief changes a person. After a loss you are not the same. But by passing through grief and by walking down the unique path of your own personal healing, you can evolve a new sense of who you are. And, the struggle for recovery from the loss can lead to the discovery of previously hidden strength, courage, skill, and talents. With this discovery may come new power to create a new meaning in your life, even in the face of death.

Adapted from “Self-Help Correspondence for the Bereaved” by Mary Ann Harter

## MYTHS ABOUT GRIEF

- A strong person should be able to deal with grief alone
- Only immediate family members will experience grief
- People with strong faith don't grieve
- Men should be able to get through a loss without showing emotion
- If you express intense feelings you're losing control of yourself
- You can never be happy again after a spouse has died
- Grief stages are orderly
- Talking to your loved one extends your pain
- Losing an infant, stillbirth, or miscarriage doesn't hurt because parents didn't have time to get to know the child
- Getting angry at God means your faith is weak
- Crying is a sign of weakness
- Resolving your grief means putting your loved one out of your mind and moving on with your life
- Christians should not grieve because they know their loved one is in heaven

## GETTING THROUGH GRIEF – SOME HELPFUL SUGGESTIONS

- Talk to the person who has died and about how their death is affecting you. If you don't feel comfortable talking, write a letter.
- Don't distance yourself from people. It is good to spend time with your friends who care about you. Don't assume they know what you need. Let them know how you are feeling and accept their love and support.
- Give yourself time and be realistic about what you expect from yourself.
- Don't compare yourself to how other people grieve. Everyone is different. Grief comes and goes. You may feel great one day and not so good the next. That is normal.
- Don't over extend yourself. Give yourself a break from responsibilities. Delegate if you can. Take care of yourself.
- Try not to make major changes in your life. If necessary, discuss with several people you trust before making any major decision.
- Don't rely on alcohol or drugs to make you feel better. There is no doubt the grief process is painful but you will get through it with God's grace, loving friends, and a support group or private counseling. Medications may help, if necessary, and prescribed by a licensed physician.
- Take time for yourself. Do things you enjoy.
- Take a nap if you feel tired. Not getting enough sleep at night is common so give yourself a break with a short nap.
- Journal – Keeping a diary of your thoughts and feelings can be very helpful in your healing process.
- Read – There are many books on the loss of a loved one. We have a Resource page at the end of this handbook.
- Birthdays, anniversaries, and other special dates will be difficult. Know that it is normal to feel anxious coming up to the date. It is not uncommon to try and find a new way of celebrating that date. Talk to your family or friends about celebrating in a different way.

- Don't feel guilty about having fun. Your loved one would not want it any other way.

THE FOUR TASKS OF MOURNING  
(Adapted from Worden's Four Tasks of Mourning)

1. To accept the reality of the loss.

Long after our mind accepts the fact of death, our body and imagination go on living as if death did not occur. We may hear the voice of the person who has died, feel their touch, or see them in a familiar chair. We may buy special foods for them, or mentally recite stories to share with them, minimizing the meaning of the loss (They were not that good of husband or father), or fantasies of reunion in this life. Each time we fail to find them, we acknowledge a little more deeply the fact that they are gone and the hole that they have left in our lives. This slow one-day-at-a-time work of acknowledging their absence is the first task of mourning.

2. To work through the pain of grief.

Enduring waves of sorrow, explosions of rage, stretches of bleak despair, restless searching, and questioning why are included in this second challenge of mourning. When a person has been an important part of our lives for many years, the pain of losing them cannot be experienced all at once. Even if our feelings for them were a mixture of love and hate, the years together leave their mark. We may feel the pain of losing not only what we had, but what we never had as well. You may have a sense of spiritual crisis, change in sleeping and eating patterns, intense thoughts of your loved one in their life or their death that interferes with your concentration on other tasks. Working through this pain is the second task of mourning.

3. Adjust to an environment in which the deceased is missing.

In a very real sense, we face a new and unfamiliar world. We need to adjust, just as an immigrant needs to adjust to the language and culture of their new country. We need to develop and get used to new routines, learn to handle new responsibilities, learn to interact with other people in a new way. This process of discovering what this new world is like and learning how to cope with it is the third task of mourning.

4. Reinvesting in Life and Living While Maintaining a Bond to your Loved One.

No, we do not want to stop loving the person who has died, or cherishing the memories. Yet, the fourth task of mourning is to find a place for the deceased that will not impair our ability to give and receive love here on earth. We remain connected to our loved one through our recollections and

memorializing acts, and are able to simultaneously invest in life. Whether or not we enter into similar relationships (such as remarrying, or having more children), our challenge is to discover people, activities, and causes to invest in, to experience love, and to satisfy our need to be loved. Opening up again to loving and being loved is the fourth challenge of mourning.

## GOALS OF GRIEF COUNSELING/OR GROUPS

- GOAL 1: To increase the reality of the loss
- GOAL 2: To help the bereaved deal with both expressed and latent affect.
- GOAL 3: To help the bereaved overcome various impediments and to readjustment after the loss.
- GOAL 4: To encourage the bereaved to say an appropriate good-bye and to feel comfortable reinvesting in life.

## JESUS POINT OF VIEW

If you're in the process of grieving, you know that it isn't a simple experience. Grief is a tumultuous time of conflicting emotions. Knowing that the experience is identifiable doesn't do much to help us through the dark times when a terrible loss leaves us feeling as though a piece of our very soul has been ripped away.

Jesus is our best role model for combining faith and grief. When He saw Mary and Martha in anguish over the death of their beloved brother Lazarus, He wept and groaned. Although Jesus knew He was about to raise Lazarus from the dead, He still felt, and expressed, the depth of human sorrow. We can take comfort in knowing that Jesus has experienced all of our pain, including loss, rejection, betrayal, and dying.

As our Savior and Redeemer, He took all our sins to the cross and forgives us when we ask. As our Good Shepherd, He leads us safely through "the valley of the shadow of death" (Psalm 23:4). Remember, a shadow indicates that there is a light on the other side.

Deep faith in Christ does not prevent grief, but it infuses grief with hope. For Christians, death is a passageway to eternal life (John 5:24). Paul said in 1 Thessalonians 4:13, "we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope."

Well-meaning people may say, "God took your loved one away," but that can cause people, especially children, to be angry at God. 1 Corinthians 15:26, says "death is our last enemy. Therefore, we can say, "Death took our loved one away from us, but Jesus took our loved one away from death."

If we don't know whether our loved one believed in Jesus, we must simply trust God. The Bible says, "The Lord...is long-suffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should have eternal life." (2 Peter 3:9). We do not know what happens in a person's final moments between life and death, but God does.

The Holy Spirit can give us God's peace, even in the midst of suffering (John 14:26). Philippians 4:6-7 tells us, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." The peace of God does not come from our circumstances, but from drawing close to Him.

The Eucharist is of central importance in our spiritual lives, it is also of central importance in our celebration of Christian death. At the last supper, on the night before He died for us, our Savior transformed bread and wine into His own body and blood which He offered to His Father as a sacrifice acceptable to Him. This is the

Eucharistic sacrifice He asked us to celebrate as a continuing memorial of His death and resurrection. It is a pledge of future glory which sustains us all through life and is especially significant as we face the death of someone dear to us.

#### SCRIPTURES OF REFLECTION:

Matthew 5:4 – Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

Psalm 31:9 – Be merciful to me, O Lord, for I am in distress; my eyes grown weak with sorrow, my soul and my body with grief.

Revelation 21:4 – He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”

Psalm 34:18 – The Lord is close to the broken hearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.

Isaiah 53:4 – Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows.

1 Thessalonians 4:14 – We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.

Romans 14:9 – For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living.

Ecclesiastes 3:1-4 – There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven.

## Types of Loss

## TYPES OF LOSS

It is often difficult for the family and friends of an individual, who has recently experienced the loss of a loved one (whether through death or through divorce), to understand why the grieving process lasts so long. Family and friends want to see their loved one be happy and “get on with life.” It is therefore, important to be aware of the many levels of loss. This awareness may help the grieving person, as well as others who care about this individual, be more patient and more gentle during the time (often at least two to five years) of grieving. Now is the time to draw upon friends, family, church, and community. Share your feelings, talk about your loss. Let others be there for you.

1. **LOSS OF A LOVED ONE:** this level of loss is very obvious; consequently, many think it is the only level of loss.
2. **LOSS OF A LARGE CHUNK OF SELF:** the part of self that was given to the other person in love; at death or divorce, this part of self seems to be violently wrenched from one’s being.
3. **LOSS OF FRIENDSHIPS:** some of your married friends may drift away now that you have less in common, but this is natural. Just as your single friends had less in common with you when you got married, or your childless couples when you started having children. You may need to make the adjustment to find new friends.
4. **LOSS OF IDENTITY:** often times, an individual identified self by the “roles of service” used in a relationship; when the other is no longer present and the role no longer played, the individual often loses the feeling of wholeness.
5. **LOSS OF CONFIDENCE:** because a grieving person doesn’t recognize his or her personal wholeness, the feeling of inadequacy – of not being able to do anything right – is often very strong.
6. **LOSS OF CHOSEN LIFESTYLE:** divorce/death FORCE a person to begin a new way of life; in marrying, a person chooses to be married. Even when, for very good reasons, a person must leave a spouse, the person does NOT willingly choose to be single again.
7. **LOSS OF SECURITY:** because of the new life style, the grieving person doesn’t know what will happen next or how he or she will emotionally react or respond to what will happen.
8. **LOSS OF FEELING SAFE:** the grieving person feels exposed to the cold winds of life and feels very vulnerable.

