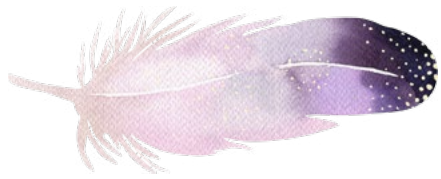


Coping with  
Grief and Loss

*a Handbook for Survivors*





"Grieving is as natural as crying when you are hurt, sleeping when you are tired, eating when you are hungry, or sneezing when your nose itches; it is nature's way of healing a broken heart."

- *Doug Manning*

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## **SURVIVING YOUR LOSS**

One of the most devastating things that can happen to a person is the death of a loved one. This booklet will offer guidance about what to expect from the grieving process and how to heal from your loss.

The first section of this book is about surviving the early days of a loss. Think of it as a "First Aid" kit of information that will help you deal with the stress of grieving.

### **HANDLING STRESS**

Times of emotional upheaval are always stressful. You may be worn out from months or years of being the primary caregiver for a loved one during a long illness. Or, you may be utterly stunned by the news of a sudden death.

You may feel overwhelmed by the many practical aspects of a loss (planning of a memorial service, visits from friends and family, financial matters, estate decisions, etc.) Whatever the case, this is a time in your life when it's very important to take care of yourself.

Think of your body as a trusted car that has carried you through your life so far. Normally your car is well-maintained; it has a full tank of gas, and runs well. But the shock and devastation of losing someone can suck your fuel tank dry and leave you empty, tired, and vulnerable. The danger is that you may not notice that you are feeling "run down" until you possibly "break down."

The following are some of the ways you can minimize the effects of stress on your body and maintain your health.

## **MAINTAIN HEALTHY EATING HABITS**

While grieving, it is not unusual to experience disturbances in your appetite. Some people lose their appetite entirely while others experience an increase in appetite or have cravings, especially for "comfort" foods. It is best to choose foods that will provide your body with balanced nutrition.

Research has proven that when you are under stress, your immune system is more susceptible to illness. You may not feel like cooking, but healthy meals can help maintain both your immune system and your daily energy levels. They can also help stabilize your moods and emotions.

Some health experts recommend eating five to six small meals a day to keep energy levels even. Foods high in potassium, calcium, and protein can help decrease the effects of stress on the body. You may also want to ask your physician about vitamin supplements such as B-12. Avoid foods that have empty calories. Junk foods and comfort foods may fill an emotional void, but the effect is often short-lived.

### **SLEEP WELL**

During a period of deep sadness, people often find that their sleep patterns change and sleeping becomes difficult. This is a normal response to loss and usually only lasts a short time.

If you are having trouble sleeping, try creating a routine that you can repeat every night. Go to bed at the same time every night and wake up at the same time every morning. Experts say that ignoring the alarm clock, even on weekends, can upset the body's sleep rhythms all week long.



Avoid alcohol. Even if you find it “relaxing,” it can still disturb your sleep. It may make you feel tired, but it often reduces the quality and length of your sleep. You might find yourself waking in the middle of the night as the effects wear off.

Caffeine and tobacco also interfere with sleep. Be aware of foods that contain caffeine, such as tea, coffee, chocolate, and many soft drinks.

If sleep disturbances continue for more than a few weeks, you may want to consult your physician. Do not take any over-the-counter sleep aids without also consulting your physician.

### GET EXERCISE

One of the best ways to relieve tension and elevate your outlook on life is to engage in moderate physical activity. The activity does not have to be strenuous to have benefits; it only needs to be moderate and regular.

A simple daily walk can improve your mood and increase your overall well-being. Asking a friend or neighbor to be a “walking buddy” will provide the added benefit of having someone to talk to and share your feelings with. If a friend or neighbor is not available, consider joining a health club, but be careful to choose programs and facilities that are appropriate for your age and needs. Remember to check with your physician before beginning any exercise program.

### BE KIND TO YOURSELF

Grief can impact your emotions in many ways. It can cause fluctuations in your moods that you are not used to causing feelings of depression.

The following is a list of ways to help yourself through feelings of emotional distress:

- **Maintain** a healthy lifestyle by eating nutritionally balanced meals, exercising regularly, and nurturing regular sleeping routines
- **Identify** activities that are comforting to you and allow yourself to do those things. They can be as simple as talking to a friend, writing, praying, singing, or listening to music. Other soothing activities are: taking nature walks, treating yourself to a massage, or taking a long bath.
- **Set** small, achievable goals. For example, each day you can set one goal. Then, as you begin to feel stronger and have more energy, you can add more goals to your list. Don't feel bad if you seem to make progress on some days and not on others.
- **Praise** yourself often. You deserve it! Even if there are days when your main accomplishment is getting out of bed and doing a few household chores, you will be successfully overcoming feelings of emotional upheaval.

### LEARN TO RELAX

You probably already know some relaxation techniques that you have forgotten about. Think of stressful situations you've had in your past and how you handled them. Is there a place that makes you feel safe or relaxed? Is there a person whose company you find soothing? Is there an activity that makes you feel calm?

Look around for new activities that might be relaxing, such as: a beginner's yoga class, an arts and crafts class, or a scrap-booking class. Check local newspapers, recreation center flyers, church bulletins, and health club schedules for more ideas.

