



The
Healing
WORKBOOK

by Angela M. Doel, MS

45 Therapeutic Assignments to Help You
Accept Your Loss and Move Forward with Your Life

The Healing Workbook:
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Accept Your Loss and Move Forward with
Your Life

By Angela M. Doel, MS

Between Sessions Resources, Inc.
Coral Gables, FL

The Healing Workbook by Angela M. Doel, M.S.

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Disclaimer: This book is intended to be used as an adjunct to psychotherapy. If you are experiencing serious symptoms or problems in your life, seek the help of an experienced mental health professional.

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About the Series

The Healing Workbook is part of a series of workbooks designed to give therapists and their clients easy access to practical evidence-based psychotherapy tools. Each workbook represents a complete treatment program.

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Introduction

Grief is a healthy, normal, and multi-faceted response to loss, and it has emotional, physical, cognitive, behavioral, social, and philosophical dimensions. Bereavement refers to the state of loss, and grief to the reaction to loss. The grieving process can occur in many types of losses. This workbook focuses on loss by death.

The grieving process helps people accept loss and move forward. This process may be complicated if the relationship with the deceased was either ambivalent or challenging, or the death was sudden or violent.

This therapeutic assignment workbook provides therapists, other mental health professionals, and coaches with resources to help their clients with the grieving process. The worksheets in *The Healing Workbook* will engage clients who are grieving and encourage them to identify, internalize, and verbalize their feelings while working through their grieving process. The worksheets can be used in individual counseling sessions, support groups, and “between sessions.”

How to Use this Workbook

This homework assignment workbook is organized into seven sections:

Section 1. Understanding Grief

Section 2. Self-Care

Section 3. More Healthy Ways to Cope

Section 4. Receiving Support

Section 5. Family Relationships

Section 6. Remembering Your Loved One

Section 7. Moving Forward

Each worksheet has three sections: What to Know, What to Do, and Reflections on This Exercise. **What to Know** offers background information about the issue(s) being addressed in the worksheet. **What to Do** features a variety of exercises, including thought-provoking questions to answer, charts to track activities, and questionnaires to complete. In the **Reflections** section, clients are asked to provide feedback on the worksheet, including rating how much the exercise helped them, and writing about what they learned from the exercise. This is perhaps the most important part of the worksheet because it helps you and the client assess any progress or improvement that was made upon completion of the assignment. While you may want to give this book directly to a client, it is more likely that you will give specific assignments to each client, integrating each new skill into your counseling or coaching. For this reason, we recommend using the **Psychology Forms Filler**, a tool developed by Between Sessions Resources. The Psychology Forms Filler makes it easy to extract specific tools to send to clients, which they can then fill out on any computer or tablet, and either download or send back to you for review. You can learn more about the Psychology Forms Filler as well other psychological tools and software at www.BetweenSessions.com.

Section 1. Understanding Grief

Grief and Loss Assessment

This assessment will help your coach or therapist understand the losses you have experienced. Read each statement and check off if you experienced this in the past (*more* than six months ago), or you recently experienced it (*within* the past six months).

| Experience or event | I experienced this in the past | I recently experienced this |
|--|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Death of a loved one | | |
| Divorce or marital separation | | |
| Infidelity | | |
| End of friendship or romantic relationship | | |
| Unemployment | | |
| Dismissal from school | | |
| Loss of professional license | | |
| Retirement | | |
| Serious illness | | |
| Serious injury or loss of a limb | | |
| Homelessness | | |
| Financial loss/bankruptcy | | |
| Loss of driver's license or vehicle | | |
| Family member's illness or injury | | |
| Loss of a living parent to Alzheimer's or dementia | | |
| Addiction | | |
| Incarceration | | |
| Incarceration of a loved one | | |
| Estrangement from family | | |
| Relocation | | |
| Loved one's addiction or overdose | | |
| Pregnancy loss | | |
| Adult child leaving home | | |
| Infertility | | |
| Death of a pet | | |
| Loss of home to fire or natural disaster | | |
| Loss or destruction of sentimental possessions | | |
| Loss of a personal dream or goal | | |

| | | |
|--|--|--|
| Loss of reputation | | |
| Discovering a devastating secret | | |
| Loss of an important role | | |
| Loss of hope | | |
| Cancer-related loss (e.g., fertility, organ, breast, independence) | | |
| Other: | | |
| Other: | | |
| Other: | | |

Choose three events from your past that you checked off. Briefly describe each event. Write about what happened, when it happened (year, month or season, your age at the time, etc.), and how you reacted to the loss.

#1 What happened? _____

When did it happen (year, season, your age at the time)? _____

How did you react to the loss? _____

Who supported you during this time? _____

#2 What happened? _____

When did it happen (year, season, your age at the time)? _____

How did you react to the loss? _____

Who supported you during this time? _____

#3 What happened? _____

When did it happen (year, season, your age at the time)? _____

How did you react to the loss? _____

Who supported you during this time? _____

Now describe the most recent loss you have experienced.

What happened? When? _____

How are you coping? _____

What are your thoughts and feelings surrounding this loss?

Who is supporting you during this time? _____

Everyone reacts to loss in different ways. Some of the most common reactions to grief and loss are listed below. You may notice you had similar reactions in the loss events you described above. Some of these probably won't apply to you. Check off what you are *currently* experiencing (or experienced in the past week). **Circle the items that are especially strong or that you experience the most frequently.**

- | | | |
|--|---------------------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> AGGRESSION | <input type="checkbox"/> IRRITABILITY | <input type="checkbox"/> CONFUSION |
| <input type="checkbox"/> ANGER | <input type="checkbox"/> LONELINESS | <input type="checkbox"/> POOR CONCENTRATION |
| <input type="checkbox"/> ANXIETY | <input type="checkbox"/> NUMBNESS | <input type="checkbox"/> MUSCLE WEAKNESS |
| <input type="checkbox"/> APATHY | <input type="checkbox"/> REGRET | <input type="checkbox"/> DISBELIEF |
| <input type="checkbox"/> BITTERNESS | <input type="checkbox"/> RELIEF | <input type="checkbox"/> DISSOCIATION |
| <input type="checkbox"/> DESPAIR | <input type="checkbox"/> SADNESS | <input type="checkbox"/> FORGETFULNESS |
| <input type="checkbox"/> EMPTINESS | <input type="checkbox"/> SELF-PITY | <input type="checkbox"/> TIME DISTORTIONS |
| <input type="checkbox"/> FATIGUE | <input type="checkbox"/> SHOCK | <input type="checkbox"/> ABSENT-MINDEDNESS |
| <input type="checkbox"/> FEAR | <input type="checkbox"/> YEARNING | <input type="checkbox"/> ACCIDENT-PRONE |
| <input type="checkbox"/> GUILT | <input type="checkbox"/> SELF-BLAME | <input type="checkbox"/> CRYING |
| <input type="checkbox"/> HELPLESSNESS | <input type="checkbox"/> RELIEF | <input type="checkbox"/> SPASMS OF GRIEF |
| <input type="checkbox"/> HALLUCINATIONS, SEEING, &/OR HEARING THE DECEASED | | <input type="checkbox"/> MOOD SWINGS |
| <input type="checkbox"/> HAVING OBSESSIVE THOUGHTS ABOUT THE DECEASED | | <input type="checkbox"/> PASSIVENESS |
| <input type="checkbox"/> THINKING THE DECEASED IS STILL ALIVE | | <input type="checkbox"/> RESTLESSNESS |

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> AVOIDING REMINDERS OF THE DECEASED | <input type="checkbox"/> SCREAMING |
| <input type="checkbox"/> AVOIDING TALKING ABOUT THE DECEASED | <input type="checkbox"/> LACK OF ENERGY |
| <input type="checkbox"/> DREAMING ABOUT THE DECEASED | <input type="checkbox"/> WITHDRAWAL |
| <input type="checkbox"/> EATING TOO MUCH OR TOO LITTLE | <input type="checkbox"/> BODY ACHES & PAINS |
| <input type="checkbox"/> VISITING PLACES ASSOCIATED WITH THE DECEASED | <input type="checkbox"/> TROUBLE SLEEPING |
| <input type="checkbox"/> SENSING THE PRESENCE OF THE DECEASED | <input type="checkbox"/> DRY MOUTH |
| <input type="checkbox"/> CONSIDERING OR QUESTIONING THE MEANING OF LIFE | <input type="checkbox"/> NAUSEA OR UPSET STOMACH |
| <input type="checkbox"/> RECKLESS OR SELF-DESTRUCTIVE BEHAVIOR | <input type="checkbox"/> CHEST TIGHTNESS |
| <input type="checkbox"/> SEARCHING & CALLING FOR THE DECEASED | <input type="checkbox"/> THROAT TIGHTNESS |
| <input type="checkbox"/> BREATHLESSNESS OR SHORTNESS OF BREATH | <input type="checkbox"/> ANGER AIMED AT GOD |
| <input type="checkbox"/> FEELING THAT NOTHING IS REAL | <input type="checkbox"/> LOSS OF APPETITE |
| <input type="checkbox"/> DIFFICULTY MAKING DECISIONS | <input type="checkbox"/> EXHAUSTION |
| <input type="checkbox"/> HOLLOWNESS IN THE STOMACH | <input type="checkbox"/> SEEKING MEANING IN THE LOSS |
| <input type="checkbox"/> HYPERSENSITIVITY TO NOISE OR LIGHT | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> DECREASED INTEREST IN ACTIVITIES THAT USED TO BRING YOU PLEASURE | |

List any additional reactions, feelings, thoughts, or behaviors you are experiencing.

What reactions are the most uncomfortable for you? Why?

Are you letting yourself experience your emotions and thoughts freely? Why or why not?

Are there any complicated or unresolved issues related to your loss? Explain.

Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences?

Understanding and Coping with the Stages of Grief

Objective

To identify ten specific phases of grief and practice strategies for coping.

What to Know

Accepting grieving and going through it as a process will help you make/find closure with the past and move on. It takes real courage and bravery.

Long after Sigmund Freud and his work on sadness and Elizabeth Kübler Ross's approach to the stages of grief, many researchers worked on analyzing the grieving process to help people overcome difficult times and start taking risks again, live their lives as fully as possible, recover after loss, and find closure with the past. Grieving is a natural process that helps you let go, have closure, and move on in with your life.

If you dare to live your life fully, there is no way to avoid loss. It can be a loss of a person, a relationship, a job, a possession, a feeling, even an idea (if you believed in something deeply). The experience of loss is difficult to go through. Some people try to avoid it, deny it, repress it, and split it off from the rest of their lives. They pay a high price for that. The grieving process has its biological, psychological, and spiritual function and meaning. It helps you withdraw and detach your energy from the lost object, person, or event. It helps you end that attachment and accept your own human fragility, vulnerability, and the tough parts of life.

Researchers divided the grieving process into phases to make the process easier to understand. Rather than being rigidly divided, phases can blend into one another other. Sometimes from phase 1, you can jump to phase 3, then come back to phase 1 and so on. Everyone is different. Knowing the phases can help you understand what is happening, know that it is normal, that it will pass, and that the next phase will come, no matter how illogical or irrational they might seem.

What to Do

It is good to know the normal, typical phases of grief, but it does not mean you need to be experiencing or sharing your grieving process all the time. You can make choices, depending on whether you feel strong or vulnerable, about who you are with and who you reveal your feelings too. It is OK to put your feelings aside sometimes.

The Phases of Grief

1. Shock. You might freeze, become numb or mute, and not register what happened. You might be disorganized and confused; your body might become extremely rigid or extremely limp. Some people might be in this phase for seconds, some for hours. Follow the advice of the people you trust. If it is a police officer or a doctor who gave you bad news, follow their instructions. Let professional people take care of you.

Recall your shock. Describe how you felt.

2. Denial. Once confronted with the news, you might not believe it. You might deny it despite all the facts. “No, no, it didn’t happen. No, this is not possible, this is not the truth.” It is OK to do that. Let yourself say “NO, it didn’t happen,” for a while.

How did you deny the loss? Describe how you felt.

3. Fight/Flight/Freeze. You might feel the need to fight with the person who gave you the bad news, or with somebody you believe is responsible. Resist the urge. You might run away as far as possible and hide. That is OK. After running, sit down, breathe, and ground yourself. You might faint. You need time to absorb what happened.

How did you react to the loss? Describe your initial reactions.

4. Pain Strikes. Sometimes the pain comes unexpectedly, and it is unbearable. You might feel like every bone in your body hurts. Still, your body is made to endure, and the pain will eventually stop.

Remember the pain you felt.

5. Exaggerated Emotions. You might have a panic attack, burst into tears, feel enraged, or experience a range of other emotions. Just do your best to control your emotions, and not act impulsively. You might speak to a therapist or grief counselor who can help you process feelings. Be aware of guilt, that is, taking everything that happened on your shoulders.

Remember the loss and describe the whole range of your feelings.

6. Rationalization. This is the phase when you try to explain rationally what happened or make up your own theory about the event. This is a normal, and you might develop several different theories and elaborate on each one of them at length. You might change your theories, but what you are really doing is trying to convince others—and yourself—as a way to understand and process the loss.

Recall your theory/theories about the loss.

7. Acceptance. This phase is when you acknowledge that the loss was beyond your control. It is sometimes difficult to accept your limitations and boundaries, the idea that “things just happen.” You did the best you could. Accept that bad things happen.

Remember the loss and how you came to accept it.

8. Risk Taking. If you went through all the above phases, you likely understand that life is complicated, complex, and sometimes traumatic. Eventually you will want to live again, and that means you will have to take risks. But you are wiser now.

Remember a trauma and the turning point that led to your decision to move on.

9. Separation. This is the phase when you say goodbye. You might journal or write a letter.

Remember your loss and describe the way you said goodbye.

10. Gratitude. Then, one day you will feel grateful. Grateful that you are alive, that you have your life, and that you can go on. Yes, you experienced loss. But you had something to lose. You will rediscover the joy in nature, people, and yourself. When that happens, you might want to help people who are going through what you went through.

Describe how you learned to be grateful.

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Has Your Grief Turned into Depression?

Objective

To identify if you are experiencing grief or depression.

What to Know

If you have suffered a loss and you are grieving, you might wonder if your grief has become depression. It might be helpful to learn what the difference is between depression and grief.

- **Grief** is your emotional response to the experience of loss.
- **Grief reactions** vary widely and include difficult or overwhelming feelings, thoughts, behaviors, and physical sensations.
- **Complicated Grief Disorder** is a chronic, debilitating, and heightened state of mourning that delays healing.
- **Mourning** is the process of adapting to life after a loss, and it is influenced by society, culture, and religion.
- **Bereavement** is the state of having experienced a loss and refers to the period following a death.

There are many factors that affect the nature, intensity, and duration of grieving, including your:

- relationship with the deceased person
- age and gender
- past experiences with loss
- personality, resiliency, and coping style
- support system
- cultural, religious, or spiritual customs, rituals, and beliefs

There is no right or wrong way to grieve, and everyone grieves differently. If you are grieving in a manner that does not fit with societal or cultural beliefs or habits, you might worry whether you are grieving “correctly.” Maybe your grief has lasted longer than you think it should.

Are you depressed?

Grief reactions involve emotional, spiritual, physical, mental, and social experiences. Intense sadness will come and go, and you might wonder, “How can I go on?” But over time, the challenging days and moments of deep sadness will become less frequent.

Grief can develop into complicated grief, which does not dissipate with time and can look like depression.

Though there is some overlap in symptoms of grief and depression, depressive disorders are persistent and ongoing. Check off any of the following symptoms that apply to you.