## I NOT ONLY LOST MY LOVED ONE BUT.....

Part of what makes grief so difficult is that the death of a loved one is often accompanied by other losses in your life. Those losses are often called “secondary losses” because parts of your life will now be missing or changed.

Some secondary losses may include:

- Loss of Income – This may be challenging and significant. Meeting with a financial advisor that you trust may be helpful.
- Activities – Losing your golf partner; going to restaurants or movies.
- Caregiving – The loss of being a caregiver is significant. How do I now fill my time?
- House/Community – “I can’t maintain my residence. What do I do?”

These losses can take you by surprise so it’s important to know that you will have them. Allow yourself to grieve those losses too.

## LOSS OF A CHILD

It has been said that few marriages survive the death of a child. Coming to grips with the death of a child is not easy because it seems so unfair. It goes against the natural order of things – parents naturally expect to die before their children. For parents, the death raises a series of agonizing “What if?” questions that can haunt you for years or even decades.

Feelings of intense guilt are common following the death of a child. It is common for parents, especially mothers, to feel responsible for the death, and even feeling that they should have died instead. The intense grief following the loss of a child means that it is critical for parents to share their feelings with each other frequently and seek counseling if they need it.

## MISCARRIAGES, STILLBIRTHS, AND ABORTIONS

These losses are often minimized by other people. It is still a major loss and going through the grieving process is the same. In abortion, there may be a sense of guilt that also needs to be addressed.

## LOSS OF A PARENT

Although most people have a long time to prepare for the death of a parent, it doesn't make the loss any easier. Losing a parent means losing the person who's known you all your life. This person has been a constant in your life amid all the other changes you go through.

Because the loss is expected, you may find others are not as sympathetic to your grieving. You may hear reassurances such as “Be thankful. She had a long full life,” or “This is for the best. He was in so much pain.” Such well-intentioned condolences don't make your grief any easier to bear.

The loss of a parent also tends to bring any unresolved family issues to the surface. The death and its aftermath bring family members together to confront their grief – and sometimes one another. These additional stresses and strains only add to the grief caused by the loss of a parent.

*It is said that with the loss of a parent, you lose your past, and with the loss of a child you lose your future.:*

## LOSS OF A SIBLING

This can also be a loss of a “best friend” as you have grown up with this person and your relationship is part of your identity. There are deep and emotional ties to this loss not matter our age at time of death.

## ACCIDENTAL DEATH

Accidental deaths are harsh with additional emotions. Why??? A question that often goes not get answered. This grief can also be compounded by not being able to say goodbye or the constant thought of pain inflicted on your loved one.

## A SUICIDE

A suicide leaves loved ones wondering why and can also raise feelings of guilt or anger. The grief is also compounded by the sometimes stigma and judgment surrounding suicide.

## A MURDER

When a murder, it causes the loved ones to feel powerless and vulnerable while being deeply angered at the assailant. Feelings of rage and revenge are common, frightening, and frustrating. Sometimes the slow criminal justice system can prolong and exacerbate the grief.

First Month

## TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF

**EAT WELL** – Even if it's the furthest thing from your mind, take the time to eat nutritious sit-down meals, avoid processed and fast-food, and pay attention to your daily food intake to make sure you are not over or under-eating. This is more difficult than you think, especially if you have lost a spouse and are eating alone.

**EXERCISE AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY** – Grief is exhausting, so it's important to stay in shape. Exercise doesn't have to be grueling. A short walk or stretches so you can move your body will do. Find an exercise routine that suits you – such as yoga, bike riding, walking, or swimming – you can do it with a friend or alone but do it regularly. Exercising is also an easy way to build new friendships and support.

**WRITE** – Keep a journal or continue your diary. Write a letter to your departed loved one. Some people find it easier to express their emotions on paper.

**SLEEP WELL** – Immediately after a loss your sleep habits may be disrupted. This is normal. A regular sleep routine is important. Even if your sleep is disrupted, try to establish a set bedtime and take naps whenever you feel tired. Resting your body will help with your emotional recovery.

**INDULGE YOURSELF** – Be good to yourself. Don't feel guilty about treating yourself to a movie, a visit to a day spa, or just curling up with a good book. Not every moment needs to be heavy with meaning and seriousness – give yourself permission to laugh, enjoy life, and do something frivolous and distracting.

**TAKE STEPS TO START NEW ACTIVITIES** – Give yourself time to grieve and then, when you feel you have the energy, make a conscious effort to branch out with new activities. Take courses. Volunteer for a cause you believe in. Find a new job, which can lead to new friends. It's easy to procrastinate about this step because you are preoccupied with your loss and often lack energy. So don't just talk about it – make a wish list of new activities that you would like to participate in, then research how you can get involved and track your progress.

## WHAT WE NEED DURING GRIEF

**TIME:** Time alone and time with others whom you trust and who will listen when you need to talk. Months and sometimes years of time to feel and understand the feelings that go along with loss.

**CARING:** Try to allow yourself to accept the expressions of caring from others even though they may be uneasy and awkward. Helping a friend or relative also suffering the same loss may bring a feeling of closeness with that person.

**SECURITY:** Try to reduce or find help for financial or other stresses in your life. Allow yourself to be close to those you trust. Getting back into a routine helps. Do things at your own pace.

**PERMISSION TO BACKSLIDE:** Sometimes after a period of feeling good, we find ourselves back in the old feelings of extreme sadness, despair, or anger. This is the nature of grief, up and down, and it may happen over and over for a time. It happens because, as humans, we cannot take in all of the pain and the meaning of death at once so we let it in a little at a time.

**REST, RELAXATION, EXERCISE, NOURISHMENT, and DIVERSION:** You may need extra amounts of things you didn't need before. Hot baths, afternoon naps, a trip, a project or "cause" to work for to help others – any of these may give you a lift. Grief is an emotionally and physically exhausting process. You need to replenish yourself. Follow what feels healing to you and what connects you to the people you love.

**HOPE:** You may find hope and comfort from those who have experienced a similar loss. Knowing what helped them, and realizing that they have recovered and that time does help, may give you hope that sometime in the future your grief will be less raw and painful.

**SMALL PLEASURES:** Do not underestimate the healing effects of small pleasures. Sunsets, a walk on the beach, a favorite food – all are small steps toward regaining your pleasure of life itself.

**GOALS:** For a while, it will seem that much of life is without meaning. At times like these, small goals are helpful. Something to look forward to, like playing tennis with a friend next week, a movie tomorrow night, or a trip next month helps you get through the time in the immediate future. Living one day at a time is the rule of thumb. At first, don't be surprised if your enjoyment of these things isn't the same – this is normal. As time passes, you may want to work on longer-range goals to give some structure and direction to your life; guidance or counseling can be helpful.

**BE AWARE OF DRUG AND ALCOHOL USE:** The use of drugs, alcohol, and even prescription medications may prolong and delay the necessary process of grieving. We cannot prevent or cure grief. The only way out is through the grief process.

**PERMISSION TO CHANGE YOUR MIND:** Grieving can shake you up inside. You may find yourself having trouble concentrating, constantly reevaluating your priorities, or never being quite sure what you want. Let people know in advance that you may decide to change your plans.

Adapted from “Self-Help Correspondence for the Bereaved” by Mary Ann Harter

## THE FIVE STAGES OF GRIEVING

There is no set order in experiencing these five states. You can go through them as listed or in any random order. Sometimes previous stages may be revisited. The time each griever spends in each stage varies tremendously. Some people might find themselves in one particular stage of grief one day and on to the next stage soon after. Some grievors might spend weeks or months in one stage. And the line between stages is rarely clear-cut. It's common to enter a new stage even as you continue to experience the lingering effects of the current stage. The feelings of "two steps" forward, one step back" is often expressed in terms of good days and bad days; the path to recovery is rarely straightforward and direct, but with time and work, you will reach your destination.

### DENIAL

A person's refusal to admit the reality of the impending loss – denial – is nature's way of softening the immediate shock of death. You know your loved one has died or is dying, but some part of you may not yet be able to accept the reality of the situation. It is not unusual to fantasize that the deceased will suddenly walk through the door. Denial also manifests itself in behavior such as leaving bedrooms unchanged or making plans for the future that include the loved one, just as in the past. Because these self-reassurances bring a temporary peace to the griever, many people in this stage wrongly believe they are not grieving at all but instead have accepted the reality of the situation.

