



Children often express grief through their behavior. Many new problems, such as increased withdrawal, clinging, daydreaming, fights, decreased concentration, changes in eating or sleeping patterns, and dropping grades, as well as the recurrence of old problems or a worsening of current problems, may be symptoms of grief. Children need to be continually assured that they will survive their loss. They can be reassured by what you do and what you say.

Children learn how to grieve by watching you grieve. You are their role model. It is important for them to see that you can grieve without being destroyed, and to see you taking care of yourself in your grief. Getting help from others when you need it may encourage your child to reach out to others as well.

Parents can help their children by listening, particularly when they are grieving. A listening attitude is conveyed by being patient, respectful and empathetic. By adopting this attitude, you give your child a safe place to share, work through feelings and create his or her own understanding. By listening, you also can correct misconceptions.

It is important to be aware of the expectations you have of your child. Children may feel compelled to step into the role the deceased played in the home. One common example is the young son who tries to be the man of the house. Reassure your child that he is not expected to fill this role.

Just as behavior can reassure children, words can decrease isolation. It is important to be honest, direct and open with children, and speak to their age level. You don't need to tell them more than they can take in and understand.

Because of children's need to regain their sense of control, it is important to follow their lead when discussing their grief. They are more likely to open up when they feel in control of the timing and content of the conversation.

Remember, children deal with their grief in small doses. Don't be concerned if your child talks about issues close to them for a brief time, then changes the subject or goes out to play. Answer your child's questions directly and honestly. It is all right to say you do not know the answer.

To reassure your child:

Include your child when possible in planning things that affect them, such as holiday rituals and memorials.

Take your child to visit the site where your loved one has been buried or where the ashes have been scattered.

Encourage artwork such as drawing or working with clay, to help your child express his or her feelings. Help your child construct a memory book about the person who died. Include photos, drawings, funeral and obituary notices, memorabilia, short stories, favorite foods, movies, TV shows, jokes, family events and poetry.

Provide your child with a journal for recording his or her thoughts and experiences.

Talk to teachers, school counselors, church members and leaders of any of your child's clubs so they understand that any change in behavior is an expression of grief. It is important to maintain routines with consistent structure and physical nurturance (hugs, food, vitamins, rest and exercise). If you are concerned about your child's behavior or reactions, call a Sharp HospiceCare bereavement counselor at **1-800-681-9188**.

“If your compassion does not include yourself, it is incomplete.”
— Jack Kornfield

bringing comfort to each day

Healing Through Grief

Dear Friend,

Sharing feelings with someone you trust can help you release tension and gain perspective on your loss and grief. Another way to express your painful feelings is through journal writing.

If you find yourself tossing and turning when trying to fall asleep, or if you feel too anxious, confused or upset to talk about your thoughts and feelings, putting words on paper may help. Research shows that journal writing can lower stress, promote emotional well-being, boost the immune system and lower blood pressure.

This issue of *Healing Through Grief* will provide tips on how to effectively express your feelings and thoughts in writing. You'll also learn to understand your needs during grief and how to deal with secondary losses — losses that occur because your loved one died.

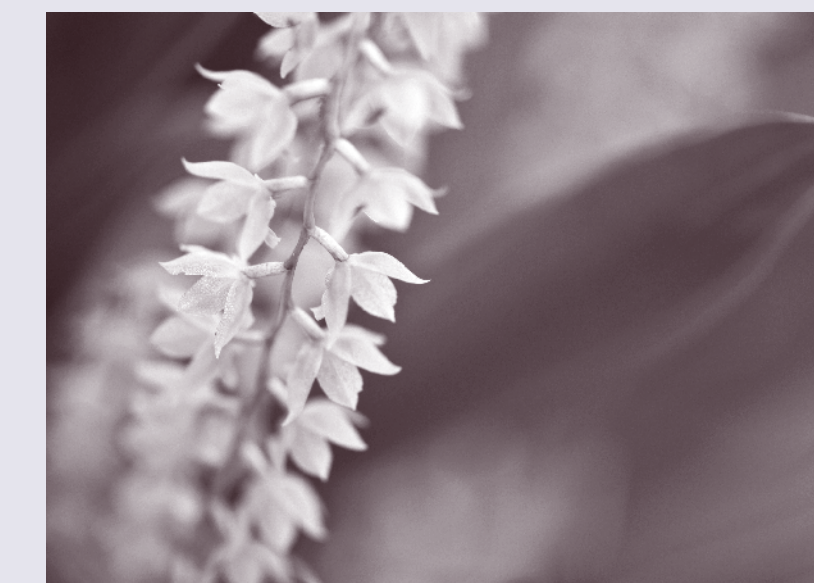
We're here to help. If you would like to talk about your loss, reactions or concerns, or if you have any questions about our services, call **1-800-681-9188** to speak to a bereavement counselor.

Sincerely yours,
The Bereavement Department of
Sharp HospiceCare

Your Needs During Grief

When you experience the death of someone you love, your whole perspective of life can change. Time can become precious and you may find that you want to spend it wisely. It helps to make time to be with people you trust who will listen when you need to talk. You also need time to get to know yourself better and to process all that has happened. You may need months and years to understand the feelings that go along with loss. Pay attention to the special needs you may have during your grief. Get plenty of rest and relaxation. When you grieve, your body works overtime and needs additional rejuvenation and nurturing. Because grief is an exhausting process both emotionally and physically, you will need to replenish yourself. Do the things that feel healing to you and that connect you to the people and things you love.

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Secondary Losses

Secondary losses are losses that develop as a consequence of the death. They can be physical losses — such as a home, other people or a specific environment. The stepmother in this statement is an example of a secondary loss:

“When my dad died, my stepmother also moved away, and I didn't have the opportunity to grieve with her or to support her in person.”

