Mental Health Resources

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1. Grief Journaling Prompts

Grief Journaling Prompts
UIC Counseling Center

When I think about my loss, I feel…

Today my body feels…

Describe below your understanding of the difference between being a "passive witness" to your grief or an "active participant" in your grief…

The pain of your grief will keep trying to get your attention until you have the courage to gently, and in small doses, embrace it. How is the pain of your grief trying to get your attention?

How will you mourn this loss - that is, openly express your grief?

What does moving toward your pain mean to you?

How might you respond to others who suggest you move away from your grief?

(If relevant) Write about your understanding of the relationship between mourning and faith and/or spirituality.

List the secondary losses you are experiencing as a result of our loss. Examples may be related to loss of self (identity, confidence, health, personality), security (emotional, physical, financial, lifestyle), and/or meaning (goals, dreams, faith, will, joy). Choose one or two and write about them.

How do you feel about the concept of learning to reconcile rather than get over grief?

Who are three people who may naturally be good companions for you on your grief journey?

How attached were you to who/what you lost?

Describe the circumstances of the loss. How did you learn about it? Was it expected or unexpected?

Prompts adapted from: "Progressing through grief: Guided exercises to understand your emotions and recover from loss" by Stephanie Jose, LMHC, LCAT; "Understanding your grief: Ten essential touchstones for finding hope and healing your heart;" and "The understanding your grief journal: Exploring the ten essential touchstones" by Alan D. Wolfelt, PhD.

Would it be helpful to create an additional ritual/ceremony to help you heal? In what ways can you continue to use ceremony to remember other special times (birthday/anniversary)?

Do you think your gender identity affects your grief? Why/why not?

How does your cultural background influence your grief and mourning?

Do you have any family rules about coping with loss/grief?

How has this loss affected your belief system?

Are there any other significant losses impacting your grief?

What are you most afraid of since the loss or since you started anticipating the loss?

Have you seen, heard, or dreamed about your loss or what you anticipate losing?

Have you felt anger, hate, blame, terror, resentment, rage, and/or jealousy in your grief? Have others around you been upset by your expression of these feelings? What are you doing to express these feelings in healthy ways?

How sad are you feeling in your grief now? How does this compare to your sadness earlier in your grief journey?

What can you do to embrace your sadness instead of move away from it?

Do you find yourself judging your grief-related symptoms/reactions? If so, how?

Do others in your life judge certain grief-related symptoms/reactions?

Have you had dreams or mystical experiences of your loss? If so, can you describe it and how you felt about it?

What do your Griefbursts or Grief Attacks look like for you?

Which, if any signs of reconciling with your loss do you see in yourself?

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Write what you are doing or have done as you move toward reconciling your loss.

Does faith help you as you move toward reconciling your loss?

How are you discovering transformation by grief?

What changes have you seen in yourself since grieving loss or anticipated loss?

Have your values changed since you started grieving? How?

How have your views of God and spirituality changed since grieving? (if applicable)

Do you believe you have a life purpose? If so, what? If not, why not?

Do you believe you have a responsibility to live partially on behalf of the person you grieve/the loss you suffered? Why or why not?

How can you honor the life of the person you grieve/the loss you suffered?

How will you most authentically live your transformed life?

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2. Managing Difficult Times – A Handout for People with Complicated Grief

Managing Difficult Times

A Handout for people with complicated grief

M. Katherine Shear, M.D.

For more information visit complicatedgrief.org
or contact us at info@complicatedgrief.columbia.edu.

Managing Difficult Times

WHAT IS A DIFFICULT TIME?

Certain times of the year are especially painful for a bereaved person. This handout is designed to help manage these difficult times. Examples include the family holidays, especially the period between thanksgiving and new years day, the day of the death, the deceased person's birthday, the bereaved person's birthday, a wedding anniversary after the loss of a spouse, the first day of school each year, mother's or father's day after the loss of a child, parent's anniversary or mother's or father's day after the loss of a parent. Or, if your deceased loved one especially enjoyed the fall, you might find that time of year especially difficult. The anniversary of becoming pregnant might be difficult for someone who has lost a child. The winter solstice might be hard for a person who lost a close friend with whom she had celebrated this date every year.