### ANGER

Anger is normal. Your anger may be directed at the deceased for leaving, at the doctors and nurses for not doing enough to save his or her life, or at siblings or other relatives for overlooking symptoms or warning signs. People of faith may be angry at God for allowing so much pain and anguish, which in turn can lead you to question your faith or even the goodness of life. You also might be envious of others' health or happiness and you may express feelings of unfairness and rage at being "cheated".

### GUILT

Few survivors escape some feeling of guilt or regret. "I should have done more," and "I didn't tell them I loved them enough," are typical sentiments during this stage. For many survivors, a lingering feeling of regret or guilt derives from unresolved issues or conflicts. As Harriet Beecher Stowe wrote, "The bitterest tears shed over graves are for words left unsaid and deeds left undone."

## DEPRESSION/SADNESS

This stage is the most well-known and effective stage of healing for the griever. In this stage, the person admits the reality of the loss and grieves for the deceased. Many people report it is not until this stage that they first cry out of genuine sadness for the loss. It is normal to feel alone, abandoned, and afraid, and you may feel a complete lack of energy to do even the simplest daily routines.

## ACCEPTANCE

Although acceptance is the final stage of grieving, the passage of time alone will not necessarily get you there. To achieve acceptance, you must acknowledge that the death is forever and find a new way to live without your loved one. Acceptance does not mean forgetting but only that you can build a new life, filled with friends and activities, both old and new. Any unfinished business is taken care of in this stage and the griever ends up at peace with herself or himself and the world.

With catastrophic loss, such as with the death of a spouse, you might spend years in a particular stage. Dr. Kubler-Ross found that two to three years of grieving is not uncommon.

The methods of grieving also vary between the genders and among different cultures. Some people might find they enter and exit one or more of the stages very quickly or skip a stage altogether. Men tend to focus their grief inward more than women, so they tend to spend longer in the early stages of grief. Some cultures acknowledge losses such as death for a period of weeks and months rather than the usual few days of public mourning most Americans are used to. This wide variance of reactions to the grieving process means that there is no right or wrong way to grieve.

## WHAT PEOPLE SAY AND DO

Some people are very caring and supportive and other seem to be cold, impatient, and uncaring. Hopefully most friends will fall into the first category but you may find that some fall into the second.

People May Pull Away – They may be afraid of your pain and afraid they may say something to hurt you. Some people are afraid of even thinking about death and this can remind them of their own mortality. People don't know what to say so they avoid you entirely.

People May Say the Wrong Thing –

- “I know how you feel” (but they don't)
- “It is for the best” (whose best)
- “Time heals all wounds”
- “At least he didn't suffer”
- “Life goes on”
- “You're young – you can remarry (or have more children)”
- “It's a blessing”
- “Only the good die young”
- “God wanted more flowers in his garden”
- “He is with God” (we want them with us)

Phrases like this make you feel lonely, misunderstood, and sometimes angry, but remember most people have good intentions. They try to say something that will fix your pain and they cannot.

People May Try to Rush You Through Grief – Those that have not experienced grief put a timeline on grief. People may say “It's time to move on with your life” or maybe even “get over it!” Maya Angelo once said, “When you know better you do better”. Until these people go through their own death of a loved one they cannot do better. This is the moment where you need to forgive and realize what is being said is out of ignorance.

The good news is that, even though some people will disappoint you, others will understand what you need at this time. This is where a support group can be very beneficial in your healing.

## MANIFESTATIONS OF “NORMAL” GRIEF

### FEELINGS

- Sadness
- Anger
- Guilt
- Anxiety/Fear
- Loneliness
- Fatigue
- Helplessness/Despair
- Shock
- Emancipation
- Relief
- Numbness

### COGNITIONS

- Disbelief
- Confusion
- Preoccupation
- Hallucinations

### BEHAVIORS

- Sleep Disturbances
- Appetite Disturbances
- Absent-Mindedness
- Social Withdrawal
- Dreams of Deceased
- Avoidance
- Searching/Seeking
- Calling (audibly and subvocally)
- Sighing
- Crying
- Restless Agitation
- Forgetfulness
- Over activity
- Visiting associated places
- Carrying significant objects
- Wearing jewelry/clothing

### PHYSICAL SENSATIONS

- Hollowness in the stomach
  - Tightness in the chest
  - Tightness in the throat
  - Oversensitivity to noise
- A sense of depersonalization: “I walk down the street and nothing seems real, including myself.”
  - Feeling short of breath
- Weakness/Tension in the muscles
  - Lack of energy
  - Dry mouth
  - Headache
  - Nausea

## PERSONAL GRIEVING EXPERIENCES

1. The first death I can remember was the death of: \_\_\_\_\_
2. I was age: \_\_\_\_\_
3. The feelings I remember I had at the time were: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. The first funeral (wake or other ritual service) I ever attended was for: \_\_\_\_\_
5. I was age: \_\_\_\_\_
6. The thing I most remember about that experience is: \_\_\_\_\_
7. My most recent loss by death was (person, time, circumstance): \_\_\_\_\_
8. I coped with the loss by: \_\_\_\_\_
9. The most difficult death for me was the death of: \_\_\_\_\_
10. It was difficult because: \_\_\_\_\_
11. Of the important people who are now living, the most difficult death for me would be the death of: \_\_\_\_\_
12. It would be the most difficult because: \_\_\_\_\_
13. My primary style of coping with loss is: \_\_\_\_\_
14. I know my own grief is resolved when: \_\_\_\_\_
15. It is appropriate for me to share my own experiences of grief with \_\_\_\_\_ when: \_\_\_\_\_

## RESOURCE LIST

Will also provide at time of funeral mass arrangements

- Death Certificates – Often times your mortuary or crematorium will order the death certificates as a service. They will provide you with the cost. Order enough to cover your needs. Some will require an original and others just a copy.
  - NOTES:
  
- Social Security – Notify the Social Security Administration at (800) 772-1212 ([www.ssa.gov](http://www.ssa.gov)) for Social Security survivor benefits and death benefits.
  - NOTES:
  
- Lawyer/Estate Executor – Contact your lawyer, trust administrator, or the executor of the estate.
  - Name \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone # \_\_\_\_\_
  - NOTES:
  
- Life Insurance – If the deceased had current life insurance, contact the company or companies. Be prepared to provide policy numbers and a copy of the death certificate.
  - Name \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone # \_\_\_\_\_
  - NOTES:
  
- Other Insurance Programs – If the deceased was a participant in any of the VA insurance programs (SGLI, VGLI, NSLI, USGLI, etc.) call (800) 669-8477 and report the death. Have policy numbers available if possible.
  - NOTES:
  
- Civil Service – If the deceased was a member of the Civil Service or Federal Employee retirement system (CSRS or FERS), notify the Office of Personnel Management at (724) 794-2005. For inquiries about Civil Service Survivor Benefit Plan coverage and Casualty and Federal Group Life Insurance, call (888) 767-6738.
  - NOTES:

- Private Pensions – If the deceased also qualified for a retirement plan or pension from a private-sector employer, notify that employer or pension plan administrator.
  - Name \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone # \_\_\_\_\_
  - NOTES:
  
- Investments – Notify any financial institution, including banks, brokerage houses, and investment firms, that has an individual or joint account in the name of the deceased. Remember to locate all stocks, bonds, and securities. Have account numbers available, if known.
  - Name \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone # \_\_\_\_\_
  - NOTES:
  
- Credit card companies or other charge accounts. Have account numbers available, if know.
  - Name \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone # \_\_\_\_\_
  - NOTES:  
  - Name \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone # \_\_\_\_\_
  - NOTES:  
  - Name \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone # \_\_\_\_\_
  - NOTES:
  
- Accountant/CPA or tax preparer
  - Name \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone # \_\_\_\_\_
  - NOTES:

- Other insurance companies (health, property, automobile, mortgage, Medigap, insurance supplements, etc.) Have policy numbers on hand if known.
  - Name \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone # \_\_\_\_\_
  - NOTES:
  
- State Department of Motor Vehicles
  - NOTES:
  
- City, county, and state property offices
  - NOTES:
  
- Any fraternal or professional organizations such as AARP, the American Legion, the Disabled American Veterans, and the VFW.
  - AARP: [www.aarp.org](http://www.aarp.org)
  - American Legion: [www.legion.org](http://www.legion.org)
  - Disabled American Veterans: [www.dav.org](http://www.dav.org)
  - VFW: [www.vfw.org](http://www.vfw.org)
  
  - NOTES:
  
- Retired Military – Notify the nearest military installation personnel office to renew family member ID cards.
  - Name \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone # \_\_\_\_\_
  - NOTES:

- Automobile leasing agent
  - Name \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone# \_\_\_\_\_
  - NOTES:

Other Contact Information:

- Internal Revenue Service – (800) 829-1040 or [www.irs.gov](http://www.irs.gov)
- Medicare – (800) 633-4227 or [www.medicare.gov](http://www.medicare.gov)
- VA Burial Benefits – (800) 827-1000 or [www.cem.va.gov](http://www.cem.va.gov)

Month Three

## WHEN YOU REALIZE YOUR LOSS IS REAL

Did my loved one really die? It's a strange question but there comes a point if grief (and it's different for everyone) when the depth of the loss finally sinks in.