___ Hopelessness

- ___ Apathy (lack of interest, enthusiasm, or concern)
- ___ Loss of interest in pleasurable activities
- ___ Inability to find joy or meaning
- ___ Negative self-focus
- ___ Guilt unrelated to grief
- ___ Feelings of worthlessness
- ___ Sluggishness
- ___ Prolonged and marked difficulty in completing daily activities
- ___ Irritability
- ___ Fatigue
- ___ Negative thinking
- ___ Feeling very sad
- ___ Often feeling on the verge of tears
- ___ Disliking yourself
- ___ Trouble focusing or concentrating
- ___ Lack of motivation
- ___ Prefer to be left alone
- ___ Mild unexplained aches and pains
- ___ Feelings of emptiness
- ___ Anger over small things
- ___ Easily frustrated
- ___ Restlessness
- ___ Difficulty making decisions
- ___ Difficulty remembering things
- ___ Frequently thinking about death and suicide
- ___ Problems with sleep (too much or too little)
- ___ Loss of appetite
- ___ Significant change in weight

- ___ Experiencing unexplained physical problems that do not go away with treatment
- ___ Feeling so tired that even small tasks seem difficult
- ___ Hallucinations and delusions

Remember – grief tends to decrease over time and often happens in waves that are triggered by thoughts or reminders of the loss. So, you might feel better in certain situations, such as when you are with loved ones. But triggers like the death anniversary might cause grief to resurface. Conversely, depression tends to be more persistent and pervasive.

If you think you have complicated grief disorder or depression, talk to your doctor or therapist. If you are having suicidal thoughts, contact the [National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/suicidal-thoughts-and-actions/index.shtml) at 1-800-273-8255 for support and assistance from a trained counselor. If you or a loved one are in immediate danger, call 911.

What to Do

Answer the following questions.

Relationship you had with the deceased person. _____

Describe your past experiences with loss. _____

How have you coped with loss in the past?

Describe your support system.

Describe any cultural, religious, or spiritual customs, rituals, and beliefs that you think might impact your grieving process. Be specific.

What emotions and behaviors are normal grief reactions within your culture?

What are your beliefs surrounding death?

What special days or dates will be significant?

Referring to the checklist, do you think you have depression? Why or why not?

Do you think you are experiencing complicated grief? Explain.

Who can you talk to? Are you willing to join a support group or share this information with a counselor or therapist? Why or why not?

Reflection on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Section 2. Self-Care

Being Mindful of Your Grieving

Objective

To increase your ability to pay attention to your thoughts and feelings while grieving.

What to Know

When grief is strong and you feel it interferes with your ability to attend to daily life, or the pain seems unbearable, it is very tempting to try to avoid, delay, or deny it. You might use alcohol, drugs, food, or overwork (to name a few) to bury the grief, hoping it will not come back. But these coping efforts do not work—the feelings do come back, maybe even stronger—and they may add new problems to your already challenging life.

There is an alternative to squashing these painful feelings—mindfulness, which involves paying attention to your thoughts and feelings.

Mindfulness does not take away the pain of grief. Instead of running away from it, mindfulness directs us *toward* the hurt, to feel it and, in a way, befriend it. This may not sound like a good idea! The truth is, it is probably taking more energy to avoid your feelings than it will to just experience them...and you are likely to feel better.

There are many books on mindfulness you may find useful. And if you would like a bit of inspiration, look up, “The Guest House,” a poem by Rumi. Many people have taken great comfort and insight from it.

There are many ways to bring mindfulness to your grief, and it will take some experimenting to find what works best for you. All the techniques are based on allowing yourself to feel whatever comes up without judgment and with self-compassion. Remember the following points.

- Critics are not allowed to tell you what you should or should not be feeling. You cannot do this wrong.
- This is a time to support yourself as deeply and fully as you would support the person you love the most, or as you have dreamed of being supported.
- There is no timeline and no need to push yourself in this process.
- It takes some time to learn these skills, so be patient and do not give up.

Step 1: Get grounded. When feelings start to overwhelm you, these skills will help you be steady enough to meet and observe them. To be *grounded* means to feel stable, rooted, calm, and present—until you are not. Then get grounded again. Ways to get grounded include:

- **Breathing.** Take deep, slow breaths into your belly, then torso, and finally fill your lungs. Gradually make your exhalations a bit longer than your inhalations. Pretend you can breathe in and out through the soles of your feet. Breathe through whatever you feel without pushing it away.
- **Using your senses.** Focus as deeply as possible on touch, scent, sound, and body sensations to help you get present and relaxed.

- Run warm water over your hands and *feel* it.
- Smell something. Concentrate on it as if you could describe it to a person without a nose.
- Sit, breathe, and listen to all the sounds around you that you do not normally hear.
- Look at something beautiful so closely that you see it as you never have before.
- **Moving your body mindfully.** Walk or stretch slowly, trying to feel every muscle as it moves. Feel each foot touch the ground.
- **Meditating.** If you have a meditation practice, do it consistently. If you do not practice, there are books, courses, retreats, meditation groups, and online resources that can help you.
- **Inviting help.** When you are trying to do something difficult, it is good to not feel alone. Call in some help—this might be a spiritual figure or someone from your past or present who loves you unconditionally, or helps you feel brave and centered. It might be the most capable, self-loving version of yourself.

Step 2. Feel the feelings and express them. Now that you are grounded, you are ready to experience your feelings. Any time your feelings feel like too much, go back to whatever helps you get grounded.

Feelings want to be heard, seen, accepted, and expressed. You are developing the self-compassion and the skills to hear, see, and accept them. But if they stay in your body, they can continue to hurt you. Find ways to get them outside yourself, including:

- **Journaling.** Writing is a great way of witnessing and expressing your grief.
- **Talking.** Whether in counseling or just with friends, talk about how you are feeling and working through your grief. Do not isolate or hesitate to ask for what you want.
- **Doing art.** Scrapbook, paint, draw, make music—represent your grief in whatever way you want. It is not about how good an artist you are, and no one ever has to see it. It is just a way to get your feelings out. What color is your grief? What shape?
- **Moving.** Your body is your ally. Walking, dancing, practicing yoga, engaging in sports—it is all good. Movement expressing your feelings is especially helpful.
- **Yelling and pounding.** Lots of people drive somewhere isolated and yell it out. Others pound on pillows. Whatever actions match the energy of your feelings are right if they do not harm you or another person.
- **Honoring your loved one.** Sometimes grief is expressed in graveside visits, ceremonies with friends, donations to charities, planting trees—anything that helps you express your relationship with and feelings about that person.

Step 3. Bring in your mind. You have gotten grounded and bravely sat with and expressed strong feelings. Now you can let your mind back into the process and consider some questions.

- **What have you done in the past?** You have had other significant challenges in your life.

What qualities in yourself helped you get through them?

- **What resources do you have?** Make a list of internal and external resources you have to help you with your grief, including supportive people, books, practices like journaling and mindfulness, self-care, and so forth.
- **What do you want?** Start to imagine a new future for yourself. See yourself coping with your grief and adjusting to life without your loved one. What does it look like? What do you look like? How will it feel?
- **Do you need help?** Look at yourself and how you are coping. Do not hesitate to reach out for help from counselors, grief support groups, friends, etc.

What to Do

Make a two-week action plan to experiment with mindfulness practices to see what helps you. For each week, choose one of the techniques listed in this worksheet for each step: grounding, expressing, and reflection. Schedule three exercises each week. Make notes about which activities are helpful, or if you are inspired to learn more about them.

Week 1

| Scheduled for: (day and time) | Grounding activity | Way to express feelings | Reflection |
|----------------------------------|--------------------|----------------------------|------------|
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |

Week 2

| Scheduled for: (day and time) | Grounding activity | Way to express feelings | Reflection |
|----------------------------------|--------------------|----------------------------|------------|
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |

What activity helped you the most? Explain.

Would you like to learn more about any of these techniques or skills? If so, how will you do that, and when?

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Developing Your Self-Care Plan

Objective

To develop a self-care plan by identifying what you value and require as part of your day-to-day life.

What to Know

Sometimes it is easy to forget the importance of taking care of yourself. Self-care refers to the kinds of things you might do regularly to reduce stress and maintain and enhance your wellbeing.

Self-care is personal, and people will have different approaches to taking care of themselves. You might value some areas over others. Below are the different life areas where you might want to implement self-care activities:

- Workplace/Professional
- Physical
- Mental
- Emotional
- Spiritual
- Interpersonal/Relational

This worksheet will help you identify the areas of your life where you can implement self-care activities.

What to Do

For each category above, select at least one strategy or activity that you can include in your self-care plan. There might be areas of overlap between these categories. List the activities that you have identified as important to your well-being and that you can engage in daily or weekly to take care of yourself.

Identify people in your life that might be good resources for exchanging new self-care ideas and strategies, as well as provide you with support and encouragement.

List other forms of support such as support groups, religious groups, community groups, and so on.

List people you can talk to on a regular basis about your concerns.

List ways you can get regular exercise (at least 30 minutes each day).

List hobbies or other activities you enjoy on a regular basis.

List ways you can improve your sleep habits.

List ways you can improve your diet.

List ways you can have fun!

List anything else you can do to take good care of yourself.

My Self Care Plan – Create a daily or weekly plan incorporating all the information above:

Once you have created your plan, ask yourself what might get in the way of successfully implementing your self-care plan. What can you do to remove these barriers? If you cannot remove them, you might want to adjust your plan. It is useful to identify potential barriers or obstacles that might get in the way of implementing and/or maintaining your self-care activities. List at least 3 or 4 obstacles or barriers and how you can address them.

The final step is to implement your plan and keep track of how you are doing. Keeping track of your self-care activities for two weeks will help you recognize your successes and identify and address any difficulties you may not have anticipated. Remember to stick to your plan even if emotionally difficult circumstances arise. Write down the date, the activity, and any obstacles you encounter. Finally, write down how it went.

| Date | Self-care activity | Obstacles? | How did it go? |
|------|--------------------|------------|----------------|
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| Date | Self-care activity | Obstacles? | How did it go? |
|------|--------------------|------------|----------------|
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Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Using the HALT Technique for Self-Care When You Are Grieving

Objective

To apply the H.A.L.T. self-care tool to cope with grief.

What to Know

Sometimes when you are grieving, you might interpret your frame of mind or emotions as part of the grieving process. What you might not have considered is your grief might be compounded by things you have some control over.

Sometimes angry or sad feelings might threaten to overtake you. You might just want to be alone, and maybe you wonder if you will ever feel better. When you have intense feelings, you can stop, calm down, and think. H.A.L.T. can help you remember to do this.

When you are overwhelmed by grief, H.A.L.T. and ask yourself, “Am I hungry, angry, lonely, or tired?” Review the questions below.

H = Am I Hungry? Some people overeat when they are distressed, while some people avoid food. Each choice can have a negative impact on your health and mental well-being. Ask yourself:

- Have I eaten something within the past 4-6 hours?
- Have I had enough water in the past 2 hours?
- Have I eaten too much sugary food today?
- In general, is my diet balanced and nutritious?
- Am I grazing and/or overeating?
- Do I have an underlying medical condition such as diabetes which might impact my ability to think clearly?

Take note: If you have ever been diagnosed as borderline diabetic, intense grief can send you over the edge. Make an appointment with your doctor.

If you forget to eat or you do not feel like eating, set an alarm on your phone to remember to eat. Fueling your body appropriately is important so you have the energy to do all the things grief requires. If you are overeating, portion out healthy snacks that will help you feel full. Instead of grazing or eating sugary snacks, take a walk or do some stretching exercises.

A = Am I Angry? It is OK to be angry; let go of any guilt you have for your anger. Ask yourself:

- Did someone say something that upset me?
- Has someone done or *not* done something?
- Am I angry at God?
- Am I angry at the deceased for leaving/for choices they made/for not saying “good-bye” to me?
- Am I angry at myself for things I really could not control?
- Am I angry with others because they are not grieving like I am?
- Am I angry that the world simply goes on without my loved one?
- Am I angry at friends or other loved ones that have not “been there” for me?

First, acknowledge your anger. If you are angry with someone else, can you talk to them and mend the relationship? If that is not an option, what boundaries can you put in place while you are experiencing intense feelings of grief? If you are angry at God or the deceased person, express it in a journal or letter, or talk about it with a loved one or grief counselor. Perhaps you just need to express yourself. It may not “fix” things, but it makes them more tolerable.

L = Am I Lonely? Grief can be an isolating experience. Once the funeral is over and the first few weeks pass, the people around you might not think about your loss or realize its ongoing impact on your daily life. There might be days when you feel very alone. Ask yourself:

- Do I feel isolated with my grief?
- How long has it been since I spent time with other people?
- Have I called/texted/messaged anyone today?
- Has anyone called/texted/messaged me today?
- Do I feel like nobody understands me?
- Do I feel like God abandoned me?
- Do I feel unable to talk to anyone anymore because of my loss?

What can you do to reduce your feelings of loneliness? Perhaps you can join an online bereavement community where you can vent your feelings, or local support group where you will be received, affirmed, and understood. You might just need someone safe to talk to. If you do not have friends or family that can fill that need, consider grief counseling.

T = Am I Tired? Perhaps you suffer from insomnia or find you cannot stay asleep once you fall asleep. Ask yourself:

- Did I sleep last night?
- Am I going to bed too late or waking too early?
- Am I keeping myself so busy that I have run myself down?
- Am I getting adequate and appropriate exercise?
- Am I taking medication that makes me sleepy?

Without proper rest, you will not have the energy to do the work grief requires. If you are struggling with sleeplessness, consider asking your healthcare provider for help. There are natural sleep remedies that might be appropriate, or you might consider a prescription medicine to help break the cycle of insomnia.

Hunger, anger, loneliness, and feeling tired are not the root cause of your grief. You grieve because you suffered a loss. But any one of them, or a combination, can make you more vulnerable to feeling worse as you grieve. You will feel pain and sorrow, but you can make adjustments in your lifestyle and life choices to make it easier to cope.

This worksheet will assist you in applying H.A.L.T. as you grieve.

What to Do

It might be helpful to have a plan in place when you need to H.A.L.T. On the card below, write down your H.A.L.T. Plan. What will you do when you are hungry, angry, lonely, or tired? Write some specific things you can do. You can make your H.A.L.T. card on cardstock or laminate it and cut it out. Place it in your wallet, or where you can see it. You can even type the plan into the “notes” on your phone.

| My H.A.L.T. Plan | |
|-------------------------|------------------|
| When I am... | I will... |
| Hungry | _____ |
| Angry | _____ |
| Lonely | _____ |
| Tired | _____ |

Reflections on This Exercise

Was it helpful to apply the H.A.L.T. tool? Why or why not?

H.A.L.T. will not make your grief go away, but did you find that you felt better when you attended to self-care? Explain.

What are some ways you can remind yourself to H.A.L.T.?

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Practicing Self-Care and Self-Calming

Objective

To develop habits which are important to your mental and your physical health.

What to Know

You probably spend a significant amount of time every day doing things to ensure your physical health and to prevent illness. But how much time do you take each day doing things to improve your mental health? By practicing self-care and self-calming you can develop a more positive attitude toward life, control your anxiety, process your grief, and feel calmer and more at peace. Studies tell us these practices will contribute to better physical health, including improved circulation, a stronger immune system, an improvement in your ability to tolerate pain, and more. Self-care behaviors address your basic lifestyle. These habits have an almost immediate effect on your physical and mental well-being. They include:

- getting at least 30 minutes of exercise each day
- sleeping 8-9 hours each night
- eating a well-balanced and nutritious diet that is low in sugar and food additives
- consuming alcohol and caffeine in moderation
- spending time each day in the company of people who care about you

Self-calming techniques are planned and conscious behaviors that trigger your parasympathetic nervous system. These techniques slow your breathing, relax your muscles, and lower your heart rate and blood pressure. These techniques simultaneously increase the brain chemicals associated with a positive mood and decrease the brain chemicals associated with stress. Self-calming techniques include:

- progressive relaxation
- deep breathing
- guided Imagery
- yoga
- walking in nature
- mindful meditation
- massage

But none of these techniques can help you if you do not practice them. Use the chart on the next page to keep track of your self-care and self-calming techniques for 21 days. Researchers tell us this is the amount of time it takes for behaviors to become a habit.