PRINCIPLES FOR MANAGING DIFFICULT TIMES

There is no right and wrong kind of grief, and there is no prescription for managing difficult times. Our principles are simply suggestions about ways you might take a little control of your own life. It is up to you to decide whether and how to do so.

PRINCIPLE 1: ANTICIPATE AND PLAN FOR DIFFICULT TIMES

You can probably predict when these times will occur and you might want to make plans for how you want to spend the time. This will help you feel a little more in control even though these times are difficult regardless of whether you acknowledge this ahead of time or not. Think about which times are difficult for you. Make some notes about this. Try to anticipate and accept how you will feel and practice self-compassion.

PRINCIPLE 2: HONOR CONTINUING BONDS TO THE PERSON WHO DIED

We have permanent bonds to people to whom we are very close and their death does not bring an end to their influence upon us. It does change the nature of that influence. It is different to love a person who died, but our bond with them continues. You can honor that bond, even as

Managing Difficult Times

you miss your loved one terribly. Consider that a deceased loved one has needs that are different from when they were alive. They may need you to honor them, to take time to remember their achievements, their accomplishments, their love and caring, or other admired traits or actions. They may need you to let them be gone, to acknowledge their new status and not try to bring them back. They may need you to visit them at their final resting place, or to tend to that place.

PRINCIPLE 3: FIND PLEASURABLE ACTIVITIES FOR YOURSELF AND OTHER PEOPLE WHO ARE STILL ALIVE.

Periods of celebration or of marking a life transition are the very times many people find difficult, and they are also opportunities to find moments of joy for yourself and also to share with loved ones who are still living. Positive emotions help us think more clearly and solve problems more effectively and have beneficial physical effects as well. So, in addition to missing your loved one, try to find ways to allow yourself and your remaining loved ones to experience positive feelings. Enjoy the Hannukah lights, the Christmas tree or the Kwanza celebration. Share the warmth and love of people around you. Plan to go to a special performance or take a walk in the snow. Try to think about things that you can truly enjoy, even if only for a few minutes, in the midst of your sorrow.

PRINCIPLE 4: TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF AND LET OTHERS TAKE CARE OF YOU.

Even if you are well prepared, difficult times are just that. They are likely to trigger painful emotions and you need to soothe yourself as best you can. Be sure that you put yourself on the list of people you are planning to take care of. Lower your expectations of yourself and give yourself time and permission to feel sad. Maybe you don't need to be a cheery host or take on too many obligations. You can accept help from friends and family. Let others take over activities that you find stressful or unpleasant. Maybe someone else can plan the party, take care of the kids, prepare meals, do the laundry. Maybe someone else can help you decide what will help you relax or have fun. Consider asking someone to do one of these things. Try to bring others into your life in a helpful way, even if you are not feeling as connected to them as you have in the past.

Managing Difficult Times

WORKSHEET 1: IDENTIFYING DIFFICULT TIMES

Below are some examples of times bereaved people find difficult. Think about how you feel on these days, and add others if you wish. Using the scale below, rate how difficult you expect each day to be and make notes about why.

0	1	2	3	4
Not at all	A Little	Somewhat	Definitely	Extremely

Event	Date	Rating	Notes
1. Anniversary of the death			
2. Birthday of the person who died			
3. Your Birthday 4. Other Birthdays			
(note whose it is)			
a.			
b.			
c.			
5. Wedding anniversary of the person who died			
6. Holidays (Specify which ones)			
a.			
b.			
c.			
Other difficult times			
a.			
b.			
c.			
d.			

Managing Difficult Times

Worksheet 2: Planning activities

Identify the difficult time and make a list of how you can plan to do things in each area

Difficult Time
Care for the person who died
Plan fun or satisfying things to do
Take care of yourself

Managing Difficult Times

Worksheet 3: Monitoring activities

List your planned activities and rate the intensity of grief, the level of negative and positive emotions, on a scale from 0-10, where 0= none at all and 10 is the highest you can imagine. Then, list some of your thoughts or reactions, after you do these activities.