When our loss first occurs we are in shock. We are in great pain and it is typically hard to accept. Shock is necessary because it shields us from some of the pain, but as much as we try, we cannot change what has happened. With that reality comes pain.

There are so many emotions that come from this pain you might feel like you have hit "rock bottom". But you can and will survive. The pain will not always be this intense. It will come and go and you may feel like you are on a roller coaster. Ultimately, you will have more highs than lows and the ache in your heart will gradually lessen as you work your way through grief.

Remember, your pain is a reality, and you must work through those feelings to heal. Talking to friend, writing in a journal, reading meditations on loss, joining a support group, or private counseling all help.

## YOUR GRIEF IS THE WORST GRIEF

You cannot compare grief. Don't try to determine if someone else's loss is worse than your loss. It's not. The worst kind of grief is your own. Simply experience your own grief without measuring it against anyone else's. Even those grieving the same person will grieve differently with different issues, with different feelings, at different times. Comparing is not helpful (and often harmful) to your healing. Grieve your own way in your own time.

## BE HONEST (not necessarily strong)

We often sugar coat our answer to “how are you doing.” When people who know you will ask, be honest. If you are having a bad day let people know. We think we should be strong and bottle up our feelings. This can deprive you of support from true friends who really care. It also gives a false perception to those who might also be grieving. “She is so strong and I should be too”. Being strong is allowing yourself to grieve and sharing that with those closest to you.

## WHY AM I FEELING THIS?

What do you do with those intense feelings of grief?

Accept them – They are not right or wrong. Sometimes you feel angry at God or jealous that someone else still has their spouse or child. These are real emotions and it doesn’t mean you are a bad person. You are not the first to experience this nor will you be the last.

Have Courage – to feel the pain or fear. When you let your feelings out feel them fully – they will lose their power. If you hold them in they will tighten their grip on you.

## Exercises

- Write to your loved one who died. It may be painful but also healing. Share your letter with a friend or Support Group. Keep your letter and read it a year later.
- If you don’t already talk to your loved one who died you will not be considered crazy by starting. It is often helpful to express your feeling out loud.
- Find a friend who will listen or join a Support Group who understands your grief.
- Cry – Nothing is wrong with crying, even crying a lot. Whether it’s 3 weeks, 3 months, or 3 years tears are healthy and release tension and sadness. Don’t try to short-circuit your crying. Your tears are cleaning and healthy. Find a place where you feel safe. Some people find the cemetery and others feel the shower is a good place. Don’t feel ashamed to cry in front of others. Each cry lets a little more pain out of your system.

*By embracing the pain, by looking into it and beyond it, I have come to see God’s presence in even the worst situations.*

*Joseph Cardinal Bernardin “The Gift of Peace*

WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN - WHERE YOU ARE GOING



## Month Six

CHECKLIST FOR GRIEF WORK  
(Six Months)

Yes/No

1. \_\_\_\_\_ I have given myself permission to grieve?
2. \_\_\_\_\_ I am not burying the grief sadness but am trying to express it?
3. \_\_\_\_\_ I now have physical and emotional energy from morning until night?
4. \_\_\_\_\_ I do not have feelings of depression. (grief is different than depression)
5. \_\_\_\_\_ I am able to concentrate for longer periods of time?
6. \_\_\_\_\_ I no longer feel like crying most of the time?
7. \_\_\_\_\_ I have overcome the feeling that I am in a daze?
8. \_\_\_\_\_ My emotions and moods are back in my control?
9. \_\_\_\_\_ I have no trouble going to sleep and sleeping all night?
10. \_\_\_\_\_ I rarely sigh now?
11. \_\_\_\_\_ I notice my body weight has stabilized?
12. \_\_\_\_\_ My appetite is good?
13. \_\_\_\_\_ I no longer feel mechanical in my daily living habits?
14. \_\_\_\_\_ I have outgrown the feeling that I am losing my mind?
15. \_\_\_\_\_ I have stopped talking continuously about my crisis?
16. \_\_\_\_\_ I have no thought of attempting suicide?
17. \_\_\_\_\_ I have no more lump in my throat?
18. \_\_\_\_\_ My stomach feels relaxed and at ease?
19. \_\_\_\_\_ I am beginning to be emotionally close to people again?
20. \_\_\_\_\_ I feel emotionally alive rather than emotionally dead?

- 21. \_\_\_\_ I understand the grief process?
- 22. \_\_\_\_ I have identified the dimensions and feelings of the grief process?
- 23. \_\_\_\_ I have identified any past grief that I have not addressed and worked through?
- 24. \_\_\_\_ I have identified what I need to grieve (person, relationship, future, lost dreams, pet, etc.)?
- 25. \_\_\_\_ I am comfortable talking about my feelings of grief with a friend?
- 26. \_\_\_\_ I have written a letter of good-bye to the loss I am experiencing now?

From: "Rebuilding: When Your Relationship Ends" by Bruce Fisher (Page 69)

## TASKS OF “LETTING GO”

1. Accept the Reality
  - a. Focus – heighten awareness
  - b. Walk into talk
  - c. Journal
  - d. Symbolize
  - e. Ritualize
  
2. “Work Through”
  - a. The pain
  - b. Anxiety
  - c. Frustration
  - d. Abandonment
  - e. All emotions
  
3. DON’T: Minimize, Avoid, Deny, Repress, Pretend, or Ignore
  
4. DO: Surface “buried” feelings/issues, explore beliefs/motivations, analyze expectations, discover contributing factors, influences, causes
  
5. Adjust to an environment/life in which the person is no longer present
  
6. Emotionally relocate the person in your life (they are still with us but live at a different address)
  - a. Requires
    - i. Saying Good-Bye
    - ii. Giving up hopes, plans, expectations, desires
    - iii. Reviewing the good/positive and the bad/negative
    - iv. Exploring own history, influences, needs, fantasies, expectations, motivations, communication, awareness, interactions

## WHEN TO CONSIDER PRIVATE COUNSELING/THERAPY OR DOCTORS VISIT

- Persistent debilitating feelings of helplessness, inadequacy, insecurity, depression, guilt, anger, anxiety, panic attacks, phobias.
- Persistent social withdrawal/dysfunction by losing track of conversation, day-dreaming, inappropriate verbal or behavioral responses or gestures.
- Inability to maintain self, home office/business, pets, auto, finances, wardrobe on a daily basis.
- Non-participation in clubs, professional societies, church, hobbies, family or neighborhood gatherings.
- Lack of pleasure/interest in previously engaging involvements, pastimes, leisure activities.
- Inhibited, insufficient, delayed, aborted grief or inappropriate euphoria.
- Reactivation of previous grief by a minor loss, another's grief, a film, play, tv show, etc.
- Excessive grief (duration and/or intensity is very individual)
- Persistent inability to concentrate or make decisions.
- Inability to dispose of possessions of deceased or alter environment.
- Development of physical symptoms (chest pain, headaches, weight gain or loss).
- Persistent abnormal sleep disturbances (night terrors, inability to fall asleep, premature waking, increased sleeping).
- Uncharacteristic, maladaptive or delinquent behaviors such as drinking, fighting, shop-lifting, hyper-sensitivity, hyperactivity, promiscuity, vandalism, poor grades. truancy, traffic violations, absence from work, gambling).
- Radical lifestyle changes or plans.

## Month Nine

## SIGNS YOU'RE GETTING BETTER

- Memories are now a source of comfort – paging through a photo album or hearing a song you both loved brings a smile rather than tears.
- You can enjoy time alone without needing companionship to distract you from feeling sad and lonely.
- You can reach out to others going through a similar situation – compassion for others helps your own healing process.
- You start looking forward to the holidays or other occasions that used to evoke painful memories.
- You have stopped feeling exhausted all the time.
- You no longer need activity to keep you distracted from thinking about your loved one – you enjoy relaxing and doing nothing.
- Sometime can pass between reflections about your loved one.
- You can enjoy a good laugh without feeling guilty.
- You begin to make long-term plans for the future – you begin to move away from a one-day-at-a-time approach.
- You are less sensitive to comments people make – you begin to understand that life goes on and others are not as affected by the death as you are.
- You can get lost in a good book or movie. You look forward to getting up each morning.
- You begin to accept things as they are and stop trying to return to the way things were.
- You no longer have to make daily or weekly trips to the cemetery.
- You can establish and maintain old friendships and develop new relationships.
- The role that your loved one played in your life begins to be filled in by yourself and others.
- You feel confident again – the awkwardness or weakness you felt before is replaced with a new sense of self.
- You find small blessings to be grateful for – you start to appreciate the good things you still have in your life.

## HEALING FRIENDS

The key to talking through your grief is finding people who will let you talk and help you heal.