What to Do

For the next 21 days, rate yourself on your self-care from 1 to 10, where 1 = my self-care was

poor today, to 10 = my self-care was excellent today. Note what you did to improve your self-care, and what self-calming technique you used. Finally, write down the total amount of time you spent engaging in self-calming exercises each day.

| Day | Rate yourself 1=Poor 10=Excellent | What did you do to improve your self-care? | What self-calming techniques did you use? | Time spent in self-calming exercises |
|------------|---|---|--|---|
| Day 1 | | | | |
| Day 2 | | | | |
| Day 3 | | | | |
| Day 4 | | | | |
| Day 5 | | | | |
| Day 6 | | | | |
| Day 7 | | | | |
| Day 8 | | | | |
| Day 9 | | | | |
| Day 10 | | | | |
| Day 11 | | | | |
| Day 12 | | | | |
| Day 13 | | | | |
| Day 14 | | | | |
| Day 15 | | | | |

| Day | Rate yourself 1=Poor 10=Excellent | What did you do to improve your self-care? | What self-calming techniques did you use? | Time spent in self- calming exercises |
|--------|--------------------------------------|---|---|--|
| Day 16 | | | | |
| Day 17 | | | | |
| Day 18 | | | | |
| Day 19 | | | | |
| Day 20 | | | | |
| Day 21 | | | | |

Reflections on This Exercise

Did this activity help you practice self-care and self-calming activities each day? Why or why not?

Practicing these activities might not make your grief go away, but did you find you felt better when you attended to self-care and focused on calming yourself? Explain.

What are some ways you can remind yourself to practice self-care and self-calming activities?

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Dealing with Upsetting Memories Through Mindfulness

Objective

To deal with upsetting memories using mindful meditation.

What to Know

Many people have recurring memories that they find disturbing. This is a common problem for people who have experienced trauma, but it can also occur with people who have experienced more common unpleasant events like a divorce, a serious illness, or the death of a loved one.

One of the most useful ways to handle upsetting memories is to practice mindfulness. The concept of mindfulness comes from a Buddhist tradition which encourages people to focus on accepting rather than fighting the thoughts and feelings that upset them. When you have an upsetting memory, you are encouraged to just pay attention to it without judging that it is good or bad. Be aware of your thoughts and feelings as well as your body and your senses. Observe what is happening in your mind, as if you were observing something outside of yourself.

What to Do

Many people find that the regular practice of mindfulness (also called mindful meditation) is extremely valuable for dealing with a wide range of emotional problems. This worksheet will help you in learning this technique.

Write down the memory you find upsetting.

Rate how upsetting this memory is to you, from 1 to 10, where 1 = not very upsetting, to 10 = very upsetting: _____

1. Consciously think about this memory for about a minute, without judging it as good or bad.
2. Sit comfortably and relax your body and breathe slowly and deeply.

3. Now stop consciously thinking about the memory and just “observe” your thoughts, feelings, and your body. Observe and accept what is happening, without being the least bit judgmental.

Write down your thoughts without censoring them in any way.

Rate how you feel from 1 to 10, where 1 = very calm, to 10 = very upset: _____

Reflections on This Exercise

What did you notice about using mindful meditation to deal with the upsetting memory?

Was this exercise easy? Challenging? What can you do to continue practicing this skill? Elaborate below or on a separate piece of paper.

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Practicing Self-Compassion While You Grieve

Objective

To practice mindful self-compassion exercises to alleviate your suffering and increase your self-compassion.

What to Know

Everyone deserves compassion, especially during challenging periods, including grieving the loss of a loved one. If you are in mourning, your emotions might be up and down for quite some time. You might find you are criticizing yourself for those ups and downs, somehow expecting that your moods “should” be on an even keel, or that you should be “over it” by now. People around you, or society itself, might be giving you messages about your grief process—that you are somehow “doing it wrong.”

There is no wrong or right way to grieve. So, it only makes matters worse when you beat yourself up for your true emotions. As you would have compassion for someone you care about who is grieving, can you offer yourself such compassion? This is not self-pity, nor is it selfish. It is a healthy, effective way to heal and move forward.

Much research exists to show the psychological benefits of mindful self-compassion, a practice derived from the Buddhist concept of ‘lovingkindness’ and brought to our Western culture by psychologists Christopher Germer and Kristin Neff, among others. It is important to understand the terms “mindful” and “mindful self-compassion” (MSC). Mindfulness is moment-to-moment awareness of your experience without judgment.

MSC combines the skills developed through mindfulness with the specific practice of self-compassion. When you are compassionate with someone, you do not pity them—you feel empathy, caring, love, warmth, and a desire to help them heal. MSC can help you learn how to extend those same feelings toward yourself.

Self-compassion involves the capacity to comfort and soothe yourself, motivating yourself with encouragement, when you suffer, fail, or feel inadequate. This worksheet will help you practice self-compassionate phrases and then record when you use them and how they make you feel.

What to Do

First, think of statements you might say to a friend or family member whom you care about who might be grieving or going through a hard time and needs your support. Write them below.

Next, describe what it is that is emotionally challenging for you during this time of grief.

What are your worries, fears, or hopes?

Now, what can you say to yourself that is kind and compassionate—accepting, nonjudgmental, and understanding of *all* your feelings? If you have trouble thinking of something to say, look at what you might say to a loved one and write that down.

Here are some possible statements:

- I am OK as I am.
- I am going to get through this difficult time.
- I forgive myself.
- I am a good person.
- I have healthy needs and desires.
- I have healthy emotions and feelings.
- I love myself.
- I am strong and resilient.
- I'm trying hard and deserve support.
- It's OK to be imperfect.
- I'm a kind and loving person.
- It's OK to be tired, sad, anxious, and scared.

Here are more statements, drawn from literature on lovingkindness. Think of these statements as wishes or, if you like, prayers.

- May I be safe.
- May I be free of physical suffering.
- May I be peaceful.
- May I love and be loved.
- May I be healthy.
- May I accept myself as I am.
- May I be happy.
- May I be kind to myself.
- May I be free from sorrow.
- May I live with ease.

Your ideas: _____

What statements would you like to repeat to yourself in the coming week? Write them below.

Using the following chart, record when you use the statements and how you feel before and after. Note the date, how you felt before using mindful self-compassion, the statement you used, and how you felt after.

| Date | How do you feel before using MSC? | MSC statement used | How do you feel now? |
|------|-----------------------------------|--------------------|----------------------|
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Reflections on This Exercise

What was the most challenging part of doing the MSC exercise? Why?

What aspects of the exercise felt comforting or helpful to you in your grief process?

What self-compassionate statements would you like to repeat to yourself on a regular basis?
Do so for ten minutes each day, even if you are not experiencing distressing feelings.

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Silencing Your Inner Critic

Objective

To replace your self-critical thoughts with self-compassion.

What to Know

If you have lost a loved one, you might feel that you should have said something differently or done something differently before your loved one died. You might focus on all the things you think you should have done, forgetting about all the positive experiences you shared with your loved one.

It is common to feel some regret about things that could have been done differently after a loss, but some people are so tormented by guilt that they cannot experience the normal grieving process and get on with their lives. This is surely not what your loved one would have wanted for you.

If you are constantly thinking about all the things you wish you had done differently, you can replace this self-criticism with self-compassion.

Self-compassion means being as kind and forgiving toward yourself as you would toward someone else who is going through a difficult time.

This worksheet will ask you to write down self-critical statements that you make to yourself and replace them with statements that reflect your self-compassion.

What to Do

Use the following chart to fill in the first column each time you are aware of your critical thoughts. Then, immediately write in something you would say to a friend who is having those thoughts. Your response should reflect a compassionate and supportive attitude.

| Critical Thought | Compassionate Response |
|--|---|
| Example: <i>I wish I had told him how much I love him.</i> | <i>You showed him you loved him in many ways.</i> |
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Reflections on This Exercise

What are some other ways you can show self-compassion?

What are some positive ways you can remember your loved one?

What are some other areas of your life where you are critical of yourself?

How will self-compassion affect these areas?

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Grief Journal

Objective

To set aside time each day to write about how you are feeling following a loss.

What to Know

Coping with the death of a loved one is one of the biggest challenges you will experience. A grief journal is one way to reflect on and work through your feelings. What is a grief journal? It is a place where you are free to write exactly what you are feeling following the loss of a loved one. You can write about memories, feelings, or share your thoughts. As long as you devote time each day to writing in your journal, you are getting your emotions out on the page.

While you may never fully recover from grief, you can take steps to write about your feelings, which can have profound positive effects. Keeping a grief journal is a healthy way to process your feelings over time. When you write about your grief, you may experience these benefits:

- Reflect on and process your feelings and painful memories.
- Experience what psychologists call the “letting go” stage.
- Sleep better because you have released fears or worries.
- Effectively cope with your emotional pain.

The best part about grief journaling is that it is accessible. You might occasionally lean on friends, family members, or a therapist, but you can write in your journal multiple times each day if you wish.

What to Do

Keep this journal for several weeks. You might want to use a notebook or journal. Otherwise, make copies of this worksheet. At the end of each week, reflect on your feelings and note any patterns.

Monday:

Tuesday:

Wednesday:

Thursday:

Friday:

Saturday:

Sunday:

At the end of the week, answer the following questions.

What patterns do you see? For instance, are you taking good care of yourself? Are you being too hard on yourself? Are you being consistent about expressing how you feel? Do you feel stronger?

Reflect on the past week. What was challenging for you? Where did you find support?

Write down your thoughts after one month of writing in your grief journal.

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What else can you do to cope with your grief?

Section 3. More Healthy Ways to Cope

Avoiding Numbing Behaviors

Objective

To replace numbing behaviors with healthy coping behaviors after a loss.

What to Know

Grief often involves difficult thoughts and emotions, and it can be tempting to avoid them by engaging in numbing behaviors. Numbing behaviors are things that people do to avoid or cope with the pain of loss. Examples include endlessly scrolling on social media, watching television or gaming for hours, overspending, binge drinking, or taking drugs. Numbing can prolong grief or leave it unresolved.

Research indicates bereaved people are at higher risk for developing addictive behaviors to cope with loss. Addiction compounds grief and complicates relationships with loved ones. If you have a history of addiction, you are vulnerable to slipping back into unhealthy ways of coping as you deal with your grief. There are other, healthier ways to cope with your pain and promote healing.

First, identify if you are engaging in numbing behaviors. Check off any of the following statements that apply to you.

- I excessively drink alcohol.
- Loved ones have told me I drink too much.
- I use illegal drugs, or misuse prescription medications.
- I keep myself busy all the time.
- I could be considered a “workaholic” since the death of my loved one.
- I shop, spend money, or gamble to distract myself.
- I get “lost” watching TV or videos.
- I scroll on social media for hours at a time.
- I am pulled toward numbing behaviors when the pain of grief begins to overwhelm me.
- I need to distract myself when I start to feel uncomfortable with my grief.
- I sleep more than I should.
- Engaging in numbing behaviors temporarily eases my discomfort.
- Numbing behaviors are interfering with my ability to work, connect with my loved ones, or take care of myself.

If you marked off any of these statements, you might be using numbing behaviors to avoid the grieving process. Blocking your grief can harm your physical and emotional health and negatively affect your healing journey.

When you are feeling the need to numb yourself, try healthier coping skills:

- take slow, deep breaths
- focus on what you are feeling and where in your body you feel it
- let yourself cry
- talk it out with a loved one
- journal
- draw, paint, or do a craft
- engage in intense exercise
- listen to soothing music
- practice calming activities such as meditation
- take a hot bath
- repeat affirmations like, "I am okay," or "I am safe right now"
- emotionally connect with friends or family members
- join a support group or seek counseling

Can you think of other healthy coping skills? List them.

Numbing behaviors can be difficult to stop if they have become habits. Practicing healthy coping skills and connecting with supportive people and groups can help. This worksheet will help you pay attention to how often you are engaging in these behaviors.

What to Do

Use the following chart to track when you are engaging in numbing behavior over the next two weeks. Write down the date, time, what triggered it, the numbing behavior, and how long you engaged in the behavior. Then, write down what you did instead of the numbing behavior once you realized what you were doing. Refer to the above list for ideas.

| Date | Time | What triggered it? | Numbing behavior | How long? | What did you do instead? |
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Did this activity help you replace numbing behaviors with healthy coping behaviors? Why or why not?

If you think a grief support group might help you, you can visit the following online resources:
www.grieving.com, www.griefincommon.com, www.onlinegriefsupport.com/groups,
www.griefnet.org, and www.griefanonymous.com.

Reflection on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Practicing Radical Acceptance

Objective

To use radical acceptance to tolerate overwhelming emotions in a difficult situation.

What to Know

No matter how you live your life, there will always be situations and events that cause great sadness, anger, or frustration. You may wish to avoid these painful and sometimes overwhelming emotions but avoiding them is not helpful.

What would happen if you accept things as they are - without trying to change, escape from, or eliminate them? What would happen if you refocus your attention on what you can do *NOW*? This is called radical acceptance - accepting even the most difficult situations the way they are rather than trying to avoid them.

When you practice radical acceptance, you acknowledge the current or past situation without judgment, and without criticizing yourself or others.

Why should you practice radical acceptance?

You may have heard the saying “The only way out, is through.” This means you must go through the pain to get to the other side of it.

Remember:

- Rejecting things that make you uncomfortable does not make them go away.
- Pain is a signal that something is wrong.
- A refusal to accept reality can keep you trapped in sadness, shame, anger, or other painful emotions.
- To successfully change something in your life, you need to accept it first.

Here is the example of Kendra, who struggled with the infidelity of her husband for years before she practiced radical acceptance:

Kendra and Jon were married for 16 years when she noticed that he seemed to be losing interest in her. Jon was always going away for weekends and even when he was home, his mind seemed to be in another place. He was constantly on the computer and texting people, but Kendra was afraid to ask him what was going on.

Kendra told her sister and her best friend that she thought Jon was having an affair. She wondered if she should try and spy on him or even hire a private detective. She started thinking about Jon and what had happened to their marriage all the time. She felt guilty, angry, and worried about what will happen to her children if they divorce. The only thing that would quiet the voices in her head was taking a few drinks and she did this every night.

Using radical acceptance, Kendra learned to acknowledge her feelings rather than giving them power over her or trying to avoid them. She stopped blaming herself and even stopped blaming Jon. Once she could accept that this was a difficult situation (but a common one), she contacted a marriage counselor and asked Jon to go with her to a session.

What to Do

There are several steps to practice radical acceptance:

- Stay in the present moment and pay attention to the emotions you are experiencing.
- Remind yourself that the unpleasant reality cannot be changed.
- Remind yourself that the past or present reality is shaped by numerous factors, decisions, and events that took place over time.
- Practice accepting with your mind, heart, and body. This can include relaxation techniques, mindful breathing, prayer, or visualization.
- Listen to your body's sensations (tension, tightness, etc.) as you think about what you need to accept.
- Allow disappointment, sadness, or grief to surface.
- Recognize that life, even when it is painful, can be worth living.

There are also statements you can say to yourself that may be helpful during this practice:

- "I can't change what's already happened."
- "It's impossible to change the past."
- "The present is the only moment I can control."
- "This situation is the result of countless other decisions and actions."

Now, consider radical acceptance as it relates to your own experiences. Think of a recent situation that you found distressing and answer the following questions.

Describe the situation.

What were the past events that led to this situation?