Even if you find activities that relieve stress, there may be times that you feel gripped by tension and tight muscles. There are specific relaxation techniques you can learn to help your body relax. One such exercise involves tightening and releasing individual muscle groups. You can do this sitting in a comfortable chair, or lying in bed before you go to sleep. Start at your head or your feet and think about each muscle in your body, one at a time. As you think about each specific muscle, tighten that muscle, then release it.



Sometimes when people are stressed, they have panic attacks. During an attack, your muscles will tense up and your heart will beat faster. Your brain may have trouble getting oxygen, which will make you want to breathe faster, which will cause even more panic and anxiety. If you feel this way, try taking slower breaths. Place your hand over your diaphragm and feel it expand as you take in air through your nose. Then feel your hand move inward with your stomach as the air is exhaled out. Continue this exercise until your breathing becomes deep and regular.

### **COMMON AND NORMAL RESPONSES TO A LOSS**

Although grief is a universal experience, it is a very personal journey. Everyone grieves in their own way and in their own time.

You may experience a wide range of different emotions or a small set of recurring emotions. They may be intense and surprise you. Or, you may feel so numb that your lack of emotion surprises you. These are all normal experiences.

What you may not know is that the overwhelming shock of loss can affect more than your emotions. It can affect your entire being and your ability to function well. You might be unable to concentrate on simple tasks. Your brain might feel “fuzzy” or “overloaded.” You might feel confused. Or you might feel an overwhelming need to sleep every few hours, as if just being conscious is hard work.

You might feel physically sick—nauseated, dizzy or physically exhausted. Your emotions can be so strong that they manifest as physical sensations: a weight on your chest that makes it hard to breathe; a feverish feeling as if the pain of your emotions is burning through you; a brittle feeling as if suddenly you are made of glass or air or nothing at all; a stunned feeling as if someone has just hit you with a large, heavy object. Again, these are normal experiences and they will pass.

Following is a list of common mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual effects of loss that you might experience:

**COMMON MENTAL RESPONSES:**  
Difficulty concentrating  
Inability to make decisions  
Disorganization  
Inability to think clearly  
Sense of unreality  
Confusion  
Short term memory loss  
Disturbing dreams

**COMMON EMOTIONAL RESPONSES:**  
Anger  
Sadness  
Hopelessness  
Panic  
Helplessness  
Anxiety  
Withdrawing  
Emptiness  
Despair  
Guilt  
Relief  
Loneliness  
Bitterness  
Depression  
Numbness  
Shock

**COMMON PHYSICAL RESPONSES:**  
Crying  
Dizziness  
Numbness  
Headaches  
Nausea  
Shortness of breath  
Exhaustion, Fatigue  
Fluctuations in appetite  
Weight loss or gain  
Constipation or Diarrhea  
Decreased resistance to illness  
Blurred vision  
Insomnia

**COMMON SPIRITUAL RESPONSES:**  
Re-evaluation of beliefs  
Sense of distance from God  
Anger at God  
Difficulty attending place of worship  
Sense of closeness to God  
Heightened awareness of God  
Feelings of spiritual grace  
Heightened awareness of one's own mortality



## PHASES OF GRIEF

There are many theories about the emotional journey that a person takes as they struggle with loss. You may have already heard the phrase “Stages of Grief.” Recently, the “stages” of grief have come to be referred to as the “phases” of grief, because a person rarely experiences each phase in a neat, orderly sequence.

For example, it is not uncommon to repeat certain stages, or to skip a stage entirely. As you travel through grief, you may feel that you are taking “two steps forward and one step back.” Or, you may feel that you are doing a frustrating sideways dance, moving through similar phases without making visible progress.

You may feel stranded in a phase. Or, you may feel that you have passed through a phase too quickly and you are waiting for the “other shoe to drop.” Remember, each person’s grief journey is different. It is important not to feel pressure, from yourself or from well-meaning family and friends, to hurry through your grief.

Also, don’t let anyone tell you what to feel or when to feel it. At some point in your journey, as the initial disorientation and shock wear off, you will develop instincts and intuition about how to help yourself heal.

The following is an outline of the Phases of Grief. Remember, this is only a guide; your grief experience will be unique.

### SHOCK / NUMBNESS PHASE

This is the initial phase that occurs right after the death. During this time, the family is usually making arrangements for the funeral or memorial service. Friends are visiting and bringing flowers. Out-of-town family members are arriving for the service.

You might find that you are on “autopilot” during this time. When you think back to this time later, it may be hard to remember the details. Strangely, this phase can be a blessing because it allows the

griever to experience the pain in increments. It protects you from feeling all the emotions at once—which would be overwhelming.

The length of this phase will depend on many factors. One factor is the manner of death. A sudden, unexpected loss may cause a longer, more intense experience of the shock phase. But even if the death was expected due to illness, there is always a sense of shock. It can still feel like a physical blow.

### TELLING-MY-STORY PHASE

This phase is characterized by the need to tell and retell the story of your loved one’s life and death.

You might need to share the details of the death - the diagnosis of an illness, the care-giving, the specifics of an accident, the medical response, the moment of death. You might need to talk about the funeral or memorial service. Or, you may need to tell and retell stories about your life together - cherished memories, watershed events, resolved and unresolved issues, everyday rituals, struggles, triumphs, and good times. You may need to tell these stories many, many times.