You can sometimes help a friend become a “healing friend” by what you say to them. A friend of mine just the other day told me about a friend who wanted to help but kept interrupting her with cheerful clichés. Finally my friend told her friend, “Here’s what I need from you. Let me be upset without trying to cheer me up or fix things. Let me talk while you mostly remain quiet and listen. Let me cry. Give me a hug. You don’t have to say or do a whole lot. Mostly just be here and care.” Her friend got the point and became a “healing friend” from then on. My grieving friend offered a wonderful gift to her friend – the opportunity to care in a most helpful way, a gift the friend can return many times over.

Healing people can connect us to God love in a powerful way. The place we see Jesus face-to-face on earth today is in each other. When people are Here for us, Empathetic, Accepting, and Listening, God works through them to bring us the healing we need. Not only do we receive the love and acceptance these people have to offer, but we also experience Jesus’ love and acceptance through them.

You need to talk, and you need healing friends to talk to. Keep a close lookout for them. Seek them out. Tell your friends how they can care. When you find healing friends, talk and talk – and then talk some more. They will help you to heal and to feel human. Through them you will experience the healing power of God’s love.

*“Some friends play at friendship but a true friend sticks closer than one’s nearest kin.”*

*Proverbs 18:24*

## DEALING WITH ANGER

Most people expect to feel sad about their loss, but the emotion many people say surprised them the most was anger. Not everyone experiences anger during grief, but many do in some way and at some point. Feeling angry is quite common. After all, someone you love has been taken away. Who wouldn't be angry about that!

Anger likes to hide – be buried or covered up – so sometimes we're not even aware it's there. But anger that's stuffed away won't remain hidden forever. When it breaks out it may catch you by surprise.

### POSSIBLE TARGETS OF ANGER

Knowing whom or what you're angry with will help you deal with your anger. I've learned that grieving people can be angry at many different people or things.

- Death itself or the illness that took the one we love
- Those we might feel are responsible for the death
- Medical personnel or hospitals
- Family members and friends for what they said or did, especially if we think they let us or our loved on down
- Circumstances, such as job responsibilities or airline delays, that may have prevented us from spending time with our loved one before he or she died.
- People who seem to be free of suffering

Perhaps the three most common targets of anger are: our loved one who died, ourselves, and God. These are also the areas of anger that can cause us the most heartache, guilt, confusion, and anxiety.

### ANGER AT THE ONE WHO DIED – ALL ARE NORMAL!

“I am angry that you left me”; “why did you do this to me?”; “why didn't you go to the doctor sooner”; “why were you driving so fast?”.

### ANGER AT OURSELVES – ALL ARE NORMAL!

“I had a big argument with my son the day he was killed.” A husband became angry with himself for not taking his wife to the hospital sooner. Guilt can quickly turn to anger at ourselves and add to the pain we feel.

### ANGER AT GOD – ALL ARE NORMAL!

It's very common to become angry at God, “How could God let this happen?” “Why wasn't God There?” Why does God allow suffering? People are often afraid of this anger because they're afraid God will punish them. They worry that others will think they're awful for feeling this way. So people hold in their anger toward God or are ashamed to tell anyone

about it. It's perfectly okay to be angry with God. In the entire universe, God is the only one able to absorb your anger. Scream at God if you'd like. That's what many of the writers of the Psalms in the Bible did. No matter how hard you beat against God's chest, God's loving arms are waiting to embrace you.

#### HOW TO DEAL WITH YOUR ANGER

Anger is a tough emotion to deal with, but you can learn to deal with your anger so that it doesn't tie you up in knots. If you have anger lurking below the surface, bring it out of hiding and let yourself feel your anger. When you do that, it will begin to lose its grip on you. Getting good and angry can be good for you and help you grieve. A great book that addresses this issue is C.S. Lewis' book "A Grief Observed"

#### RECOGNIZE YOUR ANGER

Name your anger, even if it doesn't make sense. Almost everyone gets angry at someone or something at some point in their grief. Recognizing your anger and the target of your anger is an important first step in rendering it harmless

#### ACCEPT YOUR ANGER

Anger is a normal response to loss. Too often we're told that anger is always wrong or even sinful. Anger is a very natural human emotion, just like happiness, fear, or excitement. Accept your anger even if it seems irrational. I know a man whose mother died of a heart attack while his parents were on vacation in Montana. For a long he was angry at the entire state of Montana. He knew perfectly well this made no sense at all but that didn't stop him from feeling angry.

#### EXPRESS YOUR ANGER

Unexpressed anger can build up until it erupts. Anger that we keep bottled up can even cause health problems. Find ways to let your anger out so that it won't injure you or others. One good way is by talking or writing about your anger. Another good way is by sharing your anger with a "Healing Friend" or someone who can handle it like a support group.

Recognizing, accepting, and expressing anger can be a very healing experience. I know a man who took a lot of verbal abuse from his father growing up. When his father died, the man had a difficult time dealing with his pent-up anger. Finally, he wrote a long letter to his father describing all his painful memories and angry feelings. He went to his father's grave and read the letter aloud. He felt self-conscious at first, but soon his emotions took over and he was able to get his anger out. As he knelt at his father's grave, the tears flowed, and years of hurt and anger were washed away.

Adapted from the Stephen's Ministries "Finding Hope and Healing"

## COPING WITH LONELINESS

The loneliness of grief can be overwhelming. Some say the worst part is coming home to an empty house. The silence can be frightening to some and hearing every creak or every branch brushing against the house can be scary. Many turn on the television or music to fill the silence, sometimes not even paying attention to the show or song.

If you lived with your loved one, you face constant reminders of their absence – an empty bed, a vacant room a piece of mail with their name, or an empty place at the table. Those that didn't live with their loved one may also face loneliness – no one to call with exciting news, no call or card on a birthday, no one to visit, or an empty feeling on Mother's or Father's Day.

Our loved one is gone. We miss their company and we miss the conversations. We miss their presence. We miss all the little things they brought to our lives.

Loneliness is part of the grieving process.

We may experience withdrawal from other people. We do this for many reasons. Maybe we were hurt by some of the things other people said to us. We may think that we are not good company anymore. We may feel as though no one else understands us. We may think that we are betraying our loved one if we do anything social or fun. Or we simply might not have the energy to socialize with anyone right now.

During grief we do need some time for solitude. We need time when we can rest, reflect on our loss, and regain some emotional energy. But we also need the company of other people because isolation can lead to despair. Here are some ideas for connecting with other people.

- Accept an invitation to lunch from a friend.
- Call someone you know who may also have experienced a loss
- Attend a Bereavement Support group
- Write or call someone who sent you a meaningful card or letter.
- Attend a class or participate in an activity you may have some interest in but never had time to attend
- Volunteer at the church

Taking steps like these will be easier for some people and harder for others. If you're not very outgoing, look for small ways you can begin to connect with other people. Don't push yourself into things you are not ready to do, but at the same time don't hold yourself back. Find little ways you can gradually begin to build or renew relationships with other people.

## KNOWING WHEN

People who are in grief have so many issues connected with “knowing when”.

- When do I empty the closets?
- When do I clear out my child’s room?
- When do I stop wearing my wedding ring?
- When do I get rid of my loved one’s possessions?
- When do I sell the family home?
- When do I start dating again?

The list can go on and on. Depending on the relationship and circumstances, each person’s list of questions is unique, but the common struggle over knowing when to do something can stir up significant emotions.

You may have no choice in some matters such as legal or financial, but many decisions are under your control. If you lived with the person who died or are responsible for the estate, you may be required to deal with more of these issues. Ask for support from a friend or family member. Just having someone to bounce ideas off of can give you great comfort in making decisions.

If the decision you face is significant and irreversible (giving away a prized possession or selling your home) it is best to err on the side of caution and wait until you are sure about your decision. If the action can easily be reversed such as moving pictures then do it. You can always return it to its original place.

When is the right time to make these decisions? It is when it feels right for you. Everyone is different and no one can tell you when the time is right. Decide when you feel ready and not when someone else tells you it’s time or decides for you. If a friend has cleaned the closet out in one month it doesn’t mean you need to follow in their footsteps.

Talking about your decision may help. A friend or support group may be able to give you ideas of taking these steps. This may help you decide what to do and when to do it. Talking it out can also help after you’ve had to make a tough decision, especially if you felt pressured by circumstances or other people. Talking will help you get out any painful feelings that remain from the action you had to take.

“Knowing when” is a very personal decision. Only you will know when the time is right. You can ask other people and listen to what they have to say, but most of all ask yourself and listen to your heart.

I Can't Believe It's Been One Year.....

And Beyond

*It's been a year since you lost your loved one. There may have been times when you thought you would not survive, but you have, and the wound from your loss will continue to heal. Your journey will continue. One year is not a magic number and you are instantly healed. Continue to do the things you have learned from this handbook and what you have learned from others.*

*May God continue to provide you with comfort and strength*

## THE FIRST ANNIVERSARY

For many, the one year anniversary is very difficult. It's common to begin feeling anxious beforehand – in anticipation. Some people worry so much about the “upcoming date” that they work through much of their pain ahead of time. When the day finally arrives it may not be as bad as you fear. For others, however, the anniversary is still very difficult.