What role did you play in causing this situation?

What role did others play?

What did you have control of in this situation?

Where did you lack control in this situation?

How did you respond to this situation?

How did this response affect your thoughts and feelings?

Did you avoid dealing with upsetting thoughts and feelings?

How could the events have played out differently if you had practiced radical acceptance?

Now, practice radical acceptance on a current situation that is causing you distress. Describe the situation.

What are your thoughts and feelings about this situation?

What can you do to help you accept this situation?

Did you notice any shift in your thoughts and feelings about the situation after practicing radical acceptance? Describe those changes.

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Accepting Your Feelings

Objective

To identify the feelings that accompany your grief and learn strategies to accept them.

What to Know

Complicated feelings that accompany a loss can be overwhelming. Sometimes the emotions are so strong that it is hard to even sort them out. Perhaps you feel sadness, anger, regret, fear, guilt, shame, anxiety, or a combination of those emotions.

If you have experienced a loss, you might have the urge to avoid your feelings altogether. That is an understandable and natural response. You might search for ways to “get over it” or “move on,” which, paradoxically, might result in your avoiding or postponing the authentic experience of your feelings.

How do you do that? The first step is to know what it is that you are feeling. This worksheet is designed to help you identify your feelings and practice strategies for accepting them, including a simple mindfulness technique.

What to Do

Identifying your feelings, especially when you are distressed, is not always easy. Some emotions blur into others, and it can be confusing to know whether what you are feeling is, for instance, “normal” sadness or “depression,” which can have more severe consequences.

Here are the main categories of feelings drawn from psychologist Robert Plutchik’s, “Wheel of Emotions.”

JOY
SADNESS
ANGER
SURPRISE
SHAME
FEAR

Which of these emotions are you feeling most strongly currently? There is no right answer (and it might change from day to day, or hour to hour). _____

Now write a few sentences about the emotion you are feeling most strongly right now.

What other emotion are you experiencing that is related to your loss? _____

Write a few sentences about your experience of that emotion.

Below is a list of some other words that describe the range of emotions for the feelings of SADNESS, ANGER, FEAR, and SHAME, which are often associated with grief and loss. Have you experienced any of these feelings? Check off the emotions that resonate with your experience currently (*from the "Wheel of Emotions"*).

SADNESS

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Grief | <input type="checkbox"/> Helplessness |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hopelessness | <input type="checkbox"/> Despair |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Abandoned | <input type="checkbox"/> Despondent |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Scornful | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Disappointed | |

ANGER

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Disappointed | <input type="checkbox"/> Jealous |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Frustrated | <input type="checkbox"/> Provoked |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Resentful | <input type="checkbox"/> Vengeful |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bitter | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ |

FEAR

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Vulnerable | <input type="checkbox"/> Exposed |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Isolated | <input type="checkbox"/> Anxious |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Abandoned | <input type="checkbox"/> Threatened |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Insecure | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Weak | |

SHAME

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Disgust | <input type="checkbox"/> Disrespected |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Guilt | <input type="checkbox"/> Unlovable |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Embarrassed | <input type="checkbox"/> Violated |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Scorned | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Rejected | |

Now write a few sentences about the feelings that you checked off.

So, how do you move toward ACCEPTING your feelings as they are?

You have already taken the first step in identifying *what the feelings are*. Good for you! Now, you might be thinking, “I don’t like these feelings. I want to be rid of them! What good does it do to focus on them?”

One saying might help you: “What you resist persists.” That is, the more you try to dodge or avoid your true feelings, the more they are likely to hang around.

Mindfulness can help; that is, noticing and allowing what is happening right here and now with acceptance and without judgment. The exercise below can help you practice acceptance.

Name It to Tame It

Pick one of the feelings you identified. Now, get in a comfortable position in a place where you will not be distracted or interrupted. Take a few deep breaths, settling into your body. Relax as best you can. There is nothing you need to change. Choose one emotion to focus on. Perhaps you are feeling “vulnerable.” Close your eyes and repeat to yourself, “I feel vulnerable.” Say it softly, kindly, and with meaning. Feel what you are feeling. You might want to put your hand on your heart or hug yourself as you repeat this phrase. You might begin to cry or get tense. That is OK. Just BE with the feelings, thoughts, and sensations in your body right now. You are safe. You can feel your feelings without needing to do anything to change them. As psychologist Christopher Germer, Ph.D., who specializes in mindful self-compassion, says, “Soften, Soothe, Allow.” That is, soften into the feeling, soothe yourself in whatever way feels natural to you, and allow the feeling to be ... just be.

Practice this exercise at a time when you feel safe enough to experience some mild emotional distress or with someone you feel comfortable with, such as a loved one or therapist. Try the same exercise for different emotions as they arise. Take it slowly. Be kind to yourself

throughout the process. Notice how naming and experiencing the feelings *helps them* move through and then diminish in intensity - like a wave washing ashore: rising, cresting, then disappearing.

Describe your experience during this exercise.

Reflections on This Exercise

What emotion is causing you the most distress at this time of loss?

Did you have a difficult time expressing this emotion before your loss?

Are you avoiding dealing with any particular emotions? How do you think this is holding back your healing?

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Coping with Negative Thoughts

Objective

To reduce negative thinking by using several coping strategies.

What to Know

Perhaps you cannot stop the flow of negative thoughts since your loss. In addition to grief, you might be experiencing uncertainty, anger, and many other emotions. Coping strategies that worked in the past might not be up to the task this time. Here are some strategies you can use if you are struggling with any of these common negative thoughts.

1. “I wish things could be different.” Maybe you wish you could go back to the way things were. If you are focusing on the past or ways you could change things, do the following.

- Start a daily gratitude practice. Use a journal, app, or even an audio or video recorder. Keep it brief and simple and do it consistently to remind yourself that even though you are experiencing a challenging time, there is still good in your life.
- Divide a piece of paper into two sections and label them *Things I CAN Change*, and *Things I CAN'T Change*. Then write down at least 5-6 items under each column. Spend your time and energy on the items in the first column.

2. “I can’t move on.” Do you feel stuck because you believe you need answers before you can let go and move on? If this is a problem for you, try some of the following actions.

- Use a journal to write about the questions that still haunt you. Explore likely explanations and keep writing until you come up with what might be the truth. Come to terms with the idea that you might never have all the answers.
- Create a closure ceremony by burning old letters or photographs. Bury something that had meaning in your old life.
- On a piece of paper, complete this sentence: “Because this happened, I have learned...” Once you identify what you have learned, you can begin to move forward.

3. “I’ll never be happy again.” It is easy to recall “the good old days” and assume you will never find happiness again. If you are in mourning and feel hopeless, do the following activities.

- Spending time in nature will remind you that death and renewal are natural cycles.
- See a live comedy show or rewatch favorite funny movies.
- Each week put one small thing on your calendar that you look forward to. Every 1-3 months, schedule something bigger that you enjoy.
- Have a conversation with an elderly person who has a positive outlook. Ask about their experiences. You will probably find they experienced things in their life they worried they would not recover from.
- Write down the expectations you had for your life and analyze them. How many are actually outside the realm of possibility now?

4. “Why did this happen to me?” Maybe you are wondering what you did to deserve these circumstances. Life might feel unfair. If you are feeling victimized or consumed by self-pity, do the following.

- Read a book that features people overcoming obstacles. It will remind you that bad stuff happens to good people, and people overcome great obstacles.
- What can you do to create a sense of purpose from your pain? Maybe you can reach out and help others or apply your knowledge and skills to assist people that are also coping with the end of a relationship.
- Write down some traits that make you capable of handling your circumstances. You might be a great problem-solver or networker. Whatever your strengths, focus on how they can help you now.
- Apply structure to your days and limit down time. Include activities that keep you busy.

5. “Life is too overwhelming.” Moving on after a loss and rebuilding a new life is a big deal! If you feel paralyzed by the challenges in front of you, try the following actions.

- Identify a small step you can take right now – and act on it.
- Find ways to tap into your determination.
- Create accountability in your life. Set reminders on your phone to tackle one small task each day or make a list and cross off one thing every day.
- Do a required task while doing something you want to do. For example, make important phone calls while you are enjoying a cup of tea.
- Create a doable but challenging goal for yourself.

What to Do

First, answer the following questions.

Write down some of the negative thoughts you have about your loss.

What are some of the coping strategies you have used in the past that are not working for you now? Why aren't they working?

Who can support you during this difficult time? Write down the names and phone numbers of at least four people.

Write down some ways you can practice self-care. Be specific.

What specifically triggers your negative thinking?

What can you do to be of service to others?

Next, examine what you have written down and review the suggestions above. Write down all the actions you can take to cope. Brainstorm ideas – you do not necessarily have to do everything in this list.

| Date | Action or activity | What happened? | How did you feel after? | Were you successful? Y / N |
|------|--------------------|----------------|-------------------------|-------------------------------|
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Reflections on This Exercise

Did anything surprise you while completing this activity? Explain.

What was the biggest obstacle you encountered when completing this exercise? Describe.

Were you successful at reducing negative thinking? _____

Why or why not? _____

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Emotion Regulation

Objective

To identify, observe, and name feelings to help you to regulate your emotions.

What to Know

Most of us go through the day experiencing a range of emotions—from pleasant to unpleasant, some of which are in our awareness and others are out of our awareness. Sometimes the emotions that happen outside of our awareness can cause us to make poor decisions, say things we regret, or take actions that cause us or others harm.

You can learn specific skills that can help with “emotion regulation,” that is, controlling your emotions and keeping them more in balance rather than shifting between extremes. In this worksheet, you will learn about the range of emotions and then practice simply observing and naming your own.

What to Do

To manage an emotion, you need to know what it is. The first step in learning emotion regulation is to become familiar with the range of emotions that we can experience. Read the following list of pleasant and unpleasant emotions.

Pleasant

affectionate amused
appreciative
calm caring
comfortable
confident
curious
delighted
empowered
encouraged
excited
friendly
fulfilled
grateful
hopeful
joyful loving

mellow
open
optimistic
passionate
peaceful
pleased
relaxed
relieved
rested safe
satisfied
secure
strong
surprised
thrilled
trusting
warm

agitated
ambivalent
angry
annoyed
anxious
apprehensive
ashamed bad
bored
confused
contemptuous
depressed
disappointed
disconnected
discouraged
disgusted
disheartened
edgy
embarrassed

Unpleasant

enraged
exasperated

insecure
irritated

scared
self-conscious

| | | |
|------------|-------------|---------------|
| exhausted | lonely | suspicious |
| frightened | needy | tense |
| frustrated | nervous | terrified |
| furious | overwhelmed | tired |
| guarded | remorseful | uncomfortable |
| guilty | resentful | unhappy |
| helpless | restless | upset |
| impatient | sad | vulnerable |

Are these feelings all familiar to you? Which ones are? Which ones aren't? Write some reflections on the lines below the list.

Now, note down a few situations or experiences in which you become aware of (notice) your feelings in the coming week. By labeling your feelings, you can use the power of your mind to take a step back and assess (mindfulness), then, over time, learn how to make a good choice about what to do next.

Start with PLEASANT or UNPLEASANT. Then try to identify the general feeling you notice, such as HAPPY, SAD, ANGRY, SCARED. Then, if you feel ready, try to be more specific. Use the above list of feelings as a guide, but feel free to use different words for feelings that come to mind that might not appear on this list.

| Day | Situation/experience when you noticed a feeling | Pleasant or unpleasant? | General (happy, sad, angry, scared) | Specific (see list) |
|-----------|---|-------------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------------|
| Sunday | | | | |
| Monday | | | | |
| Tuesday | | | | |
| Wednesday | | | | |
| Thursday | | | | |
| Friday | | | | |
| Saturday | | | | |

Reflections on This Exercise

What emotions did you become aware of that you weren't previously aware of?

What was the main obstacle you encountered in identifying your emotions?

What was easy about it? What would you like to do to continue the practice of naming and noticing your emotions? Be specific.

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What could you do differently to make progress in this area?

Separating Positive and Negative Coping Strategies for Grief

Objective

To identify the positive and negative ways you are coping with grief and to determine ways to change negative coping strategies.

What to Know

Following a loss, you might feel deeply sad, empty, afraid, hopeless, exhausted, or angry – among many feelings. It can be challenging to figure out how to cope. You might fall into negative or harmful habits when you are grieving. And when you are in the middle of experiencing painful feelings, it can be hard to make healthy choices, and you might default to whatever is nearest or easiest.

Perhaps you are using strategies to cope with grief that you think are helpful or effective, but they are actually causing problems for you. If you can step back, even in your time of grief, and gain some perspective on your responses and reactions, you can make better choices to support your healing process.

This worksheet is designed to help you identify some negative or unhealthy ways you are coping with your loss, and to find alternative strategies for the ones that may be causing problems in your life.

What to Do

How would you describe your current coping strategies? Be honest with yourself.

Now look at this list of some positive or healthy coping strategies. Put a checkmark next to the ones you are currently using.

- cry when you feel sad, not stifling your tears
- feel and express all your emotions—sadness, anger, fear, and so on
- let the feelings flow through you as they arise, like waves on a shoreline
- accept the loss of your loved one without denying reality
- talk to people about your loss (e.g., family, friends, spiritual community, bereavement group)
- seek help from a mental health professional for support and guidance
- honor your lost loved one through rituals, ceremonies, sharing memories, or writing about them
- be self-compassionate when you feel your feelings, whatever they are, whenever they arise, and for however long they last
- use the **TEARS** model, adapted here by psychologist Christina Hibbert, PsyD: **T**alking, **E**xercise, **A**rtistic Expression, **R**ecording Your Experiences, and **S**obbing.
- do deep breathing, yoga, meditation, or relaxation exercises.
- Other: _____
- Other: _____
- Other: _____

This list identifies some common “negative” or unhealthy coping strategies. Put a checkmark next to the ones you are currently using.

- sleeping a lot
- overworking (workaholism)
- over- or undereating
- drinking too much
- misusing or abusing prescription or illegal drugs
- gambling
- excessively watching TV or playing video games

___ distracting yourself from your feelings

___ spending excessive time on the Internet or social media

___ withdrawing from social activities

___ avoiding talking to people who reach out to you

___ obsessing or ruminating about your lost loved one

___ needing to be around mementos and reminders of your lost loved one, or, by contrast, strongly avoiding any reminders

___ Other: _____

___ Other: _____

___ Other: _____

Reflections on This Exercise

Which of the positive or healthy coping mechanisms are helping you in your healing process?

Which ones that you are *not* using are you willing to try?

Which of the negative or unhealthy coping mechanisms are causing you the most difficulty?

Which are you willing to work on to change? How?

In what other ways can you make choices to change your negative coping strategies? Be creative. Talk with a helpful friend or counselor if you need support or input.

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Coping with Difficult Times

Objective

To cope with difficult dates and events following the death of a loved one.

What to Know

Certain times of the year can be painful if you have lost a loved one. Examples include holidays, the deceased person's birthday, a wedding anniversary, Mother's or Father's Day, and the date of the death. There might be other special dates or times of year that remind you of your loved one.

Here are some suggestions for coping with these difficult times.

1. Anticipate and plan for difficult dates. You might be able to predict when these dates or times of year will occur. Plan how you want to spend that time, so you feel more in control. Make a note about what dates or times are difficult for you and think about what you can do to cope.

2. Honor the bond with the person who died. You can honor the bond you have with the deceased person even while you miss them. You can remember their love and caring, their accomplishments, or other admired traits. Visit the cemetery and place flowers on the grave or honor them with a special ritual.

3. Identify pleasurable activities for yourself and loved ones. Times of celebration or acknowledging a life transition can be difficult, but they are also opportunities to find moments of joy and peace. Allow yourself and your loved ones to experience positive feelings. Share the warmth and love of the people around you and think of things you can enjoy, if possible.

