



A Guide Through Grief

Bereavement resources for navigating loss

Dear Friend,

I am deeply sorry for your loss. During this difficult time, I want to express my deepest condolences and remind you that you are not alone in your grief. Grief is a deeply personal journey and there is no right or wrong way to experience it. Your feelings, however they may unfold, are valid, and it's important to allow yourself the time and space to process them in your own way. There is no way around grief but through it. While it can be overwhelming, remember that with time, you will find your own path to healing.

This guide has been created as a resource to provide comfort, understanding, and support as you navigate your own grief. We hope it serves as a gentle companion, offering words and reflections that bring solace.

Please take each moment at your own pace, and reach out for support when you need it.

With deepest sympathy,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Beth Myers", with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Bethany Myers, MDiv, MSW, LICSW, APHSW-C
Social Work and Spiritual Care Lead & Bereavement Coordinator
MGH Division of Palliative Care and Geriatric Medicine
Mghpcgmbereavement@mggh.org

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*Here is a link to the MGH website for Palliative Care and Geriatric Medicine, which has a section called Resources and Reading List. There you will find additional reading materials and articles to review:

<https://www.massgeneral.org/medicine/palliative-care-and-geriatric-medicine/resources>

Section 1: Understanding Grief

What is Grief?

Grief is a natural reaction to loss and is very individual. There is no universal timetable to grief and there is no proper way to grieve. Many people experience grief in waves or intermittent periods of strong emotion rather than a linear process moving from one phase to the next. Although grief at times can feel incredibly painful, it is important for you to remember that what you are experiencing is most likely a normal and expected response to the loss of a significant person in your life.

Grief can happen after any kind of loss—whether the relationship was close or distant, peaceful or strained. Your feelings may range from sadness and anger to relief or even numbness. These emotions are part of the grieving process, and none of them are “wrong” or “abnormal.” Whether the death followed a long illness or was sudden, grief is your mind and body’s way of processing the changes and adjusting to a world where that person is no longer physically present.

What You Might Feel

In the early stages of grief, it’s common to feel numb or disconnected from reality. You may find yourself going through the motions, unsure of how to face the day, or feeling as though you’re moving through life in a fog. This sense of detachment is often a natural defense mechanism, allowing you time to process the emotional weight of the loss at a pace that feels manageable. As time goes on, emotions like sadness, anger, confusion, guilt, or even relief may emerge. These feelings can come and go unexpectedly. If your relationship with the person was complicated or distant, you may experience a mix of conflicting emotions, and that’s okay. It’s normal to have moments of anger, regret, or even relief—these feelings don’t diminish the importance of the person’s role in your life, nor do they mean you are grieving in the “wrong” way.

You may also feel physical symptoms of grief, such as tiredness, upset stomach, trouble sleeping, or a lack of appetite. Your body is processing the emotional pain, and it’s important to care for yourself physically as well as emotionally during this time.

Grief Is Different For Everyone

There is no timeline for grief. Some people may begin to feel some relief within a few months, while others may experience grief for much longer. You may find that grief comes in waves—sometimes you may feel okay, and other times, the sadness may feel overwhelming

again. This ebb and flow of emotions is common, and it's important to give yourself the time and space to experience it all without judgment.

While grief may feel isolating, it's essential to remember that you're not alone in this. If you find that you're struggling, don't hesitate to reach out for support. Grieving takes time, and it's okay to ask for help from friends, family, or a counselor.

Be Kind to Yourself

As you navigate your grief, be gentle with yourself. It's normal to feel uncertain, confused, or even disconnected. It's okay to not have all the answers right now, and it's okay to not know exactly what comes next. You don't need to figure it all out at once.

Remember that grief isn't a process with a clear beginning, middle, and end. It's a journey that unfolds over time. Some days will be easier than others, and that's okay. Whatever you're feeling in this moment is part of your process, and there is no right or wrong way to grieve.

Emotional, Physical, Mental and Spiritual Responses to Grief

Grief is an experience that affects every part of us— emotionally, physically, mentally, and spiritually. It's common for people to feel overwhelmed by the changes in their body and mind when dealing with a loss. Understanding these responses can help you better navigate your grief and give yourself permission to feel what you're feeling without judgment.

Emotional Responses to Grief

The emotional side of grief is often the hardest to navigate, as it can feel intense and unpredictable. You might experience a wide range of emotions that change throughout the day. Common emotional responses include:

- Sadness
- Anger
- Guilt
- Relief
- Loneliness or Isolation
- Anxiety or Fear
- Numbness or Shock

Physical Responses to Grief

Grief doesn't just affect your emotions—your body can respond in many ways too. It's important to recognize that these physical changes are a natural part of grief. Common physical responses include:

- Fatigue or Exhaustion
- Sleep Disturbances

- Changes in Appetite
- Headache
- Stomach Issues
- Muscle Tension
- Shortness of Breath
- Tightness in Chest

Mental Responses to Grief

Grief can cause your mind to feel foggy or distracted, and your thoughts may be full of confusion or anxiety. Common mental responses include:

- Difficulty Concentrating
- Memory Problems
- Racing Thoughts
- Feelings of Confusion
- Intrusive Thoughts

Spiritual Responses To Grief

Grief can affect your relationship to your faith or spirituality. Common spiritual responses include:

- Finding comfort or strength through engagement in spiritual practices such as prayer, ritual, reading, meditation, music, journaling, or attending religious services
- Existential questions - considering profound questions regarding meaning and purpose
- Reconsidering or questioning beliefs and exploration of different spiritual traditions

You may experience some of these emotional, physical, mental and spiritual responses, and you may experience others not mentioned here. By recognizing that grief affects every part of you, you can better understand what you're going through. Allow yourself to feel your emotions and give yourself space to grieve in your own time.