Anniversaries can be both painful and healing. Going through memory albums, watching videos from the Funeral Mass, or reading sympathy cards to very normal. You may cry, you may laugh, or you may do both.

Here are some ideas for handling the one-year anniversary.

- Talk to someone about your loved one on that day. Ask them to listen.
- Reach out to others that are grieving your loved one. Open up your hearts to one another.
- Do something special to remember your loved one on that day.
  - Light a candle (see Memory Candle ceremony in Resources)
  - Go to Mass
  - Release balloons
  - Plant a tree
  - Place flowers on your table
  - Tell stories
  - Write a poem
  - A small celebration (that can be ongoing)
  - Set up a tradition

Not everyone has a difficult time with the first anniversary. Sometimes it is relatively easy in comparison to other special dates – birthday, wedding anniversary, etc. If you are not anxious as the anniversary approaches, one of the best things you to do is to tell others close to you what you need and want on that day.

The anniversary can be a difficult day but not necessary a bad day. The day can bring back painful feelings, but the day can also bring healing as you find ways to remember your loved one.

## THE SECOND YEAR.....

Many people think that the mourning period for a loved one is one year. That is a myth. In reality, nothing magical happens at the end of one year. Most people take two to three years to do all their grieving. Some take more and some take less because one size does not fit all. Your personal grief time is all that matters and do not compare yourself to others.

### WHAT TO EXPECT THE SECOND YEAR

Much depends on the circumstances of your loss and how much time you have actually spend grieving and how much support you have received. Based on experience of those in this situation this is what they have shared:

- Continue upsurges of grief – Waves of painful feelings will come and go. Don't be surprised if you get knocked off your feet unexpectedly. As time goes on these waves will be further and further apart.
- Special days can still be tough. There is also “a year of the seconds.” We expect painful feelings the first year but are surprised when they come the second. Don't say, “Shouldn't I be over this by now?” Those days will get better.
- You may receive pressure for your grief to be over from “well intentioned friends”. This is a mistake on their part and probably have not gone through a loss themselves. Don't make the mistake of placing pressure on yourself. We have said throughout this book that all grief is different and individual. Always keep this in mind. Remember that you can't grieve according to someone else's expectations or schedule. Accept your own personal timetable.
- Don't think because you are in your second year that you must map out the remainder of your life. Living day by day (sometimes moment by moment) is very acceptable. Ask God for Grace this day and this day only. Unless you need to act of issues of health, finance, or safety reasons, it is acceptable to put off long-term decisions and take things one day at a time.
- Take care of yourself. As mentioned earlier in the handbook, it is quite easy to neglect your basic needs so be sure to get adequate food, sleep, and exercise. If you have not done so already, visit your doctor.
- Do not give up your Support Group just because you are in your second year. It is a mistake not to be around “Healing Friends”.
- If you are not in a Support Group at this time it is not too late. If you tried one and gave up on it, consider trying again. Sometimes the timing may not be right, or perhaps it just wasn't the right group for you. Each group has its own personality and focus so you may need to try a few different groups before finding one that really fits your needs. It is well worth the search.

- If you cannot find a group that fits your needs it is worth talking to a counselor, priest, physician, psychologist, or other professional caregiver. Asking for help is not a sign of weakness.
- Don't look at how far you need to go in your recovery but how far you have come. As times you may feel you have not come far in your recovery but this is a long journey full of ups and downs. It is unknown territory. Be patient with yourself .
- If you have been keeping a journal this is the time to read through it. You will see from your entries how far you have come.

## REBUILDING YOUR LIFE

One day you will find yourself laughing and realize you have turned a corner. You have found a glimpse of joy. Celebrate! Once that moment arrives you will realize that perhaps you will find happiness again.

Sooner or later most grieving people reach a point when they begin to spend less energy on simply surviving the loss and begin spending more time rebuilding their life. It will be a different life than before. Rebuilding doesn't mean your life goes back to exactly what it was before – life can never be the same. Rebuilding means picking up the pieces and putting them together again, but probably in a very different way, because significant piece of your life, as you knew it, is missing and cannot be replaced.

Your rebuilding usually begins slowly. There is no specific timeframe for this to take place. It will depend on so many variables. You may be approaching that transition now, or perhaps it's still somewhere down the road. Either way is perfectly fine. You will know the right time for you.

**REMEMBER:** Love doesn't die. Only people do. Your connection to your loved one will continue and will be in your rebuilding process. You will just be connecting in a different way.

### Ways to Connect During Your Rebuilding Stage:

- Start a “memory box” with important times with your loved one.
- Place in your box all the quotes your loved one used.
- Make a cookbook for your mother's and grandmother's recipes
- Think about what your loved one would do or say in specific situations.
- Pass on your loved one's values to your children or grandchildren.
- When you are kneeling in pray, feel your child kneeling next to you.
- Give a special gift that belonged to your loved one. Giving your wife's pearls to a granddaughter for her wedding.

Rebuilding does not mean completely letting go. God has blessed us with thoughts, memories, and a love more powerful than death itself. Through these gifts our loved one can forever remain a cherished part of our life.

## CHANGE CAN BE A CHALLENGE

Change can be difficult. Change means leaving the comfort zone behind and stepping into the unknown. Who like change? Not many. One of the most challenging aspects of losing a loved one is that the loss creates change in the way you live or maybe the way you think. A big part of your journey will be how well you adjust to those changes.

Some changes you experience will be temporary. Things you may have already dealt with such as “the fog of grief” or the hollow pit in your stomach. We know those eventually life. You may be unable to concentrate and remember things that you never forgot. The loss may have left a huge hole that affects how you live your daily life, and you are unable to completely return to the former way of doing things. For a spouse, you may lose part of your “identity” as you know it and that “identity” will need to change.

The loss of a loved one can change the dynamics of the entire family. The remaining family members may need to find a new balance as well as take on responsibilities previously handled by the person who died. You may find yourself as the new family patriarch or matriarch.

Also, you may face the challenge of finding new outlets for the energy and emotions you used to invest in your loved one. While you can't replace your loved one, the love, attention, and energy you gave will need a new place to go. This may mean deepening current relationships or making new friends. It may mean finding new hobbies, or possibly a new career or calling in life. The more you had invested in your loved one, the more you will need to reinvest.

Your friends or relatives may not understand the changes in you and may not understand it is impossible for you to be the same person. They may even want to have you change in a “different” way.

Change should come in “baby steps” otherwise you may find it to be overwhelming. Try the gradual approach. Saying a simple hello to the people you pass by while walking the dog may be a change for you. After the hello may come a short conversation and before you know it you may have a new best friend.

Remember, as bad as your loss was, the changes that result don't have to be all bad. Often growth can occur as a result. As you encounter changes in your life, tackle them in your own way and in your own time. Nobody knows you better than you, so don't let anyone rush you to change or pressure you to become a certain way.

## DATING – UGH!

The decision to move on and find a new partner after the death of a beloved spouse is emotionally wrenching and deeply personal. It's a choice many of us will face. You think that the void he or she left could never be filled. But can it?

Some people, even after a happy marriage, start looking for a new mate fairly soon. Others choose to remain single. There is no right or wrong decision. The idea of becoming attached and losing someone again terrify some. Others are so spent from caring for a dying spouse that they have no energy or desire to get to know someone new. And when you're grieving, you don't exactly feel adventurous, outgoing, charming, or even want to date.

Wouldn't the loved one you grieve for want you to find happiness in a new relationship when you're ready?

Your friends and family will have an opinion. Loved ones who would never think of criticizing your appearance or your financial decisions have no problem weighing in on whether you are dating too soon or not soon enough. Many children, regardless of age, worry that if you find a new partner, you won't have enough time for them. They have already lost one parent and don't want to lose another.

“Men lose more when a spouse dies”, says Dr. Camille Wortman, professor of psychology at Stony Brook University in New York, whose research focuses on grief. Wives often watch over their husbands' health and tend to take care of more of the household chores. Because men often have fewer friends than women, wives are typically their husbands' main social and emotional outlet.

## FINDING YOUR OWN WAY

Wondering if it's time to move on after losing your spouse? Here are some points to keep in mind from Terri Orbuch, a social psychologist from University of Michigan.

- There is no set timeline for moving on. Some people need a lot of time to grieve. Others are ready to date fairly soon. Only you will know what is right for you.
- As yourself: “Am I ready to trust somebody again?” and “Am I ready to care about another partner?”

- Your children may not be thrilled that you want to meet someone. But if you're happy and balanced, you'll be a better role model and a happier person overall. Talk to your children, no matter their age. Tell them why you are dating. Explain no one will ever replace their other parent. Reassure them that you will be safe and cautious.
- You don't have to let go of your positive feelings about your spouse and marriage. You aren't looking to replace that person. Your spouse was unique. If you take that as a given, you can move forward.
- Cope with the loss itself. Talk with others, Join a support group. Join a special activity group to meet others and do things that matter to you.
- Stay hopeful and optimistic. Remember, you can and will find love again. You are never too old. Don't let yourself feel pressured to make decisions you aren't comfortable with.
- We change our values and needs as time goes on, and especially after the loss of a spouse. Identify your needs and desires, and what values are important to you. Identify what you want in a new mate.
- Think about what you liked and disliked in your first partner to help define what you want. If you know what you are looking for, you'll be more likely to find that person.