4. Take care of yourself – and allow others to help you. Even if you are prepared, difficult times can still be hard to cope with. They are likely to trigger painful memories or feelings, and you need to care for yourself by lowering your expectations and giving yourself time and permission to feel sad. Maybe you can let someone else host a celebration, plan the party, or prepare the meal. Delegate holiday tasks and accept help from family and friends.

This worksheet will help you identify those difficult times and explore ways you can cope.

What to Do

First, you will identify difficult dates, times of year, or events. On the next page is a chart with examples of times bereaved people find challenging. Think about how you feel on these days and add others that come to mind. Using the following scale, rate how difficult you expect each day or situation to be, from 0 = not at all, 1 = a little, 2 = somewhat, 3 = definitely, and 4 = extremely difficult. Include the specific date, if it applies, and make notes about how you feel and what the day or event brings to mind.

| Day or Event | Date | Rating (0-4) | Notes |
|-------------------------------------|------|-----------------|-------|
| Death anniversary | | | |
| Birthday of deceased | | | |
| Your birthday | | | |
| Wedding anniversary | | | |
| Holidays a. b. c. d. | | | |
| Other times a. b. c. d. | | | |

Next, you will plan activities for each difficult time you have identified.

Difficult date or event: _____

What can you do to honor the deceased? _____

Describe something you can do to cope. _____

What can you do to take care of yourself? _____

Difficult date or event: _____

What can you do to honor the deceased? _____

Describe something you can do to cope. _____

What can you do to take care of yourself? _____

Difficult date or event: _____

What can you do to honor the deceased? _____

Describe something you can do to cope. _____

What can you do to take care of yourself? _____

Difficult date or event: _____

What can you do to honor the deceased? _____

Describe something you can do to cope. _____

What can you do to take care of yourself? _____

Difficult date or event: _____

What can you do to honor the deceased? _____

Describe something you can do to cope. _____

What can you do to take care of yourself? _____

Difficult date or event: _____

What can you do to honor the deceased? _____

Describe something you can do to cope. _____

What can you do to take care of yourself? _____

Now, keep track of the activities you do on these difficult events and days. Write down the date and the activity you did to honor your loved one, cope, or care for yourself. Rate the intensity of your grief on a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 = none at all, to 10 = the worst grief you can imagine. Describe your emotions and whether the activity helped you cope. Note any thoughts, such as whether you will repeat the activity at some point in the future.

| Date | Activity | Intensity of grief (0-10) | Emotions | Did the activity help you cope? Y / N | Thoughts |
|------|----------|---------------------------|----------|--|----------|
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Reflections on This Exercise

Did this exercise help you cope with difficult dates and events following the death of your loved one? Why or why not?

How helpful was this exercise? _____
 (1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Coping with “Bad Days” When Grieving

Objective

To increase your ability to cope with distress following a loss.

What to Know

After the initial shock of a loss and the first flood of support ebbs, you may feel the world has gone on without you as well as without the person you have lost. Most people report that some days are not so bad, and then without reason—even years later—a grief storm arrives.

There is nothing wrong with you because this is just how grief works. The good news is that it is possible to prepare for these unpredictable mood swings. This worksheet will help you develop a plan to deal with the more difficult days of your grieving process.

The time to prepare for a storm of grief is when you are feeling relatively good. Many of the suggestions below include making lists because when you are swept away by grief, it can be difficult to brainstorm ways to feel better. If you have a list, all you have to do is read it and choose one thing to do.

- **Make a comfort kit.** Good tissues, a candle, special tea, a soft blanket, favorite bath oils—whatever brings you comfort—can be placed in a special box or location for the times you need it most. This is an act of self-love, and you will feel that when you pull it out to use. It can also include the items in the rest of this list.
- **Create lists.**
 - A playlist of music that lifts you up. No poignant songs about loss; instead, choose songs that are as cheerful as you can stand.
 - People you feel comfortable reaching out to for support so you do not fall into the “nobody cares about me” pit.
 - Ways to move when you feel tired. You might go for a walk, dance, practice yoga, or garden. Identify what it will take to engage in physical activity.
 - Feel-good resources, which might include movies that make you laugh, books that inspire you, food that brings you comfort, visits with children or animals, and so forth.
 - Places in nature you love to go. Whether you take a vigorous hike or sit and listen to the birds, nature is healing.
 - Words or affirmations. This might include statements like, “It’s ok to feel sad,” “This will not last forever,” “You can get through this,” “You are so strong,” “It’s ok to have a bad day,” and “You don’t have to fake it.”
 - Places to go. A weekend visiting a friend, a day playing tourist in your hometown, or taking a larger trip all move you out of your daily routine and thought patterns. You are likely to come home refreshed and less vulnerable to a grief attack.

- **Keep a gratitude journal.** List ten things you are grateful for every day. Then, when you are having a difficult day, you can pick up your journal to remind yourself there are so many good things in your life that balance out the grief.
- **Participate in a grief group or online forum.** When the bad days come, you will have a group of people who understand and support you in a deep way.
- **Reach out for help.** If difficult days come too often, grief is negatively impacting your relationships or work, or if you start to wish for your own death, seek professional help.

What to Do

Use the suggestions above to brainstorm your own plan for coping with bad days.

What belongs in your comfort kit?

Where will you store it? _____

What else in the suggestions sound good to you? What else might help you on bad days?

Choose three of the lists mentioned above that you would like to make.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Name of list #1: _____

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Coping with Your Emotions Following the Suicide of a Loved One

Objective

To identify ways to cope with the loss of a loved one to suicide.

What to Know

Losing a loved one to suicide can add another level of pain to your grieving. You might be overwhelmed by conflicting emotions. Common reactions are described below, along with suggestions about how to cope. Check off any of the following you are currently experiencing.

_____ **Shock** is a common reaction to an extremely stressful or traumatic event. You might have emotional numbness or “brain fog,” making it hard to understand or accept what happened. Your memory, concentration, and organization skills might also be affected. You can manage shock by:

- taking slow, deep breaths several times a day.
- doing your best to pull yourself back to the present moment.
- asking for help and accepting help when it is offered to you.

Note: If you feel disoriented, disconnected, or numb for more than a few weeks, or your feelings are preventing you from functioning, seek help from a doctor or mental health professional.

_____ **Disbelief** allows you to gradually process and integrate what happened. Over time it will subside. You can:

- slowly acknowledge what happened and gradually accept reality to begin to move forward with your healing.
- focus on positive memories of your loved one.
- reduce your focus on the details of how they died.
- allow emotions to ebb and flow as you move through the grieving process.

_____ **Shame** stems from thinking you did something wrong, and may include feelings of embarrassment, disgrace, or humiliation. Remember to:

- be gentle with yourself.
- acknowledge you did the best you could with the information you had at the time.
- reassure yourself that the suicide was not your fault – you did nothing wrong.
- connect with others and talk openly about suicide and its impact.

_____ **Regret** happens when you reflect on all the “what if” scenarios. You might often wonder what you could have done differently. Regret might be combined with guilt. You can manage regret and guilt by:

- understanding the difference between guilt and regret, and instead of saying, “I feel guilty about _____,” say, “I regret that I didn’t know about _____ at the time, or I might have responded differently.”
- knowing you did not intentionally do something wrong.
- accepting you did the best you could with the information you had at the time.
- exploring whether there is something you feel bad about.

_____ **Anger** is a common reaction to grief, and suicide can make you feel that your life has been changed without your permission. Things might feel out of control. It might seem like trust, safety, and security have been compromised. You may be angry at yourself, the deceased person, your loved ones, or at God or a higher power. Try to:

- avoid judging your anger as a “bad” emotion.
- understand and identify other feelings that might be associated with your anger, like fear, rejection, or vulnerability.
- find an outlet to safely communicate and express your anger.
- learn how to release and defuse anger in effective, safe ways, like exercising, breathing techniques, journaling, taking time-outs, or visualization exercises.

_____ **Blame** occurs when you believe there has been a wrongdoing and someone should be held responsible. You might blame yourself, another person, or a group of people. You can:

- remind yourself suicide is a multi-factored event and no one thing or person can cause someone to take their own life.
- consider whether blaming others is worth the risk of losing those relationships.
- do a forgiveness ritual.
- get assistance with any legal or advocacy needs related to the circumstances of your loved one’s death, if necessary.

_____ **Abandonment or rejection** can leave you wondering how you will deal with challenges on your own. Try to:

- remember that your loved one did not necessarily want to leave you. They may not have been capable of considering other ways to end their pain.
- understand your loved one may have been convinced that everyone would be better off without them.
- focus on the love and connection you had with your loved one.
- remember their choices had nothing to do with their love for you.

_____ **Fear** is commonly experienced when things feel out of control. You might wonder how you will get through this, and if anything will ever be the same again. You may be afraid of being alone or what the future holds. Prevent these fears from interfering with your healing or taking over your life by:

- focusing on your breathing. Take five long, deep breaths when fear arises.
- identifying what you are afraid of.
- talking about your fears with someone you trust.

- doing a calming activity like going for a walk, reading a book, or writing in a journal.

____ **Relief** might be a surprising and confusing reaction. No matter the cause, relief can be unsettling and cause you to feel guilt. You can:

- accept that *whatever* you feel is valid.
- understand it is normal to experience profound grief and relief at the same time.
- express your conflicting feelings to others. You might say, “Feeling relieved that she is no longer in pain doesn’t change how heartbroken I am or how much I love her.”
- process these feelings with a mental health professional.

____ **Deception and secrecy** might cause you to feel shocked, betrayed, and angry that your loved one had secrets, engaged in reckless behaviors, or broke your trust. You might question the relationship and whether you ever really knew them. You can:

- remember your loved one may not have been thinking clearly before their death.
- learn about how their brain health may have negatively impacted their behavior.
- build confidence in yourself by talking to someone you trust.
- explore how forgiveness can help you heal.

What to Do

What are the two strongest emotions you are experiencing now?

How have you been coping with these emotions?

Are you willing to try some of the suggestions to cope outlined above? Why or why not?

What helps you on particularly bad days?

According to The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, there are four ways you can take care of yourself following the loss of a loved one to suicide. Visit <https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/> or call 1-800-273-8255 24 hours a day, 7 days a week in the United States for more information

about the resources they offer. The four ways are included in the following chart. Do you best to complete each section.

| | |
|---|--|
| <p>1. Find a support group. Your local community might have resources, or you can explore online groups: https://afsp.org/find-a-support-group/ https://samaritanshope.org/our-services/grief-support/ https://save.org/what-we-do/grief-support/find-a-support-group/ Did you find a support group? Why or why not?</p> | <p>2. Do what feels right. You do not have to talk about it right now. If you choose to discuss your loss, who are you most comfortable talking to? What else feels right to you, right now?</p> |
| <p>3. Write. Writing a letter to your deceased loved one or journaling about your feelings can help. This is a safe place for you to express some of the things you were unable to say before their death. Spend some time writing. How did writing help you?</p> | <p>4. Ask for help. Let your loved ones, co-workers, and others support you, or look for resources in your community such as meal services. From whom can you receive support? What services would help you during this time?</p> |

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Coping with Regret and Guilt Following a Loss

Objective

To identify ways to cope with regret and guilt.

What to Know

When you lose a loved one, you might experience many emotions along with grief – including guilt and regret. Grief, guilt, and regret work together to complicate your grieving process. It can help to separate each from the other to process your grief more effectively.

Both guilt with regret can occur while you try to make sense of the loss, revisit details about the death, and wonder how this could have happened. Blaming yourself, experiencing survivor's guilt, or wishing you had done things differently is natural. During this process you might realize you made mistakes or identify things you could have done differently.

Guilt can lead to self-punishment and isolation while keeping you focused on the past. Perhaps you have done something wrong, but you might also blame yourself for things over which you had no control.

Regret happens when you focus on the past and the things you would have done differently if you had known then what you know now. Regret can include self-blame, sadness, anger, and feeling at fault.

Here are some suggestions to cope with guilt and regret.

- **Talk about how you feel.** Talk to someone you trust who is unbiased to get a different perspective. This might be a therapist, coach, or friend. This person might remind you that you did the best you could. You might not remember exactly how things were – or you forget all the things you did right. Trust that you are not to blame and begin the process of letting these feelings go.
- **Write about your feelings.** Using a journal or notebook, sort through your feelings and identify if you are feeling guilty or regretful. Remember the things you did right and all the positive memories you have. You can begin by asking yourself, “Is my guilt realistic or unrealistic? If it is realistic, were my actions intentional or unintentional?” and “What do I regret?” You do not have to share your answers with anyone.
- **Write a letter.** Express how you feel to your deceased loved one, expressing your feelings about the good things and what you wish you could have said or done. Put this letter in a special place, bury it, or read it aloud and dispose of it.
- **Find a way to make amends.** When you cannot directly make up for wrongdoings, you can make amends by changing your behavior. “Living amends” refers to living in a way that acknowledges your mistakes by consistently behaving in ways to make up for what you did – all while not repeating your mistakes.

- **Ask for forgiveness.** Have a conversation with your deceased loved one and apologize. It will be one-sided but maintaining the bond after death can be healing.
- **Apologize to others.** If your regret or guilt involves people who are living, sort out any unexpressed apologies. If you can act, do it, or say what needs to be said – even if you feel embarrassed or ashamed.
- **Forgive yourself.** Accept that you make mistakes and have lapses in judgment. No good comes from feeling awful over something you cannot change. Instead, forgive yourself. You might say, “I’ve suffered for the decisions I have made, yet I’m willing to forgive myself and move on. I allow myself to heal and grow from this experience.” Self-forgiveness includes demonstrating the following to yourself:
 - **Self-empathy.** You might be your own worst critic. Remind yourself that everyone makes mistakes, and no one is perfect.
 - **Kindness.** Showing kindness involves stopping negative self-talk and harsh judgment.
 - **Self-compassion.** Be understanding toward yourself when you fail, make mistakes, or suffer. Stop evaluating yourself and labeling your actions as “good” or “bad.” Learn to accept yourself as you are, that you are learning and growing every day.
 - **Understanding.** Understand your strengths and weaknesses, your fears and motivations, and your tolerances and boundaries.
- **Connect with loved ones.** Reconnect with loved ones whom you have alienated in the past. The death of a loved one can sometimes open the door to reestablishing severed connections.
- **Look for the lesson.** Guilt and regret can inspire you to become a better person, teach you compassion, and increase your empathy. Maybe you will choose to show appreciation to loved ones or say, “I love you,” more frequently.
- **Cultivate gratitude.** While you cannot change the past, you can be grateful for it. Affirm the good memories and aspects of your relationship with the deceased person. Gratitude allows you to experience and celebrate the lasting effects of this person’s life.
- **Seek support.** There are online grief support groups if the support is unavailable in your community.

The grieving process can become complicated when you have regrets or feel guilt. **Remember – no matter what you did or said, you CAN find forgiveness, healing, and peace.** This worksheet can help you identify ways to cope with the painful feelings of regret and guilt.

What to Do

Who can you talk to about your regret or guilt? _____

Are you interested in an online support group? _____ You can even join groups anonymously. Try www.griefanonymous.com, www.griefshare.org, or www.mygriefangels.org

Explain why you are feeling regret, guilt, or both.

Write down all the positive things that made your relationship with your loved one special.

Are you willing to write in a journal or notebook, or write a letter to your deceased loved one? _____ If so, choose either journaling or writing a letter to express your feelings. Describe your experience below.

Do you think making a “living amends” will help you? Why or why not? What can you do?

If you regret not spending enough time with the deceased person, acknowledge the time you did spend together. Write about the times you shared.

If you failed to find the closure or forgiveness you were hoping for, you can make up for things that you did not say or do when they were alive by living your life in ways that honor your loved one. Some examples are:

- If you did not express your love for them, start by saying it often to the people who are still in your life.
- Become a better grandparent, sibling, or child.