Myths vs. Realities About Grief

Grief is a deeply personal experience, and yet, it is often misunderstood. There are many common myths about grief that can create confusion or even feelings of isolation for those who are mourning. These myths can sometimes make the journey of loss feel even more overwhelming, as they set unrealistic expectations or offer oversimplified views of what it means to grieve.

This section explores some of the most widespread myths about grief and replaces them with the realities that those who grieve may experience. Understanding the truths behind these myths will hopefully provide you with more clarity, compassion, and comfort as you navigate

your own grief journey. Remember, there is no right or wrong way to grieve, and each path is unique.

1. Myth: "You should be 'over' your grief after a certain period."

Reality: Grief takes as long as it takes; it is not something you "get over." Rather, you learn to live with it. Grief is about "moving forward" rather than "moving on." Moving forward means learning to live with the loss and carrying their memory with you, rather than leaving it behind.

2. Myth: "Grief is a sign of weakness."

Reality: Grieving is a natural, human response to loss, not a sign of weakness. It shows how deeply you loved and cared for the person who has died. Grief takes strength, and allowing yourself to grieve is a powerful act of self-compassion. It's okay to feel vulnerable, and it's okay to ask for help when you need it.

3. Myth: "You should avoid talking about the person who died to avoid upsetting yourself or others."

Reality: Talking about your loved one and sharing memories can actually help you process your grief. It can be comforting to remember them, and it can provide an opportunity for others to support you in your journey. It is okay to remind people to name the person you lost. It can bring healing for others to have that permission.

4. Myth: If you don't cry, you're not grieving properly.

Reality: Not everyone expresses grief through tears. Some people may feel their grief more deeply through other emotions or may find their grief expressed in different ways, such as anger or withdrawal. The absence of tears does not mean a lack of grief—it's just another way your experience is unfolding.

5. Myth: "Grief follows a set timeline."

Reality: Grief is not a process with a fixed start and end date. There is no specific timeline for how long grief lasts, and everyone's journey is different. Some may feel better in a few months, while others may grieve for years. The intensity of grief can ebb and flow, and it's normal to experience waves of emotions over time. It's important to be patient with yourself and allow yourself to grieve in your own time, without pressure to "move on" or "get over it."

Section 2: Tasks that May be Required After a Death

Loss can be one of the most devastating and stressful events in a person's life. The immediate days following the death will be focused on the funeral or memorial service arrangements. Soon after, however, various financial and legal issues must be addressed. If you've never been in this position before, you may feel lost and unsure of what to do. While the tasks may look different depending on your circumstances, the following is a list of tasks that are likely to need attention:

Checklist:

- ☐ If they were a veteran, you may be able to get assistance with the funeral, burial plot, or other benefits. For information on benefits, call the Veterans Administration at 800-827-1000. You will need a copy of your loved one's discharge papers. In most cases these can be obtained from Massachusetts Military War Records, 508-422-1993.
- ☐ Obtain around 10 copies of the Death Certificate from your funeral director. You can also get additional ones later online at: www.vitalrec.com/ma.html or at your city hall.
- ☐ Notify Social Security of death. You should give the funeral home the deceased person's Social Security number if you want them to make the report. If you would like to report the death or apply for benefits, call 1-800-772-1213 or visit a local office.
- ☐ Contact the health insurance company or employer regarding ending coverage for the deceased, while continuing coverage for any dependents if needed.
- ☐ Contact the insurance company about all life insurance policies. You will need to provide the policy number, a certified copy of the death certificate and fill out a claim form. If the deceased was listed as the beneficiary on any policy, arrange to have the name removed.
- ☐ Contact the deceased's employer to inquire about 401(k), pension, or other company benefits. You will need a certified copy of the death certificate for each claim.

- ☐ Contact all banks and credit card companies at which the deceased had an open account and close those accounts. You will need to provide a certified copy of the death certificate to close the account.
- ☐ Seek the advice of an accountant or tax advisor about filing the deceased's tax return for the year of the death. Keep monthly bank statements on all individual and joint accounts that show the account balance on the day of death, since you will need this information for the estate tax return.
- ☐ Arrange any joint bank accounts. If the deceased's estate is in trust, check with the Trust Department of Customer Service at the bank.
- ☐ Notify the Registry of Motor Vehicles to cancel the deceased driver's license. If the deceased owned a car, transfer the automobile title into your name at the Secretary of State's Office, or if the estate is probated, through Probate Court.
- ☐ Arrange to change stocks and bonds into your name. Your bank or stockbroker will have the forms.
- ☐ Make sure that important bills, such as mortgage payments, continue to be paid.
- ☐ Manage digital legacy of the deceased. Options include memorializing their social media and email accounts, closing their accounts or leaving them open.

Documents you may need to complete the tasks:

- Death Certificates (~10 certified copies)
- Social Security Card
- Marriage Certificate
- Birth Certificate
- Birth Certificate for each child, if applicable
- Insurance Policies
- Deed and Titles to Property
- Stock Certificates
- Bank Books
- Honorable Discharge Papers for a Veteran and/or VA Claim Number
- Recent Income Tax Forms and W-2 Forms
- Automobile Title and Registration Papers
- Loan and Installment Payment Books and/or Contracts

Adapted 2002 Massachusetts Commission on End of Life Care. <https://www.mass.gov/lists/end-of-life-care>

Section 3: Strategies for Coping with Grief and Loss

Losing someone is an incredibly difficult experience, and the pain can feel unmanageable at times. Grief can be a long and overwhelming journey, but it's important to remember that you don't have to face it alone. While healing takes time, there are practical steps you can take to help you navigate this challenging period and gradually regain a sense of stability. The following strategies are designed to support you through the toughest moments, offering ways to cope with grief and find small moments of relief as you move forward.