This phase is an essential part of the healing process. Doug Manning, an author and leading authority on grief and loss, refers to it as a time when you have the overwhelming need for people to understand the significance and value of the life lived by your loved one - how wonderful and important they were - and the depth of your pain and longing for them. This is not a selfish thing. Manning calls it the “key” in grieving and says that until you know that the significance of your loved one is understood by yourself and others, you will not move on very far in your grief journey. Telling their story is a way that helps many people feel they have found a way to bring honor to the one they loved so much. Also, in the repeated telling of the story, the reality of the death is established in small increments so our hearts and minds can begin to deal with what has happened in our lives.



It is important to find supportive people who will listen to your story as many times as you need to tell it. It is only when you feel you have been heard and understood that you come to the place where you are ready for the next step in your journey. A support group can provide a safe, healthy environment for this.

## REALITY PHASE

This phase is when the loss begins to feel real. You realize that your loved one is not coming home. This phase can also happen in increments. Your mind may reach this phase before your heart does.

You might experience an emotional onslaught during this phase, and/or an emotional release. You might cry or wail. This is when the deep, intense grief begins.

## WITHDRAWAL/ANGER/DEPRESSION PHASE

You may experience a phase where your painful emotions are so overwhelming that they seem to take over your life. Common painful emotions are anger, guilt, and depression.

You may also find yourself withdrawing from your friends, co-workers and family. Or from activities that, before the death, provided you with a sense of purpose or feelings of joy, but after the death, feel empty or painful.

- **Anger:** You may feel angry at God, members of the medical community who cared for your loved one, friends, family or yourself. Anger is a normal part of grief and needs to be expressed. Talking or writing about it can help.

- **Guilt:** You may feel guilty for things you said or things you didn't say. You may feel guilty about something you did or didn't do. It is important to separate legitimate guilt from "survivor guilt," a frequent phenomenon which causes survivors to feel guilty for no real reason except that they are alive and their loved one is not. If you are having

trouble with feelings of guilt, talk to someone that you trust about them.

- **Depression:** You may find that your sadness feels like a constant companion, draining you of energy and making you feel listless or apathetic. Life may feel muted and distant, and you may feel like a heaviness has moved into your body and made even simple movements difficult. You may cry at unexpected times and lose interest in your usual activities. This is a normal reaction to loss and usually lifts as you move along your grief path. However, if your depression worsens, it could become clinical depression, at which point you should see a doctor. Suicidal thoughts are a red flag and, if you have these, you should talk to someone you trust—a friend, counselor, minister or healthcare professional—immediately.

- **Withdrawal:** You may find that you do not want to be around big groups of people. It may be hard to accept dinner or lunch invitations. This might be because you are afraid of having a "grief burst," (a sudden bout of crying or sadness), or because it is too draining to try to "act normal" at a social event. This is common. It is important to have some time alone to think about your loss and process it. Give yourself time and space. However, it is also important that you don't isolate yourself, as that can worsen feelings of depression and loneliness. Seek out friends who will spend quiet time just being with you no matter what you are feeling, or who will help you turn a grief burst into a cleansing experience of crying and/or laughing.

- **Anxiety:** You may feel anxious about the changes in your life. You may not know who you are without your loved one or what your new role and responsibilities will be. This is normal. It can help to talk with friends about your fears or to ask for help planning out your new responsibilities.



## REINVESTMENT / ADJUSTMENT PHASE

This is the phase when you begin to experience moments of joy and happiness again. You slowly begin to care about things again, and you are no longer just “going through the motions.” You may not even realize that you are in this phase at first, because healing is a gradual process.

Relationships and activities that you enjoyed before the loss may not fulfill you in the same way, so, in this phase, you begin to invest yourself in new activities and endeavors. You will find that you want to engage in life again. You will feel that your hope is renewed.

However, adjusting to loss is a life-long journey and you might experience this phase in cycles throughout your life. It might be frustrating to feel yourself going “backwards” into an earlier, more difficult phase, but once you have had the realization that you want to invest yourself in a new life-that you are ready to put the effort in-it will be a powerful turning point.



## FIRST AND SECOND YEAR EXPECTATIONS

The following is an outline of how the first and second year may unfold.

### **MONTH ONE:**

The first month is usually when the Shock and Numbness Phase occurs. You are likely planning the memorial service, but nothing feels very real and you are going on autopilot.

### **MONTHS TWO TO THREE:**

This is usually when the Reality Phase sets in. Relatives and friends return to their normal routines. You may feel lost because you don't have a normal routine to return to. The full impact of the loss on the many areas of your life may become apparent. This is a critical time and you shouldn't be afraid to reach out for help and guidance.

### **MONTHS FOUR TO SIX:**

This phase can be challenging. There may be some good days during this time, but there also may be some outbursts as events in your life trigger strong feelings. Your emotions will probably be on a roller coaster. As the sixth month approaches, your grief may become more intense and you may feel that you are slipping backwards. Bereaved persons are often surprised to experience this “relapse” around month six, because it is difficult to realize that so much time has passed. Also, there has likely been a “first” of some kind since the death-a first birthday, holiday, or anniversary-without the loved one. Strong feelings may surface in this phase as you realize that your life is not going to return to the place it was before your loved one died.