There are many studies about dating after losing a spouse. They show many widows are very wary of losing their freedom and having to care for another husband while men who were more emotionally reliant on their partners tend to start dating sooner. It is different for everyone.

Getting involved in activities of interest allows you to meet more people and can open the door for dating. Even if it doesn't lead to dating, it allows you to gain relationships that can be rewarding. Most importantly open your heart for new adventures.

Starting to date again is an important part of the healing process and can be very rewarding, yet it takes courage. When you're ready to date, celebrate your courage and the new possibilities as you begin this next chapter in your life.

## HEALING THROUGH HELPING

From the experienced:

“I have empathy – I know how much it can hurt now that I have experienced a loss myself.”

“I am much more willing to be with people who have had a loss and share in their pain.”

“I now know the value of just being there for someone. I know I don’t have to try to fix things or explain it all away. I can just be there for them and listen and care.”

Nearly every person who has experienced grief has talked about becoming more caring and compassionate with others who experience losses. They know what it’s like to lose a loved one and are much more sensitive to other people’s needs.

Often, when people give of themselves, they also receive. When someone reaches out and cares for another, the person who is doing the caring benefits almost as much as the person who is receiving the care. This is one of the reasons Bereavement Support groups are so successful. People come to receive care for themselves, but end up caring for others with their own compassionate actions.

Reaching out to others may take time. Look into your heart and when you are ready, reach out to help someone else who may be in need. How you do it will vary. Sending a card, writing a letter, or some other action depends on what is comfortable for you. It doesn’t have to be big. Small ways are often cherished more than a big effort.

*“For it is in giving that we receive”  
St. Francis of Assisi*

## Death and Children

## TALKING TO YOUR CHILDREN OR GRANDCHILDREN ABOUT DEATH

We should be open and honest with children when they lose someone they love. Do not force them to attend the funeral if they do not want to, but encourage them to remember the loved one by participating in some ritual or observance such as lighting a candle. Hold family meetings at least once a week and allow each child to talk about his or her feelings.

When explaining death to a child, don't shade the truth. Common euphemisms such as "grandpa's gone to sleep," or "your grandmother has gone on a long trip," can create not only confusion, but fear in children. Referring to death as "sleep," or example, can make children fear bedtime.

Children often feel guilty about the death, as though they were somehow responsible. And they may become fixated on death, fearful that the loss will lead to other people they love dying. Therefore, it is very important that you provide reassurance, love, and support to allay their fears and help them with their loss.

## WAYS TO HELP CHILDREN WHEN SOMEONE CLOSE DIES

- When a death is expected, prepare children beforehand. This should be done by the person or people closest to them. Let them know gradually what is happening, for example “the doctors and nurses are trying very hard to make Grandma better but they don’t think she will get better”. Allow them to ask questions in their own time. They may ask directly if the person is going to die. Answer truthfully as possible. Help them express their worries and fears. You could say something like, “we are all very sad that Grandma is dying. Sometimes we feel angry and scared”. This may help children talk about what they feel. Explain to them that it is nobody’s fault that the person is dying, that it is because he/she is very sick. Most importantly, reassure them that you love them and will be there to care for them.
- When death is sudden children should learn about it as soon as possible and should be told by a parent or someone very close to them.
- Over simplified or inappropriate explanations will increase the child’s fear and uncertainty about what is happening. Explanations such as “Grandma was sick and has gone to heaven” or “Grandma went to sleep and died” may lead to confusion. The child will need an explanation that there are different types of sickness, e.g. “little” and “big sicknesses, otherwise the child may be fearful that all illness results in death. When telling a child about a death the words “dead” or “died” should be used. Phrases such as “has gone away” or “passed away” may be confusing for young children who can be very literal. They may be under the impression that the person is alive elsewhere or will return. Death should not be equated with sleep. Such explanations may result in the child being fearful of bedtime or of going to sleep.
- Keep explanations short, simple and truthful. They may need to be repeated many times. It might be useful for example to say to the younger child “Grandma was very sick. It was a big sickness, not like having a cold. The doctors and nurses could not make her better even though they tried very hard. Grandma’s body could not work anymore so she died. Being dead doesn’t hurt”. Your explanation will also depend on the questions asked by the child.
- It is best to tell all the children together. Gather them close to you and use language they can understand. Afterwards, it may help to spend some time alone with each child.
- It is difficult to predict how children will react to bad news. They may cry, ask questions matter of factly, be silent or run out of the room. The most important

thing is to be honest and open and to listen to what the child is saying. In this way, the child will know that the death is an open subject and that they can ask questions and talk about worries as they arise.

- Involving children in the services and funeral may help them feel included and make the death more real for them. Make sure each child is looked after by a specific person who knows him/her. Children can feel very isolated and forgotten at funerals. It is important to give children choices and not to force them to do anything they are uncomfortable doing. Prepare children beforehand should they wish to see the body of the person who has died or attend the funeral.
- Children may ask the same questions many times. Although this may be difficult for you, it is their way of trying to understand what has happened.
- Maintain usual routines as much as possible. The death of someone close, especially a parent, may leave children feeling insecure and worried about who will take care of them. Comfort them and reassure them that you love them and will take care of them.
- Children learn from adults how to deal with death. Encourage the child to talk about feelings and share with them that you are also sad. It is okay to cry in front of children but explain why you are upset, as they can feel very helpless when they see an adult upset.
- Children can be very aware of their parent's grief and for this reason may not talk about the person who has died in case they cause further upset. If this is happening you should talk to them about the person so that they can express their feelings.
- Children sometimes feel that they did something which caused the death. Explain the cause of death and that it had nothing to do with things they said or did. Perhaps, when a child's brother or sister has died, the child may have said such things as "I wish you were dead" and may now feel that this in some way caused the death.
- Children may display regressive behavior. It is common for children to react to stress by reverting to an earlier stage of development, for example, thumb sucking and bed-wetting. Children may also become aggressive following a death. This may have to do with pent up feelings of anger and frustration. Most of these are temporary. However, if you become worried about your child's behavior, consult your doctor, counselor, or child's teacher.

- Returning to school may be particularly difficult for a child. They may be worried about who has been told and what they should say to other children. Help them to prepare a simple and honest explanation of what has happened.
- Sometimes children are teased or can be hurt by insensitive remarks. Children's concentration in school is usually affected because of the many changes with which they are coping. Talk with your child regularly and keep in touch with their teachers.

#### UNDER TWO YEARS

It is generally accepted that children younger than two years do not understand the meaning of death. However, even very young children can display anxiety and become upset when someone close to them suddenly disappears. Babies and toddlers may be cranky and clingy during this time. Toddlers may become upset or subdued and uninterested in their surroundings. The most important thing for very young children is to ensure continuity in their usual daily routines and the presence of one main caregiver. Plenty of hugs, comfort and familiar toys are also important.

#### TWO TO FIVE YEARS

Young children sense when adults are upset. Your first instinct will probably be to protect young children from sadness. However, not telling them about what has happened or sending them away to neighbors or friends without explanation will cause confusion and insecurity.

Children in this age group cannot fully understand the permanence of death. They may confuse death with sleeping or being away and may search for the missing person. They may repeatedly ask, for example "when is Daddy coming home" even though you have explained that when someone dies they are gone forever. You will need to be consistent in your answers to questions about the death. Children of this age need to hear the same information over and over again.

Younger children may think that they did something to cause the person to die or that the death is a punishment for something they did wrong. Children may also have worries about who will care for them, particularly when a parent has died. They may have fears that other members of their family may also die. Short, straightforward explanations of what caused the death, what happens at the funeral and reassurance about who will take care of them will usually help. Young children don't always have the words to explain what they are feeling and may become clingy, withdrawn or express upset through tantrums or destructive behavior. Being open with your children and maintain the usual rules and routines will help during this time of upheaval and upset.

## FIVE TO TWELVE YEARS

From about the age of five, children gradually begin to understand more about death. As they get older they can understand that death is permanent and that the dead person does not move, talk, breathe, eat and so on. They may be particularly interested in the biological aspect of death, for example, what caused the death and what happens when the person is buried or cremated.

As children this age can have very active imaginations, it is important to be truthful and explain the cause of death in terms they can understand. As with younger children, the words “dead” and “died” should be used and phrases such as “has gone away” or “passed away” should be avoided. When explaining burial and cremation, emphasize that it is only the body which is put in the ground or is burnt and that the person cannot feel anything.

Stories about the person who has died, going to a special place or saying special prayers are all concrete ways of helping children grieve. It is often through these types of activities and through play rather than by talking that children express grief.

As with younger children, five to twelve years old may be withdrawn, aggressive or prone to tantrums following the death of someone close. They may also have disturbing dreams or nightmares. They may complain of headaches or tummy aches or is anxious about leaving you, for example when going to school. Clear explanations about the cause of death and involvement in funeral and remembrance services can help children adjust to the death. You will also help by maintaining normal routines and rules and reassuring them that they are still loved and will be cared for by you.