Bereavement Strategies

1. Give Yourself Permission to Grieve in Your Own Way:

- Take your time with grief and give yourself space to mourn your loss.
- Understand that grief involves more than just missing the person; it includes the roles they played and the relationships they had with you.
- Don't rush the grieving process; healing takes time and can't be hurried.
- Find comfort in the memories and experiences you shared with your loved one, honoring their lasting impact on your life.
- Set aside regular dedicated "Grief Time" to reflect on and process your grief.
- Consider writing letters, journaling, or listening to music that brings back fond memories or feelings of your loved one.
- Make a memory book, or talk to them as though they are sitting next to you.
- Be kind to yourself and treat yourself with patience when grief feels overwhelming.

2. Create a Routine:

- Set up a daily routine with regular wake-up times and simple self-care tasks, like showering and having breakfast.
- Focus on eating well, getting enough sleep, and doing light exercises, especially outdoors, to take care of your body.
- Start adding tasks from your list into your day, aiming to finish one or two small tasks at a time.
- Understand that during the early stages of grief, it's normal to feel low on energy, but doing small things each day can help improve your overall well-being.

- Think about reaching out to your primary care provider to discuss how you're feeling and ensure you're taking care of your body during this unpredictable time.
- Do things that bring you comfort or help take your mind off things, like listening to calming music, spending time with pets, or being with supportive friends or family.

3. Make a Comprehensive 'To-Do' List:

- Use a notebook or diary to keep track of tasks related to handling your loved one's belongings and affairs.
- Sort tasks by importance and difficulty, setting realistic deadlines to help manage everything.
- Ask friends or family for help with tasks to lighten your load and feel supported.
- Divide large tasks into smaller, more manageable steps to avoid feeling overwhelmed and to stay on track.
- Set aside time each day to work on tasks, making sure to balance your responsibilities with time for self-care.

4. Connect with Others and Seek Support:

- Make a list of people you can call or text when you need to talk or need company.
- Try saying yes to social invitations, even if you're not sure at first, to help with feelings of loneliness and build connections.
- Think about getting professional counseling for support as you navigate your grief journey.
- Consider joining a support group where you can connect with others who understand your experience.

5. Engage in Self-Care:

Losing someone is one of life's hardest challenges, and dealing with grief can feel overwhelming and emotionally exhausting. During these times, it's important to take care of yourself. Below are some simple self-care ideas that may offer support and give you a needed break during this tough time.

- 5 minute journal
- Deep breathing
- Connect with a friend in person or over the phone
- Take a relaxing bath
- Spend time outside
- Go for a walk
- Get lost in a book
- Watch a favorite TV show or movie
- Do some form of exercise
- Try something new

- Plant something
- Discover a new podcast
- Stay hydrated
- Try a new recipe

6. Limit Exposure to Stressful Triggers

- Reduce time spent on social media or news that may heighten emotional distress.
- Set boundaries with people or activities that are overwhelming or are unhelpful to your grieving process.
- Avoid making major life decisions during the early stages of grief.

7. Be Kind to Yourself

- Allow yourself to rest, without guilt, when you feel emotionally or physically drained.
- Give yourself permission to take breaks from grief and find small moments of joy when possible.
- Practice positive self-talk, reminding yourself that it's okay to grieve and take care of your own needs.
- Give yourself permission to feel a mix of emotions, recognizing that grief is complex and normal. You can feel multiple, sometimes seemingly contradictory, emotions at the same time.

Citations:

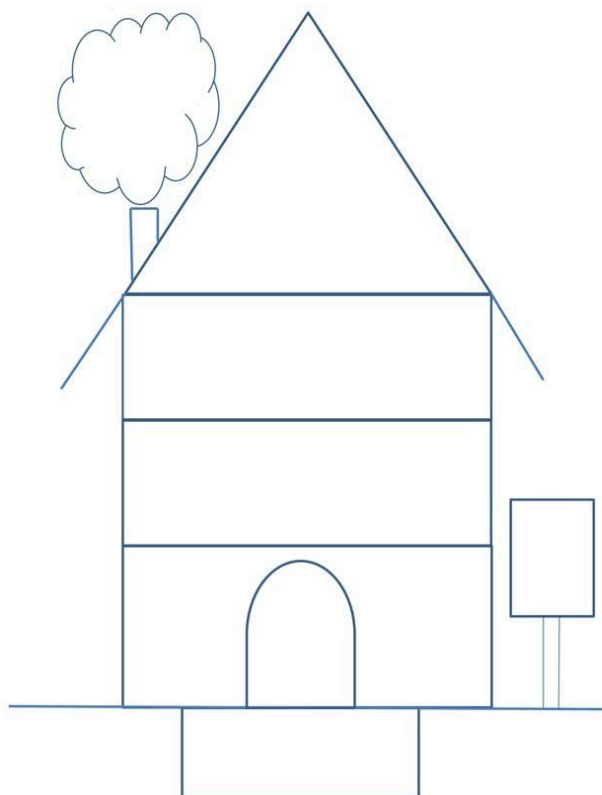
Morris, Sue. *Overcoming Grief: A Self-Help Guide Using Cognitive Behavioral Techniques*. London: Constable & Robinson, 2008, 2018.

Morris, Sue. *An Introduction to Coping with Grief*. London: Constable & Robinson, 2010, 2017.