### **MONTHS SEVEN TO TWELVE:**

There will hopefully be more good days than bad in this phase. There will still be difficult times and your emotions may still surprise you, but you will begin to feel moments of joy and hope. As you approach the one-year anniversary of your loved one's death, you may find yourself reliving the last days and weeks of their life.



This may be a very difficult time, bringing back a resurgence of thoughts and feelings you may not have expected. Some people have expressed that the eleventh month is when they begin to experience their most difficult moments in anticipation of the first anniversary and have been surprised that the actual day was not as bad as they had expected. It is just important that you are aware that this may again be a temporary time of great sadness as you continue your grief journey.

### **SIGNIFICANT ANNIVERSARIES:**

The first year is full of many “firsts” —holidays, birthdays, anniversaries, and other special days. Even after many years, you might find yourself feeling anxious, sad, angry or irritable for no reason that you can think of, until you look at a calendar and are reminded that you are near an anniversary. Sometimes, the intensity of your feelings will surprise you. Significant dates that you shared with your loved one may evoke powerful feelings in you for the rest of your life. But with the passage of time, hopefully the memories will become less painful and more treasured.

The following are some experiences that you might encounter in the first year of a grief journey:

- It is normal to feel crazy at times. Your emotions are on a roller coaster, full of ups and downs. Your mind is on overload. Grief seems to come in waves. You may be crying one minute, laughing the next, screaming and filled with anger the next. Everything seems to be spinning out of control.
- Other people often think they are an expert when it comes to grief. People will tell you what you need, how you should feel, how you should grieve and what you need to do. It is best to grieve in your own way.
- Each aspect of the loss will be grieved differently. Multiple losses in a short time will also be grieved differently and may complicate or prolong the grief process.
- Family members are not always able to comfort each other because they are grieving a different loss. Grief can bring a family together or

tear it apart. Your relationships may be strengthened or weakened.

- The intensity of grief will depend on many factors—the type of relationship, the circumstances of the death, etc.
- Grief changes you and your life. You will not be the same person after the loss that you were before. Many people are not prepared for the depth of these changes.
- You may want to just “get back to normal.” But that old normal is no longer there. You will have to develop a “new normal.” You might find yourself grieving the end of a lifestyle, the end of shared activities, the end of family traditions, or of your role. Whole aspects of your life may be lost, not just your loved one.
- Grief may affect you physically. You may be more susceptible to colds or infections. If you have been a caregiver for a long time, you may have neglected your own well-being while caring for your loved one. It is a good idea to get a physical exam from your doctor and to focus on your own health.
- You may experience a spiritual crisis during your grief journey. People may either turn to God or away from Him in moments of great sorrow. It is a common and understandable reaction to be angry with God and to question why this event has come into your life. Talking to a minister, faith community leader or spiritual counselor may help with these feelings.
- Some people will be uncertain what to say to you and may be uncomfortable around you. They don’t want to cause you more pain. They may say things that they do not realize are hurtful. Recognize their efforts and surround yourself with those who understand what it is like to suffer a loss.
- There may be times when you just need to “take a break” from your grief. Give yourself permission to enjoy life. You do not have to feel guilty if you laugh or enjoy yourself. In fact, the first time you laugh after a loss may surprise you and will probably bring you a feeling of relief.

## THE SECOND YEAR:

Many grieving persons are surprised when they experience difficult times after the one-year anniversary of the death. The second year may be even more difficult than the first. Or, it may be better. Remember that your grief will be as unique as you are, and as unique as the person you have lost. There is no concrete pattern or timetable to follow, no single right way to grieve. Grief takes as long as it takes and that is different for each of us.



## COPING TECHNIQUES

You may be asking yourself: “How can I handle this loss?” While there is no cure for the pain, there are techniques you can learn to help yourself move through the pain and toward healing.

Talk with others about your feelings. This process can be repeated as often as necessary. Don’t let your feelings get bottled up inside you. Sharing your pain and confusion, and sharing memories of your loved one can help you heal.

Find other ways to express your feelings. A friend may not always be available to listen, but there are alternatives such as keeping a journal, writing a letter to your loved one, or going to a support group. If you need a physical release, you can cry, exercise, or hit a pillow.

Give yourself permission to really “feel” whatever you are feeling. Remember, feelings aren’t “right” or “wrong,” they just are. They are automatic responses to something that has happened to us or in our world. It is important to learn how to express these feelings in ways that get them out of your body without doing harm to yourself or others. It is a good thing to express anger, sadness, frustration -even joy! It is okay to cry, and it is okay to laugh.

Take care of you. Get plenty of rest, eat nutritious meals, exercise regularly, get a physical from your doctor, and allow yourself time to do comforting activities.

Establish a Support Network. Determine who the supportive people are in your life. It’s okay to avoid the people in your life who are not supportive, who may drain your energy, or who bring you down.

Draw on your spiritual strength. Whatever is your source of comfort and strength—utilize it to the fullest. Prayer, meditation, discussions with spiritual leaders, and fellowship with others in your faith community can all be helpful.

Try not to make major decisions. Because grieving can cloud your judgment, it is best to wait six months to a year after your loss to make major decisions. If you must make major decisions, seek the counsel of a trusted individual in your life who can help you make wise choices. Don't let anyone pressure you into hurrying through a major decision.