What can you do?

Focus on this moment and not on past experiences, thoughts, or thinking patterns. Bring your thoughts and awareness to the present moment. Sit quietly and pay attention to your breathing. Notice your inhales and exhales. Do this at least ten minutes a day for two weeks. Describe your experience.

Another way to focus on the present moment is to tune into your senses. Focus on one sense at a time. Start with sight and look around. What do you notice? Observe the colors, textures, movements, and contrasts of light and dark. Then tune into your hearing. Are there sounds around you? What do you feel? Taste? Slowly engage each sense and continuously bring yourself back to the moment. Try it and write about your experience.

Think about the positive aspects of your relationship with the deceased. Express gratitude for the role each of you played in each other's lives. What else are you grateful for?

Are there people who are living that you can apologize to? Whom? What are you willing to do to ask for forgiveness?

What are some ways you can forgive yourself? Be specific.

Reflections on This Exercise

What triggers regret and guilt? Explain.

If it was hard for you to let go of regret or guilt, what do you believe caused this difficulty? Could you have done anything differently? Describe.

What else can you do to cope with regret and guilt?

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Identifying and Coping with Secondary Losses

Objective

To identify and manage the secondary losses you experienced following the death of a loved one.

What to Know

There are often many smaller, unanticipated losses associated with the death of a loved one. You might be caught off guard by these secondary losses and the ways they compound your grief.

Secondary losses can be related to financial stability, identity and roles, sense of purpose, and support systems. Non-death losses are often unrecognized and unsupported by loved ones. Perhaps you view these experiences as obstacles to overcome. Yet you may be grieving these losses, and because they are often personal (and sometimes private), it might be difficult to give (and receive) support for them.

Part of the grieving process is learning how to adjust to the physical, personal, social, spiritual, emotional, and psychological changes connected with the death of your loved one. You might be in the process of identifying and acknowledging your secondary losses. Check off any of the following that you have experienced.

___ **Loss of Family Structure** – the immediate and radical change in family composition. Remaining family members must take on new responsibilities that had previously been performed by the deceased.

___ **Loss of a Primary Relationship** –time spent together, conversations, and activities you enjoyed together have ended.

___ **Loss of the Familiar Way of Relating to Loved Ones** – they may avoid you because they do not know how to respond to your life changes. There might be routine changes.

___ **Loss of Support Systems** –friends, family, community organizations, and others who help to sustain and lend strength. When you look to those who have been there for you in the past, they seem to have disappeared at a time when you need them the most.

___ **Loss of Lifestyle** – beginning a new way of life despite your choices or wishes. If you lost your partner, you are now single again. If your only child died, it means the loss of future grandchildren.

___ **Loss of Financial Security** – if the primary wage earner is deceased, your finances may be strained.

___ **Loss of the Past** – the inability to share memories of the past with the deceased.

___ **Loss of the Future** – the immediate end of plans made with the deceased, including growing old together, having children with that person, seeing them graduate from school,

watching them begin their own family, celebrating birthdays/graduations/marriages, or being able to resolve unfinished business.

____ **Loss of Dreams** – you grieve not only a past and present with that person, but also future hopes, goals, and dreams.

____ **Loss of Identity** – you no longer fulfill specific roles in the home, family, at work, among loved ones, and in the community.

____ **Loss of a Part of Yourself** – refers to the loss of the part of yourself that was given to the deceased, like love, time, energy, and so on.

____ **Loss of Self-Confidence** – you might not be acknowledging your self-efficacy, leading to feelings of inadequacy or the thought that you cannot do anything right.

____ **Loss of Decision-Making Ability** – you feel confused and insecure and find it hard to take direction and advice from others. You are now forced to rely on yourself to make choices without the deceased.

____ **Loss of Ability to See Choices** – you feel like you have no control over your life, leading to an inability to see alternatives and options.

____ **Loss of Trust** – you lost faith in positive outcomes, or no longer trust the world, God or a higher power, the people around you, or yourself.

____ **Loss of Security** – you feel unsafe, uncertain, anxious, and vulnerable. Perhaps you have also moved homes, or changed schools, churches, or neighborhoods.

____ **Loss of a Sense of Humor** – you no longer see anything as funny because of the pain associated with your loss. You may not feel like laughing at anything and you might even wonder whether it is okay to find humor in situations, happiness, or enjoyment in life.

____ **Loss of Patience** – you cannot tolerate what you did in the past. You might be impatient with your inability to recover quickly, feel better, or handle stress. You might frequently find yourself irritable or arguing with loved ones.

____ **Loss of Ability to Focus and Function** – you are preoccupied with pain and sadness, and you might have a significant loss of energy and a shorter attention span.

____ **Loss of Health** – physical problems can result from emotional stress, pain, trauma, shock, and grief. You might experience sleep or appetite problems, heart issues, headaches, digestive distress, depression, anxiety, or other medical conditions.

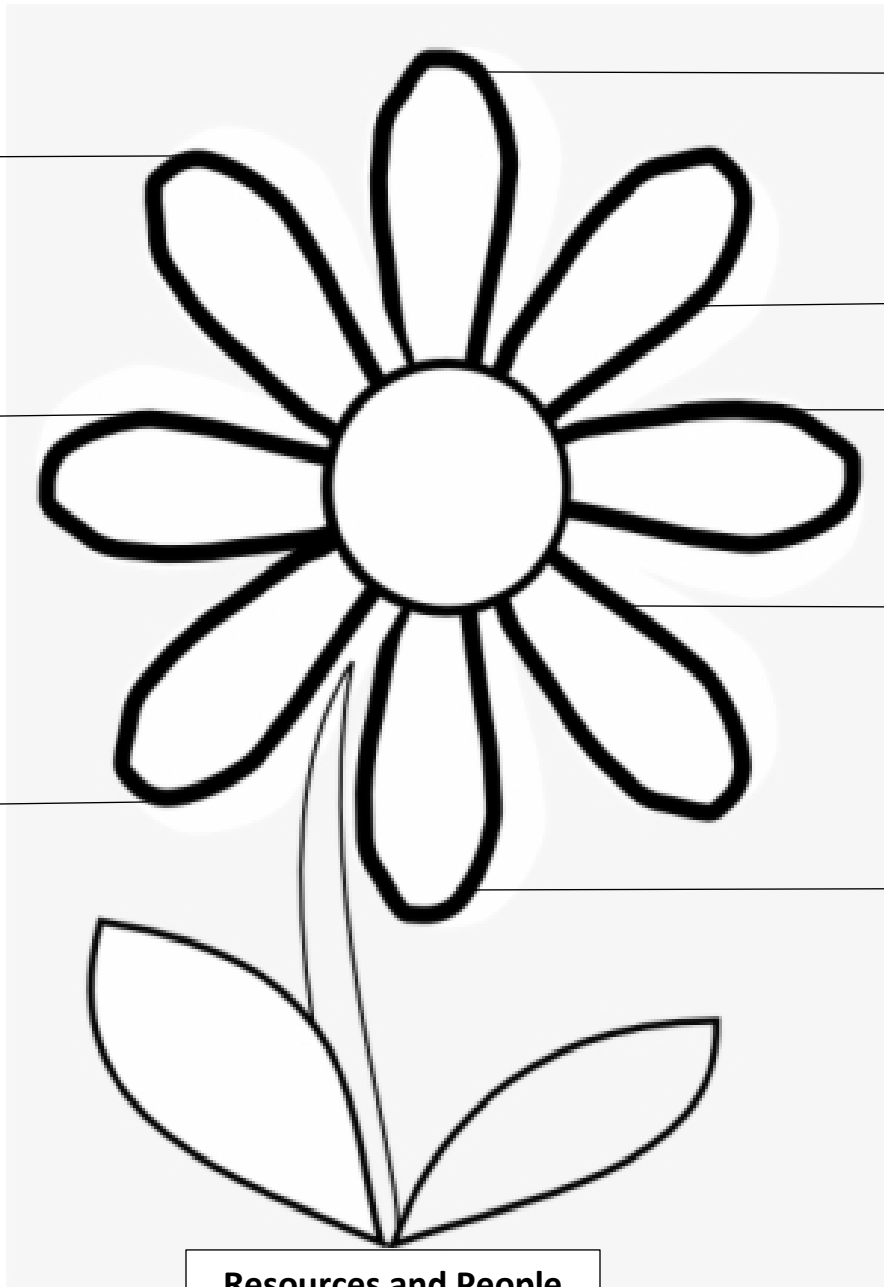
____ Other: _____

____ Other: _____

Awareness of the secondary losses that accompany the loss of a loved one can help you give yourself grace and patience as you heal. This worksheet helps you label and acknowledge the secondary losses you experienced. If you feel you are not getting the support and care you need from your loved ones, you may want to seek help from a therapist or support group.

What to Do

Reflect on the secondary losses you marked above. This exercise can help you identify the things you might need help coping with. Using the flower, write down the name of your deceased loved one in the center. Write down the secondary losses you experienced inside the petals. On the lines next to each petal, write down some ways you can address each secondary loss. For example, if you have lost financial security, you might write down, "seek the advice of a financial coach or advisor." Finally, write down the names of people or resources that can help you cope with these secondary losses.



**Resources and People
That Can Help You**

Are you receiving the support you need to cope with your secondary losses? Why or why not?

How can your loved ones support you as you cope?

Reflections on This Exercise

What else can you do to cope with secondary losses?

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

My Grief Rights

Objective

To identify your rights when you are grieving.

What to Know

Someone you love has died. You might be having painful and scary thoughts and feelings. Together these thoughts and feelings are called grief, which is a normal thing people experience after someone they love has died.

You might experience grief in different ways than other people, and that's OK. The following ten rights will help you understand that how you experience and cope with grief is healthy and normal for you.

My Grief Rights

1. I have the right to have my own unique feelings about death. I might feel angry, scared, sad, or lonely. I might not feel anything at all sometimes.
2. I have the right to talk about my grief whenever I feel like it. When I need to talk, I'll find someone who will listen. When I don't want to talk about it, that's OK, too.
3. I have the right to show or express my feelings in my own way. Maybe I'll write in my journal, draw a picture, or scream and punch my pillow.
4. I have the right to get help with my grief. I need the adults in my life to pay attention to what I'm feeling and saying.
5. I have the right to be upset. Sometimes I might get annoyed or have trouble getting along with others.
6. I have the right to have "grief-bursts." Grief-bursts are strong, sudden, unexpected feelings of sadness that overwhelm me sometimes.
7. I have the right to use my beliefs to help me cope.
8. I have the right to try to figure out why the person I love died and ask questions about death.
9. I have the right to think and talk about my memories. Sometimes my memories are happy, and sometimes they are sad.
10. I have the right to move forward and heal. I'll go on to live a happy life, but the life and death of the person who died will always be a part of me.

What are some other rights you have about your grief? Write them down.

What to Do

Post this list on your bedroom door or wall or copy it into your smartphone. Re-read this list often to remind yourself you have rights when you're grieving – and that you will eventually heal.

Ask your loved ones to read this list so they can help you in the best way they can. Who can you share your rights with?

Who can you talk to when you feel like talking?

What are some of the feelings you've had so far?

What can you say when you want to be alone?

What are some healthy ways you can show or express your feelings?

What beliefs can help you with your grief? For example, you might pray or attend religious services.

What are some ways you can remember your loved one?

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Exercising Your Rights to Your Needs and Feelings

Objective

To exercise your rights to your needs and feelings and identify others who will validate them.

What to Know

As human beings, we all need to communicate our feelings, desires, and opinions, and we all deserve to be heard, respected, and validated. Unfortunately, this does not always happen. You may have been told that your feelings are unimportant or undeserving of others' time or attention. You may avoid asking for help or expressing your emotions, so that you do not upset, disappoint, or challenge other people.

Check off the statements that best describe you:

Others have told me that my feelings are weird, wrong, or bad.

When I have an emotional reaction, I have been told to "get over it" or "stop being so dramatic," or that I am overreacting.

I am afraid to ask for help from others because I am fearful that I will be judged.

I am afraid to ask for help from others because I am sure I will be rejected.

I annoy other people when I share my needs and feelings.

I am often ignored or disrespected when I express my needs and feelings.

I am constantly misunderstood.

I don't deserve to ask for, or receive, what I need.

I would rather not get my needs met than "push back" or assert myself, out of fear of being mistreated.

Add your own statements here:

Regardless of the number of statements you checked off, one thing is true: your needs and feelings are worthy of acknowledgment and validation by others.

What to Do

First, recognize that you have a right to your own feelings, needs, and opinions, even if they differ from others' beliefs, feelings, and needs. Here are some statements that you can post on a mirror or carry with you as a reminder:

- I have a right to put myself first sometimes.
- I have a right to inconvenience or disappoint others sometimes.
- I have a right to need things from others.
- I have a right to express my emotions in ways that are not harmful to myself or others.
- I have a right to my beliefs and opinions.
- I have a right to experience things differently than others.
- I have a right to ask for help or support.
- I have a right to say "no" without being a selfish or bad person.
- I have a right to speak out against mistreatment from others.

Circle the statements you find most challenging to believe. Explain.

Next, answer the following questions to identify people in your life who can help remind you of those rights – and can support you in receiving acknowledgment and validation.

Name at least one trustworthy and nonjudgmental person with whom you can share your experiences and emotions, and from whom you can receive validation and support.

Why did you select this person?

How does this person make you feel about yourself?

Name at least one trustworthy and nonjudgmental person who can help you practice asking for help, expressing yourself, or communicating your needs to others.

Why did you select this person?

Name at least one trustworthy and nonjudgmental person who can help you practice disagreeing with others, or saying “no.”

Why did you select this person?

Where can you meet other trustworthy, supportive people (work, church, volunteer group, etc.)?

Reflections on This Exercise

Has this exercise changed how you regard your own feelings, needs, and opinions? Explain.

Has this exercise improved your ability to express your feelings, needs, and opinions? Explain.

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Section 4. Receiving Support

Asking for Help

Objective

To learn and practice strategies for reaching out to others for help and support, especially if you are usually the helper.

What to Know

Creating a safe network is important. Your network includes people who could be available if you need help in life. Let's tackle a problem a lot of people have faced—and have stumbled over—throughout their lives: how to ask for help. Sometimes it's easier said than done.

It is common for some people to try to “disappear” or isolate—perhaps because of guilt, shame, or a sense of unworthiness; perhaps because they were abused or neglected as children; or perhaps because they were betrayed by a loved one and don't trust that anyone would want to help them. If those experiences are a part of your history, it is essential that you seek individual counseling or therapy to fully understand and ultimately break free of those hurts and traumas.

No matter your history, you deserve help and support. You deserve not to carry the weight of the world on your shoulders or take care of everyone else's needs before your own.

What to Do

In this exercise, you'll first reflect on times in your life when you've asked for help—from simple things like asking someone to help you do a household task to asking for a ride to the airport to asking someone to watch the kids while you take time for yourself. List three of those times on the lines below.

Now, write down three times in your life when you really needed help and didn't ask anyone. Note when it happened (year or your age), who was involved, the reasons why you didn't ask (if you can recall), and what you remember feeling at the time.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Now look at your list of people in your network. How might each (or a few) of them help you with something that you might need right now? Here are some typical things that people who are people pleasers have difficulty asking for help with:

- Babysitting
- Pet sitting
- Cooking a meal
- Getting a ride to a meeting or appointment
- Household chore(s)
- Running an errand
- Talking on the phone for emotional support or encouragement
- Being available by phone or text to check in during the day/evening
- Meeting in person for emotional support or encouragement

Now fill in your own ideas for tasks or other things you might need help with:

Record over the next week ways in which you need to, or could try to, ask for help. Here are some ideas of how you might ask for help, by text, phone, or email, or in person:

- *“Hi, _____. If you have a moment, I’m wondering if you can help me with something?”*
- *“Hi, _____. I have a doctor’s appointment on Tuesday at 3:00, and my car is in the shop. Would you be available and willing to drive me?”*
- *“Hi, Mom. You know how I love your chocolate chip cookies? I really need some comfort food right now. Would you have time to bake a batch and bring them over?”*

You get the idea. Ask politely, assuming they have busy schedules. Be sure to say thank you. Someday, perhaps you’ll be in a place when you can return the favor, but for now you are the one who deserves to ask for help from friends and loving supporters along the way.