## TWELVE TO EIGHTEEN

The adolescent’s experience of grief, especially as they get older, is similar to that of adults. A sense of desertion, feelings of anger, loneliness, yearning for the dead person and physical symptoms are all common. However their grief will be influenced by the many challenges of adolescence such as becoming independent from their family and establishing their own identity. They may have had a stormy relationship with the person who has died and following the death may experience regret and guilt. They need reassurance that these feelings are common to many people who are bereaved.

Some adolescents cope with death by suppressing their emotions and may appear withdrawn. It is common for adolescents to seek support outside the family. They may also be reluctant to talk to you about the death in case this upsets you. Give them opportunities to talk. Although they may appear grown up, this is a time of insecurity and they need extra support and reassurance. It is important to include them in decisions and respect their feelings and wishes. Try not to overburden them with the difficulties you are facing or expect them to take on too many responsibilities. If you are concerned about your adolescent’s reactions and behavior following a death, contact your doctor, youth minister, and school counselor.

## The Holidays!

GETTING THROUGH THE HOLIDAYS  
(Bereavement Magazine, November/December 1989)

**PLAN AHEAD:** Bereaved individuals who experience the most difficulty with the holiday season are those who have given little thought to the challenges they will encounter. Consider ahead of time what may be expected of you, both socially and emotionally, as well as your own preferences.

**ACCEPT YOUR LIMITATIONS:** Grief consumes most of your available energy no matter what the season. The holidays place additional demands on your time and emotions. Plan to lower your expectations to accommodate current needs.

**MAKE CHANGES:** Your circumstances have changed. Expect to make necessary alterations in holiday plans to accommodate those changes. Consider changing your surroundings, rituals, and/or traditions to diminish stress. Serve notice on family and friends that this year things may be somewhat different.

**TRIM DOWN TO ESSENTIALS:** Limit social and family commitments to suit your available energy. Shop early or use catalog/online shopping. Re-evaluate priorities and forego unnecessary activities and obligations.

**ASK FOR AND ACCEPT HELP:** Accept offers for assistance with holiday shopping, decorating, cleaning, cooking, etc. Chances are loved ones are looking for ways to lessen your burden at this time of year. Allow those who care about you to offer their support in concrete ways.

**INFORM OTHERS OF YOUR NEEDS:** Give family and friends the tools they need to help you through the holidays. Be specific with them about your preferences and desires, and keep them up-to-date when those needs change.

**BUILD IN FLEXIBILITY:** Learn to “play it by ear.” There is no concrete formula for learning to deal with loss. You are the foremost authority on what is best for you, and your needs may legitimately change from day to day. Accept the fluctuations that must occur when walking in unknown territory, and learn to take each moment as it comes.

**GIVE YOURSELF PERMISSION “TO BE”:** Allow breathing space and expect fluctuation in mood and perspective. The bereaved work overtime. Not only is life more complicated, but all energy is siphoned into mental and emotional resolution. Grieving is nature’s way of healing the mind and heart from the greatest injury of all. Allow yourself the privilege of limping until your wounds have healed and you can learn to run again.

## PERSONAL CEREMONIES FOR THE HOLIDAYS

Because holidays are times of tradition and ceremony, you may want to create special new ceremonies that honor your loss and help you to bridge the gap between the past holidays you shared with your loved one and the future holidays you now face without your loved one.

- Visiting the cemetery alone or with others to place flowers, pray, write in a journal, or reminisce.
- Visiting a place that was especially loved by your loved one.
- Planting a special bush or tree in memory of your loved one.
- Placing a special ornament on the Christmas tree in memory of your loved one.
- Donating money to a charity or cause that has special meaning to your loved one.
- Giving a significant book, piece of jewelry, or article of clothing that belonged to your loved one to some special person.
- Lighting a candle to include your loved one in the holiday activities.
- Reminiscing during the holidays about your loved one's life and the holiday they shared together.
- Gathering photographs, mementos, and written memories to make a book of remembrances of experiences shared with your loved one.
- Holidays are times for sharing and celebrating with friends and relatives. Perhaps your personal ceremonies can help you to celebrate and share the memory of your loved one, as you acknowledge the changes and challenges in your life. One mother buys a poinsettia for her home as a living memorial to her son for the holiday season; another always orders a bouquet of orange daisies.
- Holiday shopping is definitely easier if you make the entire list out ahead of time. Then, when one of those "good days" comes along, you can get your shopping done quickly and with less confusion.
- If you thought of sending holiday cards is simply too exhausting, yet you discover that some of your friends are still unaware of your loved ones death, try this suggestion: Enclose the simple little funeral service card inside the already bought greeting card. People have found the response from friends to be most rewarding.

### REMEMBER TO

- Take one day at a time
- Be realistic. Recognize that we need to set limits and do those things which are meaningful to ourselves and our families.
- Know that whatever you choose to do this year, you may decide to handle things differently next year. Growth and change go hand in hand.
- And don't forget the comforting discovery that many people have confirmed; the realization that when the "Special Day" arrives, it is truly not as bad, by any means, as we anticipated.

## MY PERSONAL HOLIDAY PLAN

I predict that the most difficult parts of the holiday season for me will be:

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

The most difficult people to be with might be:

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

My grief triggers will be:

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

Words that would be helpful for me to hear would be:

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

My support people (those who can hear my grief) are:

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

Last year (or years) prior to my loss I celebrated holidays  
by: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

This year I want to include the following traditions in my  
holiday: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

I would like the following people to be with  
me: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

I do not want to spend my holiday with the following  
people: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

The most difficult words (words I do not consider supportive) might  
be: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

If someone says words that are not supportive I  
will: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

(examples: say “those words do not help me.” I will tell them how I need  
someone who can listen without advice. Then call a supportive friend who can  
hear my grief and anger, etc.)

Some things that might help me when I am feeling intense pain  
are: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## Resources

## BOOKS

- Grief Observed by C.S. Lewis
- On Death & Dying by Elizabeth Kubler-Ross
- Flying Without Wings by Arnold R. Beisser 1989 (very inspirational for people in depression)
- Embracing Life – Learning to Grow Through Love & Loss by Dorothy Corkille Briggs 1985 (a must read per Sister Joan)
- The Grieving Time – A Year’s Recovery From Loss by Harmony Books, New York 1985
- Living When A Loved One Has Died by Beacon Press 1977
- Questions and Answers of Death and Dying by MacMillan Publishing Company 1969
- Feel The Fear and Do It Anyway by Susan Jeffers 1987 (don’t miss this one! Per Sister Joan)
- Write Grief – How To Transform Loss With Writing, Published McCormick and Schilling (highly recommended by Sister Joan)
- More Than Surviving: Caring for Yourself While You Grieve by Kelly Osmont
- Living With Loss by Ronald Ramsay and Rene Noorbergen 1981
- Living Through Personal Crisis by Ann Kaiser Stearns 1984 (excellent per Sister Joan)
- Good Grief by Granger Westberg 1988 (highly recommended by Sister Joan)
- Healing After Loss: Daily Meditations for Working Through Grief by Martha Whitmore Hickman
- Calling Jesus: Enjoying Peace in His Presence by Sarah Young (a daily devotional) 2004

## CHILDREN'S BOOKS

- Saying Goodbye Activity Book by Jim Boulden 1989
- When Someone Very Special Dies by Marge Heegaard
- It's Hard to Say Goodbye by Ursula Hull

St. Elizabeth Seton library has a section on "Grief" with both books and CD's.

## OTHER RESOURCES

GriefShare Website: [griefshare.com](http://griefshare.com) – Provides daily readings sent to your email address.

## Memory Candles

“As we light these five candles in your honor,  
We light one for our sadness,  
One for our memories,  
One for our determination,  
One for our love,  
And one for our hope.

We light this candle for our SADNESS.  
The pain of losing you is intense,  
And the grief we feel is often hard to handle.  
We want you to know that we miss you so much.

We light this candle for our MEMORIES.  
There is so much we remember-your smile, your laugh-  
The good times and the bad ones too-  
When we were angry and when we were happy-  
All those times that never could have been lived with anyone but you.  
We want you to know that we will always remember.

We light this candle for our DETERMINATION.  
Knowing you has brought us strength.  
We are changed because of you.  
Your life has made a difference in our lives.  
We want you to know that we will take the energy of your living  
To help us move forward in our own lives.

We light this candle for our LOVE.  
The specialness that we shared with you can never be replaced.  
During Christmas and family gatherings  
Our love for you will shine as brightly as this candle.  
We will pass that love on to others, and as we do,  
Our hearts will smile because of you.  
We want you to know that we will always love you.

We light this candle for our HOPE.  
Our healing candle remains a light when others fail,  
Guiding us through the darkness of grief and sorrow;  
It slows on the Lord’s resurrection,  
Renewing the promise of rebirth,  
Lighting a path beyond the grave.  
Hope endures.