The Grief House Worksheet

This worksheet is available to you to help you better understand and explore your grief. It is a visual tool that provides a space to explore different aspects of the grieving process and offers prompts to guide thoughts and feelings and identify coping strategies and supports. We encourage you to draw a house similar to the one below on a sheet of paper and write in your responses to the following prompts:

- On the walls of the house, write the people or things who support you.
- On the roof of the house, write the things or people that protect you.
- Coming out of the chimney, write ways that you blow off steam.
- On the mailbox, write what you want people to know about you.
- On the door, write the things that you keep hidden from others.
- On the doormat, write words that describe your grief journey.
- On the 2nd floor, write things that have helped you in your grief journey.
- On the 3rd floor, write anything positive that may come from your grief journey.
- On the top floor, write a declaration of hope for your future.



Section 4: Coping with the Firsts

The firsts in grief are often the hardest to navigate. They mark new milestones that bring the reality of your loss into sharper focus. Whether it's the first holiday without them, visiting a place filled with memories, or facing a significant anniversary, these moments can trigger a wave of emotions. While they can feel overwhelming, these experiences also offer an opportunity to find new ways to cope, honor them and care for yourself during this challenging time.

Below are some tips for managing these "firsts" and helping you navigate through them with compassion and self-care.

The First Major Holiday or Celebration Without Them

Holidays are often family-centered occasions filled with traditions and shared memories. The first holiday without them can feel especially empty. Whether it's Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Year's, or any other special day, the absence can weigh heavily on your heart.

Suggestions for Coping:

- **Create New Traditions:** This doesn't mean erasing the old ones, but it might involve small adjustments that make the day more manageable. For instance, if you always hosted family gatherings, perhaps you'll choose to spend the day in a quieter way, or gather with loved ones in a different setting.
- **Give Yourself Permission to Skip the Celebrations:** If you're not ready to engage in holiday festivities, it's okay to say no. Take the time you need to rest or reflect.
- **Honor Their Memory:** Find ways to acknowledge your loved one's presence during the day. You might light a candle, share memories, or even create a ritual that brings you comfort.

The First Time You Visit a Familiar Place

Returning to a place that holds memories with them—whether it's their favorite restaurant, a park you frequented together, or their home—can be overwhelming. The place may be filled with emotional triggers that amplify your grief.

Suggestions for Coping:

- **Take Small Steps:** If you feel ready to return to a place, try to ease into it gradually. You might want to visit during a quieter time or invite a supportive friend or family member with you.
- **Be Mindful of Your Emotions:** It's normal to feel sadness, longing, or even anger. Allow yourself to experience these emotions without judgment.
- **Create a Comforting Ritual:** Bring something that brings you peace, such as a comforting object or a photo. This can help ground you during a visit to a place filled with memories.

The First Birthday or Anniversary Without Them

Birthdays and anniversaries are some of the most difficult milestones to face after the loss. These days may bring a renewed sense of loss, and the pain can feel more pronounced.

Suggestions for Coping:

- **Acknowledge Your Pain:** Don't hide from the feelings that arise. It's okay to feel sad or to cry. Your emotions are valid.
- **Do Something Special in Their Honor:** You might choose to do something that honors their memory—whether it's visiting a place they loved, cooking their favorite meal, or donating to a cause they cared about.
- **Reach Out for Support:** Surround yourself with those who understand your grief. You don't need to carry the burden alone.

The First Time You Make Major Decisions

Grief can cloud judgment, and making major decisions shortly after a loss may feel daunting. You might need to make decisions about their belongings, their estate, or even changes to your living situation. These moments are often emotionally charged, and the weight of these choices can feel overwhelming.

Suggestions for Coping:

- **Take Your Time:** Don't rush through decisions. If possible, delay making major life changes for at least the first year after your loss.
- **Lean on Others for Support:** Consult with trusted family members, friends, or professionals who can offer perspective and advice.
- **Go at Your Own Pace:** If you need to go through your loved one's belongings, take it slow. There's no timeline for this process, and it's okay to take breaks or ask for help when you need it.

Section 5: Honoring and Maintaining a Connection After a Loss

Honoring someone after their death can help you celebrate their life, keep their memory alive, and maintain a connection with them as you move through your grief. These acts of remembrance are not about staying stuck in the past, but about carrying their spirit forward and finding comfort as you adapt to life without them. Whether through creating new traditions, holding onto cherished memories, or continuing their legacy, honoring them is a way to integrate their presence into your ongoing journey.

Here are some meaningful ways to honor and stay connected to your loved one:

- **Create a Memory Box or Scrapbook:** Gather photos, letters, and small keepsakes that remind you of them. Keeping these items in a special box or scrapbook provides you with a comforting way to reflect on the memories you shared. You can return to this collection whenever you need to feel close to them.
- **Establish a Memorial Tradition:** Creating a tradition can help you honor them on important days like anniversaries or holidays. This could include lighting a candle, visiting a special place they loved, or preparing their favorite meal. These simple rituals can provide you with moments of reflection and connection during times when their absence is deeply felt.
- **Make a Donation or Support a Cause:** If they cared deeply about a cause or charity, donating to it or volunteering in their name is a way to honor their passions and continue their legacy. Supporting what they loved helps keep their memory alive in a meaningful way.
- **Write Letters or Keep a Journal:** Writing letters to them or keeping a journal can be a therapeutic way to process your grief and maintain a connection. Share your thoughts, feelings, or updates about your life. Journaling can also help you reflect on the impact they had on you and keep their presence with you as you heal.

- **Share Memories with Others:** Talking about them with family, friends or other people who know them can help you keep their memory alive and feel supported in your grief. Sharing stories, whether big or small, creates a sense of togetherness and honors the person they were.
- **Create a Physical Tribute:** A physical tribute can serve as a lasting reminder of them. Consider planting a tree or holding onto a special item that reminds you of them. These tributes help you maintain a tangible connection and offer comfort as time passes.
- **Carry Their Values and Lessons Forward:** One meaningful way to keep them close is by living in a way that honors the values they instilled in you. Whether they taught you kindness, resilience, or generosity, embodying those qualities is a beautiful way to continue their legacy.