In the next week, record any situations when you need help, whom you asked and in what way, what you said, and what the outcome was. Even if you don’t *really* need help, practice asking anyway and see what happens.

Sunday

Needed help with _____

Asked _____

What you said _____

Phone? _____ Text/Email? _____ In person? _____

Outcome _____

Comments _____

Monday

Needed help with _____

Asked _____

What you said _____

Phone? _____ Text/Email? _____ In person? _____

Outcome _____

Comments _____

Tuesday

Needed help with _____

Asked _____

What you said _____

Phone? _____ Text/Email? _____ In person? _____

Outcome _____

Comments _____

Wednesday

Needed help with _____

Asked _____

What you said _____

Phone? _____ Text/Email? _____ In person? _____

Outcome _____

Comments _____

Thursday

Needed help with _____

Asked _____

What you said _____

Phone? _____ Text/Email? _____ In person? _____

Outcome _____

Comments _____

Friday

Needed help with _____

Asked _____

What you said _____

Phone? _____ Text/Email? _____ In person? _____

Outcome _____

Comments _____

Saturday

Needed help with _____

Asked _____

What you said _____

Phone? _____ Text/Email? _____ In person? _____

Outcome _____

Comments _____

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Solving Problems Caused by Your Loss

Objective

To increase your ability to solve problems associated with the loss of a loved one.

What to Know

One of the unfair parts about grieving the loss of a loved one is there are often a multitude of practical tasks to be accomplished precisely at a time when you need to process your feelings and receive emotional support. Just a few of such challenges might include:

- Planning a funeral or memorial.
- Writing an obituary.
- Obtaining a death certificate.
- Dealing with your loved one's possessions (including pets).
- Attending to legal matters such as autopsies or wills.
- Managing financial matters like paying medical bills or seeing to ongoing bills if the person you lost normally took care of them.
- Learning new skills to shoulder household tasks.
- Losing income.
- Gaining access to their financial accounts, credit cards, etc.
- Closing/managing a digital legacy of email, online accounts, social media, etc.
- Experiencing conflict around any of these issues with others who were close to the person.
- Needing to move or downsize.

Any one of these issues could be overwhelming, and typically there are more than one. The associated stress can make a difficult time even more challenging. However, there are coping techniques you can use to feel more in control of these problems and start to overcome them.

1. Make a list. Sometimes you might feel pressure from unnamed tasks that threaten to engulf you. But when you take the time to make a list, you may be surprised that there are not as many as you thought. Even if there are, writing them down is a first step. Making a plan is the first step to feeling more control and experiencing less strain.

2. Prioritize the list. Be ruthless about what would be nice to have finished, or what are others' priorities and not yours. *Things may be important but not urgent.* The most important thing right now is to take care of yourself – which is necessary to eventually attend to the list.

- There are two reasons a task may truly need to get done soon:
 - If completing the task will make you feel better, prioritize it. If seeing his clothes in the closet every day hurts terribly, donate them.
 - If there is official pressure, such as legal or financial matters, reflect on how urgent it really is and slot it into your priority list accordingly.

You may find that many duties remain at the bottom of the list. Give yourself permission to relax about them.

3. Break it down into steps. Even with simple challenges, breaking things down helps, but with complex issues, it is a must. Breaking a task into steps makes it manageable.

- You can see what must happen first, second, and third, and put the steps in order.
- You can project a possible timeline of how long each step might take.
- You discover the tasks you are not sure you know how to do, allowing you to make a list of what to find out and who you can ask.
- You can identify steps that someone else can do for you.
- You can list small steps so you accomplish a little each day so the task is not so overwhelming.

4. Consider your options. You might forget your options when you are upset, believing you must do everything yourself and as quickly as possible. Consider the following:

- *Who can take this task on?* People who say, “If you need anything, anything at all, please let me know,” usually mean it. When people care about you, they want to help.
- Allowing them to help gives them purpose.
 - o Specifically state what you need when you ask someone if they are willing to take on a responsibility – including timing, location, cost, and so forth. Otherwise, the way they choose to do it may cause you more stress than relief. You might say, “It would help me most if you could...”
- *What is good enough?* It may not be necessary to inventory the closet and decide which items should go to specific people. Do what is important today. You may choose to go back to the project later – or you may not. Now is not the time for perfectionism.

You need not do this alone. Grief or exhaustion can rob you of your ability to think clearly. Choose a detail-oriented friend to do this with you and help you be realistic and gentle with yourself.

What to Do

Make a list of challenges facing you right now, from large to small. Use additional paper if you need more space.

Prioritize the list by emotional and practical urgency.

To try out this process, choose two or three problems that feel particularly overwhelming or charged for you. For each, complete the table below. On the left side, break each one into as many steps as you can. On the right side, make notes as to when the task should happen, who may be involved, what they will need to complete the step, etc.

Challenge #1: _____

| Steps | When, who, what... |
|--------------|---------------------------|
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |

Challenge #2: _____

| Steps | When, who, what... |
|--------------|---------------------------|
| | |
| | |
| | |

| | |
|--|--|
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |

Challenge #3: _____

| Steps | When, who, what... |
|-------|--------------------|
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |

Did you find that breaking the problems into smaller steps helped? Why or why not?

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____
 (1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Words That Help

Objective

To increase the support you feel in difficult circumstances by using helpful words and quotes.

What to Know

When you are struggling following a loss, it is good to remember that you are not the first human being to experience grief. One way to gain support is to listen to people who have dealt with a similar situation and left some wisdom behind.

You might read a book about someone who has experienced difficulties like yours, or you might join online groups of people who are dealing with similar issues. You can discover words that heal. These words can be from song lyrics, quotes, podcasts, poems, scripture, books, bumper stickers...you never know where you might find inspiration and solace. Here are some examples:

- “Just as despair can come to one only from other human beings, hope, too, can be given to one only by other human beings.” –Elie Weisel
- “He knows not his own strength who hath not met adversity.” – William Samuel Johnson
- “The greatest glory in living lies not in never failing, but in rising every time we fail.” –Nelson Mandel
- “Things turn out the best for the people who make the best of the way things turn out.” –John Wooden
- “I learned there are troubles of more than one kind. Some come from ahead, others come from behind. But I’ve bought a big bat. I’m already, you see. Now my troubles are going to have trouble with me.” –Dr. Seuss
- “Courage doesn’t always roar. Sometimes courage is the quiet voice at the end of the day, saying, “I will try again tomorrow.” –Mary Anne Radmacher
- “The human capacity for burden is like bamboo – far more flexible than you’d ever believe at first glance.” —Jodi Picoult
- “I can be changed by what happens to me. But I refuse to be reduced by it.” —Maya Angelou
- “Don’t believe everything you think.” –bumper sticker
- “It’s your reaction to adversity, not adversity itself, that determines how your life’s story will develop.” —Dieter F. Uchtdorf
- “My barn having burned down, I can now see the moon.” —Mizuta Masahide
- “If you’re going through hell, keep going.” —Winston Churchill
- “We are all faced with a series of great opportunities brilliantly disguised as impossible situations.” —Chuck Swindoll
- “You have power over your mind – not outside events. Realize this, and you will find strength.” —Marcus Aurelius
- “If your heart is broken, make art with the pieces.” —Shane Koyczan

- “The world breaks everyone, and afterward, some are strong at the broken places.” —Ernest Hemingway
- “There is meaning in every journey that is unknown to the traveler.” —Dietrich Bonhoeffer
- “And one has to understand that braveness is not the absence of fear but rather the strength to keep on going forward despite the fear.” —Paulo Coelho
- “We are not a product of what has happened to us in our past. We have the power of choice.” —Stephen Covey

What to Do

Search the internet or explore songs and books for the words that most inspire you. What are some of the words you want to keep nearby?

From that list of inspirational words, choose three that you are most attracted to:

Write statements expressing your own wisdom about each of those topics.

Start a notebook or journal. Record the words you encounter and the words you write yourself that help you. As you work with your favorite words, keep refining your own statements to reflect the wisdom you are gaining about each one.

Create a brief ritual to use at the beginning or end of your day. Incorporate these words as markers so you carry their inspiration. What will your ritual look like?

Use your creativity to engage with and digest your favorite words of healing. This could be finding images that go along with the word or quote, making a collage, or simply writing and coloring the words. Write down two ways you would like to do this.

- 1. _____
- 2. _____

Find a way to share your wisdom with others. Write a blog post, give a talk, or share what you are learning with a friend. Write three ideas for how to do this.

- 1. _____
- 2. _____
- 3. _____

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Would a Grief Support Group Help Me?

Objective

To help people who have experienced a loss evaluate whether a support group would be helpful.

What to Know

Losing a person (or pet) close to you is always difficult, and sometimes, depending on the relationship and the circumstances, quite complex and stressful. Most of us need support, whether from family, friends, religious affiliation, or professional mental health practitioners. Another source of help is found in grief support groups. How do you know when a group would be useful to you? This worksheet will help you evaluate that and provide contact information for various support groups.

Who goes? People of all ages and backgrounds attend grief support groups for all types of loss (parental, child, spouse, sibling, etc.), at any stage of grief—whether newly bereaved or having had the loss many years earlier.

What kind of groups are there? There is a wide variety of formats and approaches, including:

Peer-led or professionally led.

In-person or online.

Online formats differ too:

Discussion forums: you can just read the posts, or you can share your story and support others. Some are moderated and others are not. o Video conferencing: in real time or watching the recording.

Email and social media.

Free or fee based.

For general or specific types of grief (parental, child, spouse, sibling).

For specific groups (religious, by age, etc.).

Consistent membership or constantly changing attendance.

How do I know if a group will help me? You do not know for sure; you simply try it to find out.

You may be drawn toward group support because:

You would like to talk about your experience without needing to take care of the person listening to you—a common experience when the person who died was important to both of you.

You would like to hear about other people's experiences and see how they relate to yours.

You are lonely; you would like to feel others' support and offer yours to them.

If behaviors like these have been going on for some time, a grief support group led by a mental health professional might be useful to you:

You cannot stop thinking about your loss.

Your grief interferes with your job, your family obligations, or your self-care.

You have suicidal thoughts or lasting feelings of depression.

You have ongoing symptoms like social withdrawal, crying, sleep disturbance, eating too little or too much, increased irritability and anger, or panic attacks.

You are abusing substances or engaging in addictive behaviors.

Someone close to you is worried about you, or you are worried about yourself.

Why would I go? Everyone needs support. Family or close friends can be great, but they may be dealing with the loss themselves, or may not be good at listening. Sometimes people feel freer to express themselves with people who are not directly involved. You may experience:

Reassurance that your experiences are normal.

Feelings of connection and belonging.

Peace and hope.

Increased ability to cope with life.

Useful information and resources.

Kindness and empathy.

Pleasure in giving support and making friends.

What if I do not like it?

You should never feel pressured to share; that is up to you.

You can leave at any point you do not feel comfortable.

Sometimes it takes trying a few groups before you find one that is a good fit.

Support groups may not be for you. That is fine—and it is great to give it a try to find out.

How do I find a group? It is much like finding any kind of service: ask for recommendations from people you know (friends, clergy, mental health practitioners, funeral home professionals, etc.) and/or search online.

As well as groups open to all bereaved people, there are groups for every imaginable subset: age of participants, relationship to and cause of death of those they lost, and much, much more. Here are just a few examples as of this writing:

[The 7 Best Online Grief Support Groups of 2021](#): whether they are the “best” or not, it is a very detailed list of the groups they highlight and a sampling of what you can find online.

If the person you lost was under hospice care, many hospice organizations welcome you to their free services: www.hospiceandcommunitycare.org

Losing a child or a sibling: [The Compassionate Friends](#) was founded over 50 years ago. It offers local chapters, online support, and lots of resources.

Losing someone to cancer: [CancerCare](#) provides a variety of live and online groups for specific groups of people who have lost people to cancer, including parents/single parents, spouses/partners, young adults, caregivers, and more.

Losing a spouse: <https://soaringspirits.org/> and <https://widowsconnection.org/> have many resources for widows; widowers can try <https://nationalwidowers.org/>

Losing someone to addiction: [Grief Recovery After Substance Passing](#) is a national nonprofit that supports local groups and has a Facebook forum.

No matter what your circumstances and wishes are, there is a group for you. Find more by searching the internet for “grief support groups for the death of a _____.”

What to Do

Look at the two lists above under, “How do I know if a group would help me?” Which bullet points apply to you?

What are some reasons you might consider finding a grief support group? Be specific.

What action steps can you take to find a grief support group?

Have you decided to give it a try? _____

If so, when will you take those action steps? _____

If you decide to try a support group, write about your experience below after you have tried the group (or groups) for a month or more.

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Building a Support System

Objective

To identify people who can support you in various areas of your life following the death of a loved one.

What to Know

If you have experienced a loss or death of a loved one, you might find yourself isolating from others. You might find it easier to be alone rather than talk about what you are going through.

However, avoiding people can keep you from getting support, which can help you through this difficult time. We all need other people in our lives. Even if the people you know cannot help you, just being around others can contribute immeasurably to your happiness.

This worksheet can help you think about people who can support you in various areas of your life. Often, you will find you can get the support you need just by asking for it.

What to Do

Write down at least one person you know who fits into each category.

Someone I can discuss a personal problem with: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Someone who enjoys similar activities: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Someone who can help me with a task: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Someone who can cheer me up when I am down: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Someone who builds my self-confidence: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Someone who can give me helpful feedback: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Someone who is a good listener and who is understanding: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Someone who can be honest with me if I make a mistake: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Someone who can hold me accountable: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Someone who can help me conquer bad habits: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Someone who can help me solve serious problems: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Someone I can count on to make me laugh: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Someone who can comfort me: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Someone who can care for me when I am ill _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Someone who will be proud of my achievements and let me know it: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Someone else who can give me support: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Someone else who can give me support: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Someone else who can give me support: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Someone else who can give me support: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Local organizations and resources:

Online resources:

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Section 3. Family Relationships

How Did Your Family Deal with Loss?

Objective

To explore what you learned about grieving and loss from your family and increase your choices on how you grieve now.

What to Know

What you learn in your family of origin clearly impacts how you react to the current challenges in your life—and how you deal with grief and loss is definitely one of them. In this worksheet, you will think about what your family of origin taught you about how to grieve a loss—what was helpful and what was not—and consider how you want to approach grief as an adult.

What to Do

Remember your earliest losses due to death. Was it a pet? A grandparent? Write down when it happened, how old you were, where you were living, etc. to take you back to that time.

How did your parents or caregivers behave? What did you see them doing or feeling? Did they cry in front of you? Did they ignore or minimize the loss? How did they help their children with it?

How did other family members or friends react to the loss?

How did you feel? What did you want or need? What were your questions?

What did your parents or caregivers tell you? (*This may or may not be consistent with what you saw or felt.*) Did they try to protect you by sweeping it under the rug? Did they encourage you to express your sadness? Did they comfort you? Did they make time to spend with you?

Were there any events around the death? For instance, did you have a ceremony and burial for your pet, or did you attend the funeral of a grandparent? If so, what were those events like for you? If not, how did the absence of communal acknowledgement of the death affect you?

