

Grief Journaling

Working through the grief process must be done by each of us in our own unique way. There may be times when you are unable to verbalize your feelings and needs, or they are just too private to share. Writing your thoughts on paper can be helpful. Journaling can help to clarify where you have been, where you are now, and where you hope to be in the future. Revisiting these entries over time may help to measure your progress in your grief process, realizing that pain and sorrow may still remain, but points of lightness and joy are returning. Once you record your thoughts on paper, you do not have to be preoccupied with thoughts of losing them. The writing makes “room” for new avenues of thinking that you may not have had time to consider previously. Keep your journal private; these words are for your eyes only.

Begin by acquiring a notebook of your choice. Then choose one or several of the following approaches to journal writing that appeals to you.

1. You may find it helpful recording your feelings about your loved one in the form of a letter. Write a letter to the person who died, expressing your thoughts and feelings about the following issues:

- A special memory I have about you
- What I miss the most about you and our relationship
- What I wish I’d said or hadn’t said
- What I’d like to ask you
- What I wish we’d done or hadn’t done
- What I’ve had the hardest time dealing with
- Ways in which you will continue to live on in me
- Special ways I have for keeping my memories of you alive

Choose one or several ideas that have significance for you to start at the top of the list and work your way down. These topics may serve to help you come up with your own ideas specific to your situation and relationship.

2. Provide a page or two for each of the following headings:

- Losses in Childhood: Record how you felt when you experienced loss as a child and how you feel now about those losses. What made it difficult? What helped?
- Losses in Adolescence: Repeat prompts from above with focus on your teen years.
- Losses in Adulthood: Continue prompts from above, shifting attention to adult life.
- Hurting: Record your present hurts and compare them to earlier times
- Healing: Record your resources and healings after past losses. Reflect on the healing you have experienced in your current grief.
- Beyond Now: Record your musings about the future. Write about plans for bringing meaning back into life again.
- Periodic Entries: Establish a daily or weekly time to record entries about your feelings during the next few months.

3. In addition to letters and narrative written material about your own thoughts, feelings, and observations you may also choose to include:

- Drawings or other visual materials, i.e. dreams, doodles, symbols, or diagrams that are useful in clarifying or expressing your ideas.
- Illustrations from magazines or newspapers which capture the thought or image you are writing about.
- Personally meaningful quotations you may have read or heard.
- A section entitled “Bright Ideas” may help you to brainstorm about all the possible alternatives to your problems.

In time you will find that your writing as provided you with a meaningful way to engage, express, and reflect on your grief process.

Adapted from Self-Help Correspondence for the Bereaved: A Manual for Bereavement Support Programs by Mary Ann Harter Janson, RN, MS.

*If you have questions or concerns about the grieving process,
please give us a call at (716) 836-6460 or email griefsupport@palliativecare.org
for more information, resource and support.*

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