Section 6: Spiritual Support in Times of Loss

Bereavement support can also be found in the form of spiritual care. This kind of support focuses on providing compassionate presence, helping individuals find meaning and hope amid loss. Often a priest, minister or other faith leader will seek to honor the unique beliefs and rituals of each person, offering a safe space to express grief and explore questions of faith, purpose, and connection. Through empathetic listening and spiritual guidance, spiritual leaders can assist in navigating your journey toward healing and peace.

Here are some examples of some ways that spiritual support can be meaningful following the death of someone:

- **Rituals, Prayer, Music and Meditation:** Participating in familiar rituals, prayers, music, or meditations can provide comfort, structure, and a sense of connection to your loved one or to a higher power.
- **Sacred Texts and Teachings:** Reflecting on spiritual writings or teachings can offer meaning, hope, and perspective on life, death, and other beliefs like the afterlife or reincarnation.
- **Guided Meditation or Mindfulness:** These practices can help calm the mind, reduce anxiety, and create a space for inner peace during intense grief.
- **Presence and Listening:** Having a spiritual leader or community member who listens without judgment can validate feelings and help you feel less alone.
- **Meaning-Making:** Exploring questions about life's purpose, the nature of suffering, or the continuity of the soul can help find personal meaning in loss.
- **Community Support:** Being part of a faith community offers social connection, shared beliefs, and collective rituals that support healing.

- **Sacred Places:** Spending time in nature or other meaningful locations can be grounding and can bring a sense of connection to yourself, your loved one, the natural world, or a higher power, during times of grief.

Section 7: Professional and Community Based Support

Grief can be an isolating experience, but you do not have to navigate it alone. Support is available in many forms including, but not limited to, the comfort of close friends and family, one's faith community, bereavement support groups and professional counseling. Everyone's journey is unique and finding the right support can make a significant difference in how someone copes with loss. Below are a few starting points for bereavement support outside of Massachusetts General Hospital.

Bereavement Support Groups

- **Hospice and Palliative Care Federation of Hospice**
 - This website can help you find bereavement support groups through community hospices. All hospice agencies offer bereavement resources to those in their community, no matter if one received services from them or not.
 - <https://www.hospicefed.org> → Under Hospice Care click Bereavement Help, look for your town in the first drop down and select Adult Group Counseling in the second drop down. Click Continue and a number of hospice agencies serving your area will appear.
- **The Dinner Party**
 - It is a platform for grieving 21 to 45 year olds to find community, peer-led support and build lasting relationships.
 - <https://www.thedinnerparty.org/>
- **Fenway Health**
 - Offers bereavement support groups to address loss in the LGBTQIA+ community.
 - <https://fenwayhealth.org/the-fenway-institute/lgbtqia-aging-project/programs-support-groups/>
- **Grief Share**
 - It is a Christian-based grief support group program offered by local churches that provides a safe and communal space to feel and express loss. It is open to people of all faiths, including those who are not religious.

- <https://www.griefshare.org/>
- **Jewish Family & Children Services**
 - Offers nonsectarian bereavement groups that provide emotional and spiritual support for adults living with loss.
 - <https://www.jfcsboston.org/our-services/services-for-older-adults/betty-ann-greenbaum-miller-center-for-jewish-healing/grief-bereavement-supports>

Individual Counseling

If looking for an individual therapist, contact a therapy finder service:

- **Social Work Therapy Matcher:** www.therapymatcher.org
- **William James INTERFACE Referral Service:** <https://interface.williamjames.edu>
- **Psychology Today Therapist Finder:** www.psychologytoday.com/us/therapists
- If you have a primary care physician at Massachusetts General Hospital, you can utilize psychotherapy services through the MGH Department of Clinical Social Work, 617-726-2643.

Section 8: How To Talk to Children and Teenagers about Grief

Grief is a complex and personal experience, and following the death of someone, children and teenagers may struggle to understand and express their feelings. It can be difficult to know how to talk to them about loss, especially when their emotions may seem unpredictable. However, it's essential to approach the conversation with honesty, empathy, and patience, providing them with the support they need during this difficult time. By helping them process their grief in healthy ways, you can guide them through the emotional ups and downs, ensuring they feel heard, understood, and safe.

Here are some suggestions for talking to kids and teenagers about grief in a way that validates their feelings and helps them cope:

- **Be Honest and Age-Appropriate:** It's important to be truthful with children and teens, but also to consider their developmental level. Younger children might need simpler explanations, while teenagers may need more detailed discussions. Use clear, straightforward language, and avoid euphemisms like "gone to sleep" or "passed on," which can cause confusion. Instead, explain that the person has died, and they won't be coming back.
- **Acknowledge Their Feelings:** Grief can bring out a wide range of emotions, and it's important to let kids and teens know that all their feelings are valid. It's essential to remind them that there is no "right" way to grieve and that it's okay to have different feelings from others in the family. Encourage them to express themselves in whatever way feels comfortable, whether that's through talking, drawing, journaling, or physical activities.
- **Normalize Sadness:** It's important to remind children and teens that feeling sad is normal, and that adults feel sad too. They may see grown-ups crying or acting differently, and it's helpful to explain that everyone, no matter their age, grieves in their own way. Showing that it's okay to feel sad helps children feel less alone in their emotions.