Educate yourself on the grieving process. Use the resources provided by Covenant Care Bereavement Services. Also, seek out workshops, support groups, magazines, and books about grief.

Seek guidance. If you know someone who has experienced a similar loss and who has healed enough to be able to offer guidance, you might want to seek them out and talk with them.

Honor your loved one. Find a comforting way to honor the memory of your loved one. Here are some suggestions:

- Make donations to a charity in their name
- Make a scrapbook or shadowbox to hold special mementos
- Light a candle on special occasions in their memory
- Plant a tree or create a memory garden
- Create a table or place with pictures and mementos of your life together
- At a holiday dinner, set a special place setting
- On special occasions, offer a toast to your loved one in remembrance and thanksgiving

Avoid self-medicating. Do not use alcohol or drugs (legal or illegal) to numb your pain. When the numbness wears off, the grief will still be there. In fact, your life may be worse than when you began self medicating, because drug and alcohol abuse endanger your health, your friendships, your job, etc.

When you're ready, help others. Many bereaved persons find it healing to help others. You can volunteer for charitable organizations or simply help others on an individual basis. After a year has passed, you might want to consider volunteering with groups who work with grieving people such as: Hospice, Widowed Persons Services, or Compassionate Friends.

Don't impose any "shoulds" on yourself. There is no specific time frame for the grief process. You don't have to be at a specific place at a specific time. Don't judge how you're grieving by looking at how someone else is grieving or has grieved. Be patient with yourself.

Believe that you will survive. Even though it seems impossible, you can make it through your grief journey step by step. Sometimes that will mean taking life day by day-and sometimes it will mean taking life minute by minute. Don't try and force your life into returning to "normal." You can't go backwards into the "old" normal, but you can look forward to finding a "new" normal.

Practice journaling. Every day most of us carry on an internal conversation with ourselves as we try to make sense of our lives. The process of "journaling" is simply writing down those thoughts and feelings so that they become tangible and clearer to us.

Journaling is a coping technique that can be used at any time in life, but it is especially helpful for handling the complicated and intense emotions of grief. What is great about a journal is that anyone can keep one. It doesn't require any special skills or training. It doesn't matter what kind of notebook you have, how much time you spend journaling or even if you can spell correctly.

Also, a journal is a safe place to express your feelings. You can write down anything—questions, longings, fears, or needs. This process can provide insight and relief.

Here are sample topics you may want to write about:

For clarification of thoughts and feelings, you can ask:

Who am I at this point in my life?  
What am I doing and why? How do I feel about my life?  
What do I need to change in order to feel better about myself?

For reflection and remembering, you can write about:

Special memories with my loved one.  
Things I don't want to forget.  
Favorite stories I want to pass down to children and others.  
A history of our lives together.

For a sense of completion, you can write about:

What I wish I had or hadn't said.  
What I wish I had or hadn't done.  
What I'd like to ask you.  
What I miss most.  
How I felt when you died.  
How I feel now.  
What I wish we had or hadn't done together.  
What we can't do now.

Write letters. When someone dies, we almost always wish we had one more chance to say something to them. In addition to journaling, it can be helpful to write a letter addressed to your loved one. You can do anything you want with the finished letter—put it in a drawer, take it to the cemetery and bury it, burn it and scatter its ashes, or shred it and put it in a balloon.

You can also try this exercise: After you have written the letter, take a break—sit quietly and clear your mind, go for a walk, or do something else. Then, come back and try to imagine what your loved one's response to you might be. Don't think too hard, just start writing and let it flow. See if you can write a letter back to yourself.

You can use this same technique to clarify your feelings about God, which are often confusing after a loss. You can write them down in your journal, or you can write a letter to Him. You can pour out your thoughts and feelings. You can follow that with the same exercise as described above. Wait awhile after writing the letter, then try to imagine what a response from God would be like and write that down.

This exercise often works because we tend to have wisdom inside us that we don't know how to access. When we are able to write in a way that the thoughts and feelings flow of their own accord out of us, then we can find clues-messages-from our own internal wisdom.

Write down emotional dreams. While grieving, you may experience a change in your dream life. Dreams can cause many different types of feelings. You may feel comforted, confused, enlightened, or distressed.

It may be helpful for you to know that according to many theories about dreaming, dreams are sent to us by our subconscious mind as a way to help us understand ourselves. They are sent to us in the service of becoming whole.

Even frightening dreams are just simple messages from our minds telling us how our emotional, inner self is doing beneath the surface. The reason they are frightening is because of the language they come in—that is, the language of our own personal subconscious mind—a language full of strange, exaggerated, bizarre, beautiful images, many from our own lives. But once you learn to decode your dream language, then the message itself is usually not so scary.



For example, a frightening dream about drowning might simply be your subconscious mind alerting you to something you have been ignoring—that you currently feel as if you are “drowning” in your emotions. Once you understand the metaphor or message of the dream, then the dream becomes helpful and positive. Now you know how to fix the situation in your waking life—spend time expressing and releasing some of the excess emotions.

Writing down your dreams can help you clarify them. It can also help you shake off any bad feelings that the dream might have left you with upon waking. Writing down the dream—or talking about it—gets it out in the open. It takes the emotional echoes out of your body and releases them. Some people keep a pad of paper by the bed (and even a flashlight), because it is best to write them down when they are fresh.