Secondary losses can also be symbolic: a loss of dreams; your future as you and your loved one had planned it; status or identity; or expectations. Depending on one's situation, secondary losses can become more apparent after a passage of time and may account for a resurgence of grief.

There might also be a loss of independence, such as when the survivor is frail or ill, and was cared for by the person who died. That person can no longer be alone or care for him or herself independently.

Symbolic losses may also be a loss of autonomy, control, predictability, self-esteem and mobility. You need to grieve all losses both individually and together, and you must acknowledge this as part of your overall coping process.



Sharp HospiceCare strives to bring comfort to those working through the grieving process. Bereavement counselors provide a supportive, confidential environment for families and friends dealing with the loss of a loved one. To learn more about Sharp HospiceCare, including support groups, call **1-800-681-9188**.

Your Needs During Grief Continued

The death of a loved one will push you to make necessary changes and decisions. When making these decisions, you need to feel secure. Rely on someone you trust — a family member, friend or colleague — to help you through these difficult decisions. Beware of being pushed into decisions before you are ready or before you understand them sufficiently.

For a while, it may feel impossible to put structure into your life again. It may seem that your life has no meaning or that you have no reason to go on. At these times, it helps to have small goals. Have something to look forward to, like going to lunch or to a movie, to help you get through the immediate future. Live one day at a time. Initially, you may find it painful to go out, but in time it will become easier and enjoyable.

As the months pass, you may choose to work on more long-range goals to give added structure and direction to your life. Don't underestimate or deprive yourself of the

therapeutic value of simple pleasures. Watching sunsets, taking a walk on the beach or indulging in a long, hot bath can help you renew your emotional investment in life. Try to banish guilt from your grieving; it can make you feel that it is wrong to laugh, feel pleasure or enjoy any part of life again.

Have hope, and remember that many people recover from profound losses and have built new, fulfilling lives.

After experiencing more positive emotions, you may find yourself stepping back into feelings of sadness, despair or anger. Your painful emotions return because you can't take in all of the grief and life changes at once. Be patient and recognize that your grief diminishes gradually.

In some circumstances, a doctor may prescribe medication to help you through the most traumatic, incapacitating period of grief. Most of the time, however, you should avoid medication and alcohol — which deaden feelings — or use them in moderation. Although they may temporarily relieve some of the pain, they may delay or extend the healing process in the long run.

Grief cannot be prevented or cured — the only way to overcome grief is to work through it.

Keeping a Journal

Journaling is a popular tool for coping with stress and inner conflicts. You can use the process to sort out and vent your feelings, identify issues that are creating stress, and discover insights to help you solve problems and resolve relationship issues. Keeping a journal helps you examine your inner processes — what's going on inside of you.

You can record feelings, thoughts, stories, prayers, anxieties, fears, poems, joys and concerns, and how you deal with them. You may also record what you feel are the outside sources of your feelings, for example, an argument or loss.

Start your journal by answering these questions:

- How am I over-/underreacting to the situation?
- How am I allowing my perceptions to be colored by emotions?
- Can I identify past events similar to the present experience?
- Are my feelings, especially fears, so strong that they override my ability to think correctly? Why?
- What experiences cause my reactions? Is this a constant pattern? Or is it a new pattern?

Tips for Keeping a Journal:

- Date every entry.
- Often a phrase or even just a word is adequate to record the experience.
- Complete sentences and attention to grammar are not necessary.
- Use the free-flowing method. Jot down your thoughts and feelings as they occur, without censoring yourself.
- Review your entries periodically. When you review the flow of thoughts and feelings, you can gain insight about how you are progressing.
- When you review entries, don't edit them. If you want to add notes or comments to prior entries, use another color ink or pencil so you can see how you have changed over time. Also, note the date of your additions.

- Make entries as regularly as possible to help you monitor your progress. Daily entries will enable you to track and understand experiences more completely than haphazard or less frequent entries. If you aren't able to complete a daily entry, weekly entries still allow you to see patterns of responses and changes.
- Journaling is very personal and should be treated with the utmost respect and confidentiality. Write for your eyes only, and be playful. It's OK to get a little goofy; it's OK to have fun. Don't feel pressured by others to let them read your journal unless you want to share it.
- Keep in mind that journal writing is therapy, not drudgery.



Practical Suggestions for Journal Entries:

Record Daily Experiences:

- Highs and lows
- Significant events
- Things that made you laugh, cry or get angry
- Moments of wonder
- Important conversations
- How you feel supported
- Triumphs

Make Lists of:

- Coping behaviors that work
- Nurturing experiences
- Things you treasure most
- Things that continue to be relevant in your life
- Goals or desires
- Fears
- Strengths and weaknesses
- What you like about yourself
- Things you want to change



Communicating With Your Loved One Who Died

By writing a letter to your loved one who died, you can get in touch with your feelings and release some of your pain. It may also help bring closure to issues that might have been left undone or unsaid.

Topics that you may want to address:

- Special memories you have about your loved one
- Things you miss most about your loved one and your relationship
- What you wish you had or hadn't said or done
- Questions you would like to ask your loved one
- What you've had the hardest time dealing with
- Ways your loved one will continue to live on in you
- Special ways you have for keeping your memories
- How you've grown through this profound experience

As you begin to write, choose as many or as few topics as you want that have significance for you. These topics may help you come up with ideas specific to your situation and relationship.

Write an answer to your letter, telling yourself what you imagine your loved one would say. Writing these letters may bring up painful or frightening feelings. Getting these feelings out is helpful and healing. When you speak or write about your pain, you take the opportunity to release it.

You may find even more healing by reading your letter to someone you trust.