- **Involve Them in Rituals:** If appropriate, involve children and teens in funeral or memorial services. This can help them feel included in the grieving process and provide them with a chance to say goodbye. Ask them if they'd like to participate in activities such as writing a letter, making a memory box, or contributing to a tribute. Involving them in these rituals can give them a sense of control and help them understand the importance of honoring the person who has died.
- **Create Space for Ongoing Conversations:** Grief doesn't have a set timeline, and children and teens may need to revisit their feelings as they process the loss. Let them know that they can talk to you at any time, and it's okay if they don't have all the answers right away. Sometimes they might have questions weeks or months later. Encourage open communication and make sure they know you are there to listen without judgment.
- **Connect Them with Support:** Grieving can be especially isolating for children and teens, and they may need additional support outside the family. Consider connecting them with a grief support group or counselor who specializes in helping children and teens process their emotions. Support groups can provide a safe space where they can meet others going through similar experiences, which can help them feel less alone in their grief.

Above all, reassure your child or teen that grieving is a normal process, and it's okay to feel sad and to seek help when they need it. Encourage them to take their time and let them know that they are not alone in this journey.

Section 9: Book Suggestions and Additional Resources for Children and Teens Who are Grieving

Books For Children

The Invisible String

by **Patrice Karst**

This book is specifically written to address children's fear of being apart from the ones they love. The story delivers a particularly compelling message, that though we may be separated from the ones we care for, whether through anger, or distance or even death, love is the unending connection that binds us all. (Ages: All)

The Fall of Freddie the Leaf

by **Leo Buscaglia**

This thought-provoking story follows Freddie and his companions as their leaves change with the passing seasons and the coming of winter, finally falling to the ground with winter's snow. This story helps readers navigate death and dying, grief and bereavement, the passage of time, and loss of a loved one. (Ages: All)

Something Very Sad

Happened: A Toddler's Guide to Understanding Death

by **Bonnie Zucker**

This book is intended to be read to two and three-year-old children to help them understand death and process the loss of a loved one. (Ages: 2-3)

I Miss You: A first look at Death

by **Pat Thomas**

When a close friend or family member dies, it can be sad for kids and difficult for them to express the big feelings they are experiencing. This book will help explain in a gentle way that death is a natural complement to life and that grief and a sense of loss are normal feelings to have following the death of a loved one. (Ages: 3-7)

Badger's Parting Gifts

by Susan Valley

This is the story of old Badger, who is kind, thoughtful, wise and is not afraid of dying. His only concern is how his friends will feel when he is gone. A book to help prepare children for the death of someone they love, especially an older person. (Ages 4-8)

Lifetimes

by Bryan Mellonie & Robert Ingpen

This sensitive book is a useful tool in explaining to children that death is a part of life and that, eventually, all living things reach the end of their own special lifetimes. (Ages: 4-8)

Help me Say Goodbye

by Janis Silverman

An art therapy and activity book for children coping with death. Sensitive exercises address all the questions children may have during this emotional and troubling crisis. Children are encouraged to express in pictures what they are often incapable of expressing in words. (Ages: 4-10)

When Someone Dies: A Children's Mindful How-To Guide on Grief and Loss

by Andrea Dorn

This book walks children through the bereavement process in a simple, concrete, and developmentally appropriate way. Through the lens of mindfulness, children will learn how to say goodbye, make space for

any emotions that arise, and work through their grief. (Ages: 4-10)

The Memory Box: A Book About Grief

by Joanna Rowland

The child in the story creates a memory box to keep mementos and written memories of the loved one, to help in the grieving process. The Memory Box will help children and adults talk about this very difficult topic together. (Ages: 4-12)

Water Bugs and Dragonflies

by Doris Stickney

This book uses the analogy of the waterbugs' short life under water as human's time on earth and their emergence as dragonflies into the bright sunlit world above the water as human's life after death. (Ages: 4-12)

Thank You, Grandpa

by Lynn Plourde

This glowing picture book, by turns playful and poignant, portrays the tender relationship between a grandfather and granddaughter as they appreciate nature together over the years. One day the girl walks alone, stronger because she learned from her grandfather how to be grateful for life's fleeting gifts. (Ages 5-8)

When Dinosaurs Die, A Guide to Understanding Death

by Laurie Brown & Marc Brown

A comprehensive, sensitive guide for families dealing with the loss of loved ones, When Dinosaurs Die helps readers understand what

death means, and how to best cope with their feelings. Unlike many books on death for little ones, this one doesn't tell a story. Instead, it addresses children's fears and curiosity head-on, and in a largely secular fashion, by answering some very basic questions: "Why does someone die?" "What does dead mean?" "What comes after death?" (Ages: 5-8)

The Next Place

by **Warren Hanson**

The Next Place is a colorful and beautifully illustrated poem that plainly talks about the place where people may move to after an earthly existence. (Ages: 5-12)

When Someone Very Special Dies: Children Can Learn to Cope with Grief

by **Marge Heegaard**

This book was designed to teach basic concepts of death and help children understand and express the many feelings they have when someone special dies. Communication is increased and coping skills are developed as they illustrate their books with their personal story. (Ages 6-12)

Tear Soup

by **Pat Schwiebert**

This is a family story book that centers around an old and somewhat wise woman, Grandy. Grandy has just suffered a big loss in her life and so she is headed to the kitchen to make a special batch of Tear Soup. To season her soup Grandy adds memories like the good times and the bad times, the silly and the sad times. She does not want to

forget even one precious memory of her loss. (Ages: 8-12)

Books For Teens

Straight Talk About Death for Teenagers: How to Cope with Losing Someone You Love

by **Earl A. Grollman**

With brief entries, Grollman offers advice and answers the kinds of questions that teens are likely to ask themselves when grieving the death of someone close.

The Grieving Teen: A Guide for Teenagers and Their Friends

by **Helen Fitzgerald**

Although the circumstances surrounding a death are difficult to handle at any age, adolescence brings with it challenges and struggles that until now have been largely overlooked. This book guides teens through everything from the sickbed to the funeral, from the first day back at school to the first anniversary of the death. Above all, she lets teens know that even in their darkest hour, they are not alone.