Remember, as “unnatural” and painful and “wrong” as grief often feels, it is actually a very natural process. At some point in life, everyone suffers a loss. Many bereaved struggle with their own mortality after a death and this may bring up difficult emotions.

Nature has built-in ways of processing and healing the wounds to a human being’s emotional, psychological, and spiritual self. As Doug Manning said, “Grieving is nature’s way of healing a broken heart.” Let time, tears, dreams, and reflection do the work of mending you.



## MOVING TOWARD HEALING

The death of a loved one is one of the worst kinds of wounds imaginable. The process of healing from this kind of wound—an emotional, psychological and spiritual wound—is similar to the healing process of a physical wound.

**CLEANSING** - An emotional wound, like a physical wound, needs to be cleaned so that it doesn’t get infected. Tears are a natural way of cleaning out your emotions. Crying can wash away some of the pain you feel.

**TREATING** - Early treatment of a wound is important. Don’t let your emotions get trapped and fester inside you. Even with early treatment, wounds can sometimes be so deep you may find that more intensive work is needed. Healing takes time and patience. Sometimes we think the wound is almost healed and something happens to reopen the wound, and we must start the healing process again. Don’t be discouraged.

**HEALING** - When this begins to happen, your perspective will change, and you will be able to look back on the event that caused the wound and your pain will have lessened. You will begin to treasure the good memories you have, and they won’t hurt as much to recall.

**SCARRING** - Sometimes, even when the wound heals, you are left with a scar. A scar stays with you for the rest of your life, but it does not destroy you. You can think of a scar not as a mark of pain, but as proof of love.

If you ignore the treating of an emotional wound, it can be harmful in the same way that ignoring a physical wound would be. It is important to take care of yourself and honor the process of your grief.



Below is a list of signs that indicate that healing is occurring:

- You can talk about your loved one without the constant flow of tears
- You begin to do some of the activities you did before your loved one died
- You realize that you are laughing again without feeling guilty
- You are eating and sleeping better and don't feel as tired all the time
- You feel like you are coming back to life and things begin to matter again
- You realize that you are living in the present instead of in the memories of your past
- You don't think of your loved one constantly
- You develop a new routine in your daily life (a "new normal")
- You are able to look forward to events in your future

It has been said that eventually life breaks us all, but just as with a broken bone, when it is healed it is stronger at the broken place. You too can be stronger once you have done the work of grieving and healing.



## HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

When the unspeakable-and at times unbearable-happens to us, we think that our lives will never be the same. And, that is correct. When someone you love dies, your life changes forever.

However, at some point, life begins to be meaningful and joyful again. You find that "new normal." But this new normal, this new life, is something you have to choose. Only you can choose if you are going to be a survivor or a victim.

You can choose to:

- Seek out people who will listen to you and who care about you OR you can isolate yourself and retreat from life.
- Look for things that give you a sense of meaning and purpose in life OR you can decide you have nothing to live for
- Fight back against your negative feelings OR you can give in to feelings of helplessness and pity
- Talk about your concerns with someone you trust OR you can keep them bottled up and festering
- Make your life better OR make your life bitter
- Embrace family and friends who are also hurting OR you can pretend you are protecting them by ignoring their pain
- Be thankful for the years you were given with your loved one OR you can continue to be angry because you feel you were robbed

The late Dr. John Claypool was a minister whose daughter, Laura Lue, died from leukemia when she was ten years old. His was a long and agonizing journey through the dark valley of grief. He emerged on the other side with some profound insights and spent the rest of his days speaking, writing and counseling others who were on a similar path.

He was a great supporter of Compassionate Friends, the national organization for parents who have experienced the death of a child. At one of their conventions he shared his insights. He said that while he was in that dark valley, he was led to the realization that Laura Lue's life was not something to which he had been

entitled, and which had been stolen from him, but that his daughter's life was a beautiful gift that he had been given.

Dr. Claypool observed that we think differently about gifts than we do possessions. He believed that if we remember only the pain of our loved one's death, then we ignore the joy of their life, and that is a disservice to their memory.

He came to realize that one of the central questions of grief, "Why did she die?" could be turned into, "Why did she live?" and then the life, not the death, can be celebrated. He knew that he had begun to heal when he was able to say, 'I'm gladder that I had her, than sadder that I lost her.'

The bereavement services of Covenant Care hope that you will also reach a place in your grief journey where you will be able to cherish the gift of your loved one's life and find comfort in the memories that remain.



You can shed tears because they are gone,  
Or you can smile because they lived.

You can close your eyes and pray they will come back,  
Or you can open your eyes and see all that they left for you.

Your heart can be empty because you can't see them,  
Or you can be full of the love you shared.

You can turn your back on tomorrow and live yesterday,  
Or you can be happy for tomorrow because of yesterday.

You can remember only that they are gone,  
Or you can cherish their memory and let it live on.

You can cry and close your mind and feel empty,  
Or you can do what they would want:

Smile, Open your heart, Love ... and go on.