Activity	Grief intensity	Negative emotions	Positive emotions	Thoughts

3. Helping Yourself Through Grief

Helping Yourself Through Grief

"There is no grief that time does not lessen and soften." ~Cicero

1. Provide Gentle Self-Care when Grief is Fresh. Ask for help with everyday tasks, drink plenty of fluids, take a walk, and, at bedtime, soak in a soothing bath or drink a cup of warm milk to help you sleep.

2. Accept Your Feelings. Common emotions are disbelief, numbness, fear, anger, relief, guilt, loneliness, and exhaustion. Know there is no right or wrong way to feel or grieve.

3. Find an Outlet for Your Feelings. A range of intense emotions can be generated after a loss, and these feelings need release. So cry, walk, write what's on your heart, paint, or talk to a friend.

4. Care for Your Whole Being—Body, Mind, and Spirit. Get regular exercise, replace self-critical thoughts with positive ones, and accept that sorrow is not a sign of spiritual weakness.

5. Seek Ongoing Support. Grieving is a lengthy journey and support is needed from those who understand this reality. Consider joining a Grief Support Group to meet others.

6. Make Needed Adjustments. Your routines, roles, and relationships have been altered as a result of the death. Keep a flexible attitude with a willingness to adapt and change.

7. Manage the Stress of Change. Cultivate an inner calm when you cannot change a situation. Slow down, relax your standards, and engage in a life-giving activity each day.

8. Embrace the Memories. Death ends a life, but it doesn't end a relationship. Retain special keepsakes, create a memory book, or give to a charity in your loved ones name.

9. Search for Meaning. You may wonder what purpose your life has now. Stay present in the activities of each day and a sense of meaning and purpose will gradually reemerge.

10. Prepare for Special Occasions. Plan ahead for anniversaries, holidays, and other special occasions when grief can be especially intense, and do what feels right for you.

From *The Nature of Grief: Photographs and Words for Reflection and Healing*, by Rebecca Hauder. Available at www.resourcesforgrief.com

4. Helping Someone Who is Grieving

Helping Someone Who Is Grieving

"Walking with a friend in the dark is better than walking alone in the light."—Helen Keller

- Your presence is more important than anything you say. Don't assume you know how they feel or what you can say to make it better. A hug and "I'm sorry" is usually enough.
- Expect a wide range of emotions, including a sense of unreality in early grief. There is no right or wrong way to feel, whether it is guilt, regret, relief, anger, sadness, or fear.
- Listen attentively. At first, their talk may be mostly about the death. Later, they may talk more about their loved one's life. Listen, even if they repeat their stories over and over.
- Make specific and practical offers to help, such as, "Let me pick-up some groceries for you when I'm at the store," rather than, "if there's anything you need, give me a call."
- Don't try to lessen the loss with easy answers—"It's God's will," "They're better off now," "God needed a little angel in heaven," or "There must be a reason."
- Remember there is no timetable for grief, so keep support ongoing. Also, don't rush them to put away their loved one's belongings. They will when they're ready; then offer to help.
- Share your positive memories of the deceased. It helps the bereaved relive past experiences and feel connected to their loved one.
- Let the bereaved know what you appreciate about them. Build them up and include them in your life and activities. Self-esteem and a sense of identity suffer after a major loss.
- Remember special days--holidays, birthdays, anniversaries. Mark them on your calendar. These are likely to be difficult times for someone who is grieving.
- Encourage professional help if you see any of the following warning signs: thoughts of self-destruction, mounting anxiety, depression, or abuse of drugs and alcohol.

5. Responding to Children in Grief

Helping Someone Who Is Grieving

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6. Web Resource Links

Good Therapy – An online resource for finding the right therapist for your needs.

https://www.goodtherapy.org/home.html

Psychology Today – An online resource for finding the right therapist for your needs.

https://www.psychologytoday.com/us?tr=Hdr_Brand&_gl=1*1xx8xg2*_ga*MTE4MDEwMzYzLjE3MzU1MDY0NTg.*_ga_5EMHF6S1M6*MTczNTUwNjQ1Ny4xLjAuMTczNTUwNjQ1Ny42MC4wLjA

988 Lifeline – An online, text, chat, or deaf friendly resource for anyone facing mental health struggles, emotional distress, and alcohol or drug use concerns. Call 988 or use the link below.

https://988lifeline.org/