My Parent Has Cancer and it Really Sucks: Real-Life Advice from Real Teens

by **Maya Silver and Marc Silver**

One million American teenagers live with a parent who is fighting cancer. This book provides real-life advice from real-life teens designed to help teens live with a parent who is fighting cancer.

Additional Resources

Dougy.org

The Dougy Center is in Oregon, but their website and podcasts, "Grief out Loud" is full of helpful information for grieving children.

<https://childrensroom.org/>

Located in Arlington MA, The Children's Room offers grief support services for children and families, for schools, and for community organizations. Services include peer support groups, parent groups, teen programs, and Family Night. Consultations and referrals are also provided. Additionally, there are ample resources available on their website.

Section 10: Book Suggestions and Additional Resources for Adults Who are Grieving

General Loss

How to Go on Living When Someone you Love Dies

by **Therese A. Rando, PhD**

Therese's book offers the bereaved person and family a kind of roadmap to the journey ahead. It provides clear descriptions on the nature of grief, what "grief work" is, how grief affects you, what factors influence your grief, and what to expect.

It's Ok That You're Not Ok

by **Megan Devine**

Megan's book offers a profound new approach to both the experience of grief and the way we try to help others who have endured tragedy. She debunks the culturally prescribed goal of returning to a normal, "happy" life, replacing it with a far healthier middle path, one that invites us to build a life alongside grief rather than seeking to overcome it.

When Bad Things Happen to Good People

by **Harold S. Kushner**

When Harold Kushner's three-year-old son was diagnosed with a degenerative disease that meant he would only live until his early teens, he was faced with one of life's most difficult questions: Why, God? Years later, Rabbi Kushner wrote this straightforward, elegant contemplation of the doubts and fears that arise when tragedy strikes. Kushner shares his wisdom as a rabbi, a parent, a reader, and a human being.

Option B: Facing Adversity, Building Resilience and Finding Joy

by **Sheryl Sandberg & Adam Grant**

After the sudden death of her husband, Sheryl Sandberg felt certain that she and her children would never feel pure joy again. Her friend Adam Grant, a psychologist, told her there are concrete steps people can take to recover and rebound from life-shattering experiences. This book combines Sheryl's personal insights with Adam's eye-opening research on finding strength in the face of adversity.

A Grief Observed

by **C. S Lewis**

Lewis's book offers an honest reflection on the fundamental issues of life, death, and faith in the midst of loss. Written after his wife's tragic death, this book is an unflinchingly truthful account of how loss can lead even a stalwart believer to lose all sense of meaning in the universe, and how he can gradually regain his bearings.

Grief One Day At a Time: 365 Meditations to Help you Heal After Loss

by **Alan Wolfelt, Ph. D.**

After someone we love dies, each day can be a struggle. But each day, if we work to embrace our normal and necessary grief and care for ourselves, we will also take one step toward healing. With one brief entry for every day of the calendar year, Dr. Wolfelt's book offers small, one-day-at-a-time doses of guidance and healing.

Bearing the Unbearable: Love, Loss, and the Heartbreaking Path of Grief

by **Joanne Cacciatore**

Organized into fifty-two short chapters, this book is a companion for life's most difficult times, revealing how grief can open our hearts to connection, compassion, and the very essence of our shared humanity.

When Breath Becomes Air

by **Paul Kalanithi**

This is an exceptional thought-provoking story of the challenges facing a terminal-illness and eventual death. When Breath Becomes Air is the transforming story of a brilliant, young surgeon who takes us down the road of uncertainty as he faces death.

Grief Day by Day: Simple Practices and Daily Guidance for Living with Loss

by **Jan Warner**

This book offers supportive readings and exercises to help you move through life after loss, one day at a time. It includes 365 daily reflections, weekly themes that capture common feelings and experiences while grieving and 52 healing exercises to help process your feelings at the end of each week.

The Year of Magical Thinking

by **Joan Didion**

Joan's book is a memoir that explores her experiences coping with the sudden death of her husband and the illness of their daughter. It offers a raw and honest reflection on grief and the human condition.

Welcome to The Grief Club Because You Don't Have to Go Through it Alone

by **Janine Kwoh**

Janine's book addresses with empathy and honesty the aspects of grief that so many of us experience but that aren't widely discussed. This book includes brief writings,

illustrations, and creative diagrams to explore the wide range of emotions and experiences that grief can encompass.

On Grief and Grieving: Finding the Meaning of Grief Through the Five Stages of Loss

by Elizabeth Kubler-Ross and David Kessler

A modern classic text on the crucial role of grieving in dealing with loss, by the author who first explored the now famous five stages of grief—On Grief and Grieving is an invaluable blend of Kubler-Ross's practical wisdom, case studies, and her own experiences and spiritual insight.

Surviving the Holidays Without You: Navigating Grief During Special Seasons

by Gary Roe

Hospice chaplain Gary Roe has put together a grief survival kit designed to help navigate the holidays with hope and new confidence.

It's Okay to Laugh: (Crying is Cool Too)

by Nora McInerney Purmont

This is Nora's first book, written in the six months after the death of her husband, Aaron. It's a story about love, loss, and trying to stay alive, told with heart and a sense of humor.

Tuesdays With Morrie

by Mitch Albom

This book chronicles Mitch Albom's transformative journey through his weekly

meetings with his dying college professor. Through their deep conversations, Morrie imparts invaluable wisdom about love, forgiveness, relationships, and pursuing a meaningful life.