*-Elizabeth Ammons*

## GRIEF AND LOSS RESOURCES

### DEATH OF A SPOUSE

Accettura, P. Mark and Case, Steven J. **Lost & Found: Finding Self Reliance After the Loss of a Spouse.** Farmington Hills: Collinwood Press, 2001. *Provides resources, practical and useful information in the areas of finances, insurance, taxes, estate planning and more. It includes a directory of resources for governmental and non-profit organizations serving the surviving spouse.*

Caine, Lynn. **Widow.** New York: Bantam Books, 1974. *The autobiography of a widow - her courage, loneliness and search for a life with her children after the death of her husband.*

Lewis, C. S. **A Grief Observed.** New York: Seabury Press, 1961. *An autobiographical account of the famous writer's journey through grief after his wife's death from cancer.*

Loweinsohn, Ruth Jean. **Survival Handbook for Widows.** Glenview, IL. Scott, Foresman & Co. 1984. *AARP's book about widowhood.*

Neeld, Elizabeth Harper. **Seven Choices.** New York: Warner Books, 2003. *Written particularly for individuals whose spouse has died to help them find daylight after loss shatters your world.*

### DEATH OF A PARENT

LeShan, Eda. **Learning to Say Goodbye.** New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1988. *Written in an easy to understand language for children when a parent dies.*

Marshall, Fiona. **Losing A Parent.** Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 1993. *A practical guide to assist adults after losing a parent suddenly or following a terminal illness.*

Myers, Edward. **When Parents Die.** New York: Penguin Books, 1997. *A comprehensive guide to dealing with a parent's death. Offers information on practical matters and a resource guide.*

Smith, Harold Ivan. **Grieving the Death of a Mother.** Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Books, 2003. *Address the unique grief children face after losing a mother.*

## GENERAL GRIEF

Callanan, Maggie and Kelley, Patricia. **Final Gifts.** New York: Bantam Books, 1992. *Two hospice nurses share their experiences with patients at the end of life.*

Deits, Bob. **Life After Loss.** Tucson, AZ: Fisher Books, 1988. *A personal guide to dealing with death, divorce, job change and relocation.*

Fitzgerald, Helen. **The Mourning Handbook.** New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994. *A comprehensive guide that describes the grief process. Includes information on complicated grief*

Grollman, Earl A. **Living When a Loved One Has Died.** Boston: Beacon, 1977. *An excellent general text for adjusting to life following the loss of a loved one.*

Grollman, Earl A. **What Helped Me When My Loved One Died.** Boston: Beacon Press, 1978. *Personal stories of many who have mourned the death of a loved one.*

Kubler-Ross, Elisabeth and Kessler, David. **Life Lessons.** New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000. *Two experts on death and dying teach us about life and living.*

Kushner, Harold. **When Bad Things Happen to Good People.** New York: Schocken Press, 1981. *Discusses the meaning of suffering and the choices we have as individuals.*

Levinson, Daniel J. **The Seasons of a Man's Life.** New York: Ballantine, 1978. *Report that explores and explains specific periods of personal development for adults.*

Manning, Doug. **Don't Take My Grief Away From Me.** Oklahoma City, OK: Insight Books, 1993. *How to walk through grief and learn to live again.*

Manning, Doug. **The Special Care Series.** Oklahoma City, OK: Insight Books, Revised 2005. *A series of four easy to read booklets that guide you through the first year of grief.*

Miller, Sally Downham. **Mourning and Dancing.** Deerfield Beach, FL: Health Communications, Inc., 1999. *Memoir of a young widow and her journey through grief to healing.*

Miller, Sally Downham. **Mourning and Dancing.** Deerfield Beach, FL: Health Communications, Inc., 1999. *Memoir of a young widow and her journey through grief to healing.*

Rando, Therese A. **How To Go On Living When Someone You Love Dies.** Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1991. *Provides education on the grief process, normalizes grief reactions and encourages the reader to grieve in his/her own w.*

Staudacher, Carol. **A Time To Grieve.** New York: Harper Collins, 1994. *A book of meditations for grievers.*

Staudacher, Carol. **Beyond Grief.** Oakland, Calif.: New Harbinger Publications, 1987. *A guide to a variety of losses. Death of spouse, loss of parent, loss of child, surviving a suicide and surviving a murder are included in this book.*

Tatlebaum, Judy. **The Courage to Grieve.** New York: Harper, 1980. *Provides specific guidance on how to face grief, and resolve and grow from the experience.*

Westberg, Granger. **Good Grief.** Philadelphia: Frotess Press, 1978 (1962). *Identifies 10 stages of grief*

Wolfelt, Alan D. **The Understanding Your Grief Journal.** Fort Collins, CO: Companion Press, 2004. *Journal that helps the griever to explore the 10 touchstones in their own grief journey.*

Wolfelt, Alan D. **Understanding Your Grief.** Fort Collins, CO: Companion Press, 2003. *Describes 10 "touchstones" to guide you in your grief journey.*

## DEATH OF A CHILD

Clark, Martha Bittle. **Are You Weeping With me God?** Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1987. *The diary of a mother whose daughter died suddenly in a car accident, describes her journey from despair to living again.*

Claypool, John. **Tracks of a Fellow Struggler.** Waco, TX: Work Books, 1980. *A minister's journey from the leukemia diagnosis of his 10 year old daughter through her death.*

Huntley, Theresa M. **When Your Child Dies.** Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2001. *Part of the Hope/Healing Series which includes numerous other titles addressing many losses. Booklet provides practical guidelines for parents who have lost a child.*

## FOR ADULTS - PERINATAL LOSS

Kuebelbeck, Amy. **Gift of Time.** *Practical guide for parents who decide to continue a pregnancy knowing their baby's life will be brief*

O'Keeffe Lafser, Christine. **An Empty Cradle, a Full Heart.** *A book of reflections written by a mother who has lost a child.*

Kohn, Ingrid, MSW and Perry-Lynn Moffitt with Isabelle A. Wilkins, MD. **A Silent Sorrow: Pregnancy Loss. Guidance and Support for You and Your Family.** Published by Routledge, copyright 2000. *Offers practical suggestions for newly bereaved parents and their families.*

Limbo, Rana K. and Sara Rich Wheeler, with Susan T. Hessel. **When a Baby Dies: A Handbook for Healing and Helping.** Published by Bereavement and Advanced Care Planning Services. Copyright 1986- 2008. *Includes individual stories of pregnancy and perinatal loss, addresses family issues related to the grief process, and provides practical guidance for healthcare professionals who support grieving families.*

Ilse, Sherokee. **Empty Arms: Coping with Miscarriage, Stillbirth and Infant Death Surviving the First Hours and Beyond.** Published by Wintergreen Press, copyright 1986-2013, 40th 2013. *Offers guidance in decision-making to newly bereaved parents after their baby's death.*

**Dear Parents, A Collection of Letters to Bereaved Parents.** Published by Centering Corporation, copyright 1898, revised 2003. *A collection of letters written by bereaved parents and leaders in the bereavement field.*

Schwiebert, Pat, RN. **Strongand Tender, A Guide for the Father Whose Baby Has Died.** Published by Grief Watch, copyright 1996, 2003. *A collection of insights that recognize the grief fathers experience following the death of their baby.*

Schwiebert, Pat, RN and Paul Kirk, MD. **When Hello Means Goodbye: A Guide for Parents Whose Child Dies Before Birth, at Birth, or Shortly After Birth.** Published by Grief Watch, copyright 2012. *Answers questions and provides guidance on multiple topics to include: collecting keepsakes; reasons for seeing, holding, and naming a dead baby; and where to find help.*

McCormick, Kristine Brite. **When a Friend's Baby Dies.** Free eBook at [www.corasstory.com](http://www.corasstory.com), copyright 2012. *Offers suggestions and tips on how to support a friend after the loss of a baby.*

## MASCULINE GRIEF

Golden, Thomas R. **Swallowed by a Snake.** (2nd ed.). Gaithersburg, MD: Golden Healing Publishing LL. C., 2000. *Identifies differences in the masculine side of healing.*

Levang, Elizabeth. **When Men Grieve.** Minneapolis, MN: Fairview Press, 1998. *Provides personal stories of loss and grief from the male perspective and explores how men grieve differently than women.*

## DEATH BY SUICIDE

Carlson, Trudy. **Suicide Survivor's Handbook.** Duluth, MN: Benline Press, 2000. *A practical guide for suicide survivors that addresses the emotions felt after a loved one completes suicide.*

Glover, Beryl S. **The Empty Chair.** Oklahoma, OK: In-sight Books, Inc., 2000. *Includes personal stories of grief following a death by suicide.*

Smolin, Ann and Guinan, John. **Healing After the Suicide of a Loved One.** New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993. *A guide that describes the emotional reactions after a suicide and provides information and resources.*

Wroblewski, Adina. **Suicide Survivors: A Guide for Those Left Behind.** Minneapolis, MN: SAVE, 1994. *Gives insight into the pain felt by suicide survivors, common concerns of the survivors and hope for the future.*

## FOR CHILDREN / SIBLING (INFANT) LOSS

Johnson, Marv & Joy. **Where's Jess?** Centering Corporation. *This is a simple book to help children, ages 3 - 6 understand the death of a sibling.*

Blanford, Cathy. **Something Happened.** Centering Corporation. *This is a simple story to help young children understand a pregnancy loss.*

Schwiebert, Pat. **We were Going to Have a Baby but We Had an Angel Instead.** Centering Corporation. *Illustrations help children ages and up to understand and cope with perinatal death and stillbirth. Includes endnotes for parents with suggestions on how to help bereaved children.*

## PET LOSS

Nieburg, Herbert A. and Fischer, Arlene. **Pet Loss.** New York: Harper and Row, 1982. *Comprehensive guide for adults and children that legitimizes the grief experienced after losing a beloved pet.*

## JOURNALING

Broyles, Anne. **Journaling: A Spirit Journey.** Nashville: The Upper Room, 1994. *Discussion of simple ways of journaling.*

## DREAMS

Holloway, Gillian. **The Complete Dream Book.** Naperville, Illinois: Source books, Inc. 2001. *Discusses how real events in life relate to dreams.*

Kelsey, Morton. **Dreams: A Way to Listen to God.** New York: Paulist Press, 1978. *A basic introduction to the interpretation of dreams.*

## WEBSITES

[www.bereavementmagazine.com](http://www.bereavementmagazine.com)  
[www.bereavementresources.com](http://www.bereavementresources.com)  
[www.centerforloss.com](http://www.centerforloss.com)  
[www.compassionbooks.com](http://www.compassionbooks.com)  
[www.goodgriefresources.com](http://www.goodgriefresources.com)  
[www.griefdigest.com](http://www.griefdigest.com)  
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