How to Carry What Can't be Fixed: A Journal for Grief

by Megan Devine

This is an illustrated journal and everyday companion to help you enter a conversation with your grief, find your own truth, and live into the life you didn't ask for—but is here nonetheless.

Healing After Loss: Daily Meditations for Working Through Grief

by Martha Hickman

The classic guide for dealing with grief and loss offers daily reflections to find solace in our own lives, and comfort in the connection of sharing these meditations with others.

Loss of a Spouse or Partner

Finding your Way After Your Spouse Dies

by Marta Felber

This book presents a guide for coping with the practical issues that face the recently widowed as they struggle through the grieving process. It is written by someone who has experienced personal grief and loss and understands what needs to be faced when a spouse dies.

The Hot Young Widows Club

by **Nora McInerny**

Drawing from her own life experience, Nora McInerny offers a wise, humorous roadmap and caring community for anyone going through a challenging life moment.

The Tender Scar: Life After the Death of a Spouse

by **Richard L Mabry**

This book offers hope and healing for the brokenhearted and addresses the heart-wrenching pain of losing a spouse. Working from journal entries written after the death of his wife, Mabry uses his own journey as a stepping-stone to a practical discussion of the grief process.

Widow to Widow: Thoughtful Practical Ideas for Rebuilding Your Life

by **Genevieve Davis Ginsburg, M.S.**

In this useful guide, widow, author, and therapist Genevieve Davis Ginsburg offers fellow widows – as well as their family and friends – sage advice for coping with the loss of a husband.

Comfort for the Grieving Spouse's Heart: Hope and Healing After Losing Your Partner

by **Gary Roe**

This practical book reads like a caring conversation with a friend and guides the reader through the healing process with a daily

dose of honesty, courage, compassion and love.

Loss of a Parent as an Adult

The Orphaned Adult: Understanding and Coping with Grief and Change After the Death of Our Parent

by **Alexander Levy**

This book is an incredibly helpful resource for thinking through the feelings that arise when we arrive at the moment of asking ourselves "Who will I be, now that I am nobody's child?" It is a guide to understanding and coping with grief and all of the disorienting emotions that accompany the death of our parents.

Loss of a Parent: Adult Grief When Parents Die

by **Theresa Jackson**

This book offers expert guidance, effective healing exercises, and experience from others who have lost a parent. Theresa has combined the latest theories and practices on loss, with effective meditations and exercises so that one can honor and remember his or her lost parent, all the while processing your grief in a healthy way.

Healing After The Loss of Your Mother

by **Elaine Mallon**

This book is a heartfelt and practical guidebook for those mourning the loss of their mother & for supporters hoping to help a loved one through grief.

Loss of a Sibling

Healing the Adult Sibling's Grieving Heart: 100 Practical Ideas after Your Brother or sister Dies

by Alan D. Wolfelt, PH. D.

Compassionate and heartfelt, this collection offers 100 practical ideas to help understand and accept the passing of a sibling in order to practice self-healing.

Surviving the Death of a Sibling: Living Through Grief When an Adult Brother or Sister Dies

by T. J. Wray

Based on the author's own experiences, as well as those of many others, this book helps adults who have lost a brother or sister to realize that they are not alone in their struggle. It teaches them to understand the unique stages of their grieving process, offering practical and prescriptive advice for dealing with each stage.

Additional Resources for Grief

<https://whatsyourgrief.com/>

This is a grief website and online community for grieving people and grief support.

<https://www.centerforloss.com/>

This website, created by grief counselor Dr. Alan Wolfelt, is dedicated to helping people who are grieving and those caring for them.

Widowed Parent Podcast

Host Jenny Lisk, who lost her husband to brain cancer when her kids were 9 and 11, offers practical guidance, invaluable resources, and steadfast support for widowed parents raising grieving children and teens.

Terrible, Thanks for Asking Podcast

It is a podcast with Nora McInerney that makes space for how it really feels to go through the hard things in life, and a community of people who get it.

Dear Friend,

As you reach the end of this booklet, I want to take a moment to acknowledge the weight of the grief you are carrying right now. The loss of someone can be overwhelming, and the journey you're on can feel uncertain and isolating. I hope the information in this booklet has offered you some clarity and reassurance as you move through this challenging time.

As you move forward, try to take things one day at a time. There may be moments when you feel like you're doing okay, and other moments when the pain seems overwhelming. Both are part of the journey. You don't have to rush through this time, and it's okay to take breaks from the intensity of grief. It's a process that unfolds in its own way and at its own pace. There is no "right" way to grieve, only your way.

I encourage you to reach out for support when you feel ready, whether it's with friends, family, a support group, or a counselor. While grief can feel isolating, you don't have to face it alone. Others who care about you are there to listen, share memories, and offer comfort when needed. Don't hesitate to let them in.

As you continue to remember the person you've lost, you may find your connection to them taking on new forms. The love and bond you shared will always be a part of who you are. While things may never be the same, you will find ways to carry that love with you, day by day.

Remember to be kind and gentle with yourself during this time. Grief doesn't follow a straight path, and it's okay to experience ups and downs. What matters most is that you are allowing yourself to feel what you feel and take each moment as it comes.

You are doing the best you can, and that is enough.

With heartfelt compassion,



Bethany Myers, MDiv, MSW, LICSW, APHSW-C
Social Work and Spiritual Care Lead & Bereavement Coordinator
MGH Division of Palliative Care and Geriatric Medicine
Mghpcgmbereavement@mggh.org

Notes



Notes

Contact:

For more information about additional bereavement resources, please email mghpcgmbereavement@mggh.org

This guide is intended to provide general information and is not a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. Massachusetts General Hospital does not endorse any of the organizations listed in this guide. For any health-related concerns or questions, please consult with your doctor or another qualified healthcare professional.