Now think of a loss due to death you have experienced as an adult. Are there any parallels between how you behaved as an adult and how your parents handled grief when you were a child? Be as specific as possible.

What do you think now about what your parents taught you about grief? Did they meet your needs back then? Is there anything you wish had happened differently that would have helped you?

How will you go about changing how you grieve? What actions can you take to support yourself?

Is there someone who can help you with this? Write down two or three names.

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Talking to Your Child About Death

Objective

To discuss death with your child in an age-appropriate manner.

What to Know

When a family loses a loved, children look to their parents or caretakers for information on what has happened and how the family will move forward. But having conversations about death with your child might feel awkward, overwhelming, or scary. Family members might even disagree on what and how to tell children. You can set the expectations for how the family will stabilize, connect, and communicate. Trust, honesty, and love are the core values that can help your family heal following a death.

How you communicate with your child depends on their age, psychological and emotional development, and maturity. Consider how children view and react to death at different stages. If your family includes siblings of different ages, the conversation should be suitable for the youngest child, so older children may need alone time with you to have their specific needs addressed. Here are some developmental issues to keep in mind:

Toddler (ages 2-4). Toddlers believe the world revolves around them and they think death is reversible. Offer reassurance to toddlers that they are safe, provide clarity about what death means, and comfort them with physical touch.

Young child (ages 5-7). Young children may still not understand that death is permanent. Explain what death means and discuss family beliefs about the afterlife. They are practicing independence and may need to balance that with receiving comfort.

Pre-teen (ages 8-11). Children understand that death is permanent and will have more questions about what happened. Offer honest, simple explanations, and reinforce that the death was not the child's fault.

Teen (ages 12-18). Teens are developing abstract, logical thinking and are more capable of talking about death. Encourage communication and expression of feelings.

Discuss the following points with all children in a manner that is age appropriate:

- death is part of life, and all living things die – including flowers, animals, trees, and people
- death is caused by physical reasons and is not a punishment
- the body does not work anymore because death ends all functions required for living
- death is permanent because body functions cannot be restored

Here are some additional guidelines. Be sure to consider your child's developmental stage.

- Prepare yourself and be thoughtful and intentional with your words.
- Use truthful, simple, clear, and direct words.

- Listen and comfort in a calm and caring way.
- Have conversations in a quiet, private place.
- Ask them what they already know about death.
- Allow them to talk about their story of what happened and be curious and affirming about their point of view.
- Be sensitive to their signals in case they need more information or reassurance.
- Ask open-ended questions instead of yes/no questions.
- Be prepared to discuss and answer repetitive questions.
- Be patient and sensitive to how they process information.
- Ask how they feel and if they understand what is being discussed.
- Judge how much to say and how to say it based on their reactions.
- Address specific issues they ask about, using very straightforward explanations.
- Avoid giving them more details than they are ready to process.
- Reinforce that they are not at fault.
- Share your own grief and how you are coping.
- If they ask about details surrounding the death, share basic information, but avoid graphic details.
- If the death was a suicide, reinforce the importance of talking about mental health. Talk openly about mental health concerns, especially suicidal thoughts, plans, and behaviors.
- Reassure them that they can ask questions any time and that you will do your best to answer them.
- Let your child know it takes time to feel better after a loss.

What to Do

Taking the above suggestions into account, use this worksheet to discuss death with your child.

Write down your child's age(s). _____

Do you have any concerns about developmental stage or maturity? Explain.

Label your feelings and put them into words, and then ask your child to describe what they are thinking and feeling. You might say, "I know you're feeling very sad. I'm sad, too. We both loved Grandpa, and he loved us too." Write down your feelings and things you might say to your child.

Feelings: _____

What you will say to your child: _____

Tell your child what to expect to prepare them for changes in their life or routine. Explain what will happen.

Explain the events that will happen and allow them to participate in rituals like viewings, wakes, funerals, or memorial services. Tell them ahead of time what will happen. What will you say?

You might need to explain burial or cremation. You might say, "After the funeral, there is a burial at the cemetery. _____'s body is in a casket (or coffin) that gets buried in the ground with a special ceremony. This can feel like a sad goodbye, and people might cry." Write down what will happen in a way that your child will understand.

What will you tell your child about what will happen after the service?

Having a small, active role can help your child feel part of things and help them cope. Your child could read a poem, pick a song to be played, gather some photos to display, or make something. Let your child decide if they want to take part, and how. Write down some ideas.

In the days and weeks ahead, encourage your child to draw pictures or write stories about their loved one. What are some other ways you can share happy memories?

Support groups and counseling can help your family if you require more support. Check community resources, or visit these online resources: <https://www.dougy.org>, <https://good-grief.org>, <https://www.griefcounselor.org/resources/helpful-websites>

Whom can you ask for help? What resources might support your family?

You might spend a lot of time talking and listening. Occasionally switch to an activity or topic that helps your child feel a little better. Play a game, do crafts together, bake cookies, or spend time at the park. What can you do?

Healing and moving forward includes remembering the deceased person with love. What are some ways you can help your child preserve their memories?

Note: If a loved one's death was sudden, deeply stressful, or violent, your child may need individual counseling. If your child's distress lasts for more than a few weeks, or if you think your family requires more help, reach out to your child's doctor or your family's therapist.

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Helping Children Cope with Loss

Objective

To use the CHILD technique to discuss death with your child to increase the likelihood of healthy coping following a loss.

What to Know

Avoiding the subject of death does not help children appropriately deal with loss. When discussing death with your child, make the explanation as simple, honest, and direct as possible. Questions should be addressed directly, and children need to be reassured that they are safe because they might worry they will also die.

Although it is a difficult conversation to have with children, any discussion about death must include appropriate words (e.g., cancer, died, death). Euphemisms (e.g., passed away, he is sleeping, we lost her) should never be used because these phrases can confuse children, leading to misinterpretations.

Following a death, children can and should be included in the planning of and participation in mourning rituals to memorialize their loved one. Although children should never be forced to attend, their participation should be encouraged, and they can participate in whatever parts of the funeral or memorial service they feel comfortable with. You can prepare them by offering a full explanation of what to expect. For example, you might describe the layout of the room, who will be present (e.g., friends and family members), what the child will see (e.g., the casket, lots of flowers, people crying), and what might happen.

This worksheet will help you discuss death and loss with the children in your life through use of the CHILD technique.

C = Consider:

- the unique situation of the child
- developmental capacity to understand death, grief, and loss
- concerns, thoughts, feelings, and relationship to the deceased

H = Honesty:

- use the “d” words: death, die, dying
- be OK with not having all the answers
- avoid euphemisms
- avoid phrases like “gone away” or “went on a trip”
- do not say that the deceased is sleeping

I = Involve:

- let the child know what is happening
- offer the child factual knowledge about the cause of death
- allow the child to say goodbye to the dying and deceased
- allow the child the choice to participate in the funeral

L = Listen:

- concentrate on discussing any issues or concerns that come up
- let the child talk through what is on his/her mind
- let the child know it is OK to not want to talk about the death
- give the child ways to express grief—art, drawing, play, letter writing, poetry, stories
- be aware of thoughts and fantasies children may have about the deceased
- pay attention to any suggestion of suicide or self-harm
- emphasize death is NOT the result of the child's actions or thoughts
- read a book about death and discuss the child's reactions

D = Do it again

- appropriately share your grief
- children need to see an honest expression of emotions from the adults around them
- remember the developmental capacities and age-related concerns and needs

Adapted from: Davies, B., & Orloff, S. (2010). Bereavement issues and staff support. In G. Hanks, N. I. Cherny, N.A. Christakis, M. Fallon, S. Kassa, & R.K. Portenoy (Eds.). Oxford textbook of palliative medicine (4th ed., p. 1370). Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

What to Do

Communication and support from parents and other loved ones are valuable for grieving children. When caregivers can talk about death, express their feelings, and provide support following a loss, children are better able to develop healthy coping strategies. Refer to the CHILD technique and write down how you will address death and loss with your child.

Consider. How old is the child? _____ Relationship to the deceased. _____

Are there unique considerations? If yes, describe.

Honesty. Honestly talk about the loss, as this gives your child permission to talk about it, too. Acknowledge that grief can be difficult, confusing, and involve changing emotions. Write down what you will say.

Remember to ask open-ended questions to better understand your child's understanding of death and physical or emotional reactions. Open-ended questions encourage children to share their own perspectives—giving you some insight into what might be helpful as your child grieves. Write down some open-ended questions you can use during your conversation.

Involve. What are some ways you can involve your child in mourning rituals? Do you have concerns? If so, write them down.

Consider accommodations that might be required as your child adjusts to the loss. For example, modifying expectations for homework that requires sustained attention. Write down some ideas.

Remember, you need to be physically and emotionally healthy as you grieve. Prolonged, intense grieving or unhealthy grief reactions, such as substance abuse, will prevent you from providing support to your grieving child. Mindfulness-based stress reduction is an evidence-based strategy that is effective for both grieving adults and children. For example, you might practice deep breathing exercises, meditate, or exercise. You can even teach mindfulness practices to your child. What are some ways you can take care of yourself?

Mourning takes time, and bereavement is a process that occurs over months and years. Be aware that normal grief reactions may last longer than 6 months. Take advantage of community resources such as grief counseling or bereavement support groups. Community hospice organizations have lists of professionals who provide support for children and families. Where can you get help?

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Helping Your Child Cope with Grief

Objective

To help your child cope with the death of a loved one.

What to Know

After a loss, children need support, stability, and honesty. They may also need reassurance that they will be cared for and kept safe. You can support your child by demonstrating it is okay to express a range of emotions

While you cannot take away feelings of loss, you can help your child build healthy coping skills and process their grief. It is important to use a variety of helpful coping methods. Here are a few ideas:

Honestly answer questions. Children sometimes misunderstand death, so it is important to be literal without sharing information in a blunt or inconsiderate way. Use simple, developmentally appropriate, honest, and concrete terms when explaining death.

Encourage questions. Frequently check in with your child and encourage them to ask questions as they arise.

Encourage and validate the expression of feelings. Criticism can make your child feel like they are experiencing their grief in a wrong or inappropriate manner. If your child expresses anger or frustration, support and acknowledge their feelings. Tell them their feelings are completely okay and valid. Create an atmosphere where all feelings are normal.

Emphasize stability. Offer structure, security, a sense of stability, and safety. Try to maintain routines, limits, and expectations. Let your child know you are going to care for them.

Encourage normal activities. Children may take a break from grief to spend time playing. Suggest drawing, reading, listening to music, dancing, and playing.

Prepare your child if you are away from home. If you must leave, let them know when you will return. Tell them how you can be reached (e.g., phone, text, video chat, etc.). Identify another adult who will be in contact with you if needed.

Offer choices. This increases your child's sense of control.

Clearly communicate. Open communication allows your child to express distressing feelings. Discuss changes in the family and work together to problem-solve. Meet regularly as a family to find out how everyone is coping.

Be patient and understanding. If your child acts out, avoid being judgmental or punishing. Try to understand what is causing the behavior and communicate with the other adults in your child's life.

Pay attention to play. Your child’s reactions might be recreated while playing, doing arts and crafts, storytelling, and so on. Even if it is troubling, support your child in expressing their grief. Show interest in the content. Contact a counselor or other mental health professional if you are concerned.

Lead by example. Be expressive and grieve alongside your child. You can show your child healthy ways of coping with grief.

Involve your child in bereavement activities. What works for one child might not work for another. Offer unique options, depending on age and developmental phase. Some ideas:

- allow your child to attend family and religious rituals or services if they want to
- if your child is frightened about attending services or rituals, plan to honor or remember the deceased person in some way, such as lighting a candle, making a scrapbook, reviewing photographs, or telling a story
- discuss your spiritual values about life and death
- pray together
- use pictures, clothing, and mementos to remember and talk about the deceased
- find ways to include the memory and presence of the deceased in milestone rituals (weddings, graduations, and so on)
- create new memories while honoring old ones

Use the following tips with your child’s school and other social groups.

- Your child may not know how to talk about what happened, so help them come up with phrases they are comfortable with. Give permission for them to say, “I don’t want to talk about it right now.” Rehearse what they will say.
- Meet with school staff to plan how to best support your child.
- Ask school staff to notify you if any issues arise.

There are some things you might want to avoid, including:

- forcing your child to publicly mourn if they are uncomfortable doing so.
- giving false or confusing messages.
- using euphemisms that downplay or distort the concept of death.
- telling your child to stop crying because others might get upset.
- trying to shield your child from the loss.
- acting tough and avoiding your pain, because this can make your child believe they need to do the same.
- turning your child into your personal confidante. Instead, seek support from another adult, a grief counselor, or a support group.

For additional information about how to help your child cope, explore The Dougy Center for Grieving Children & Families: <https://www.dougy.org/>

What to Do

Do this activity as a family. Make a copy of the next page for each family member to fill out. For each part of the house, fill in your answers. Color or decorate the page in any way you wish.

1. **Sun** – write the name of your deceased loved one in the center of the sun.
2. **Banner** – write down ways you can celebrate the life of your loved one.
2. **Cloud #1** – write down how you're feeling right now.
3. **Cloud #2** – write down what you want to remember about your deceased loved one.
4. **Tree** – things you can do to stay healthy while you grieve.
5. **Chimney Smoke** – next to and inside the smoke, write down the names of people or things you've lost.
6. **Inside the House** – write down ways you can stay connected to your family and friends.

When each family member is finished filling in the worksheet, share the completed worksheets with each other.

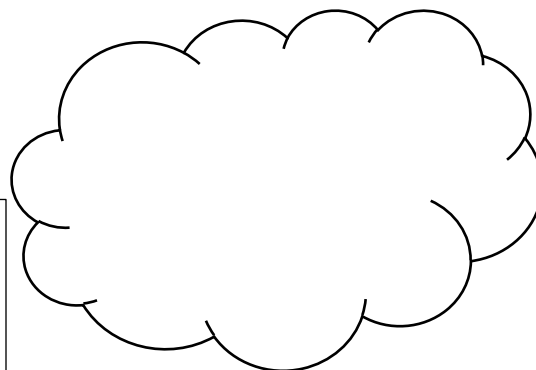
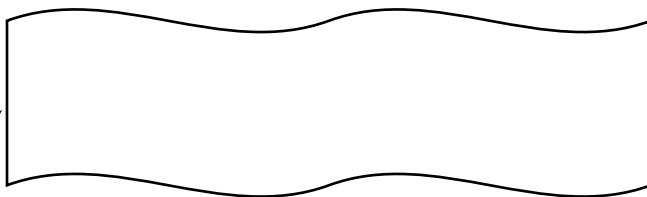
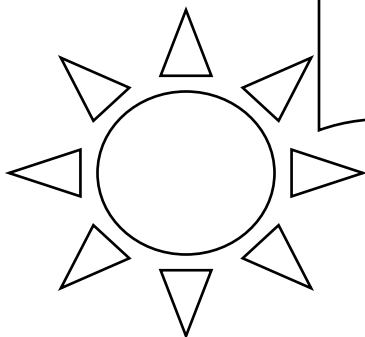
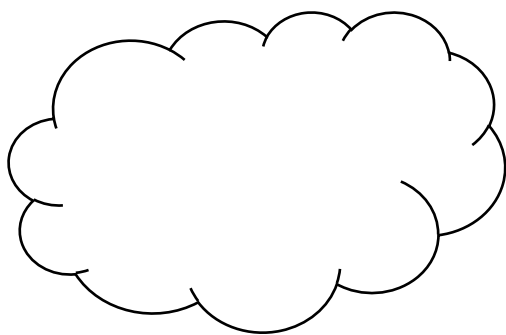
Reflections on This Exercise

Did this activity help your child cope with the death of their loved one?

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

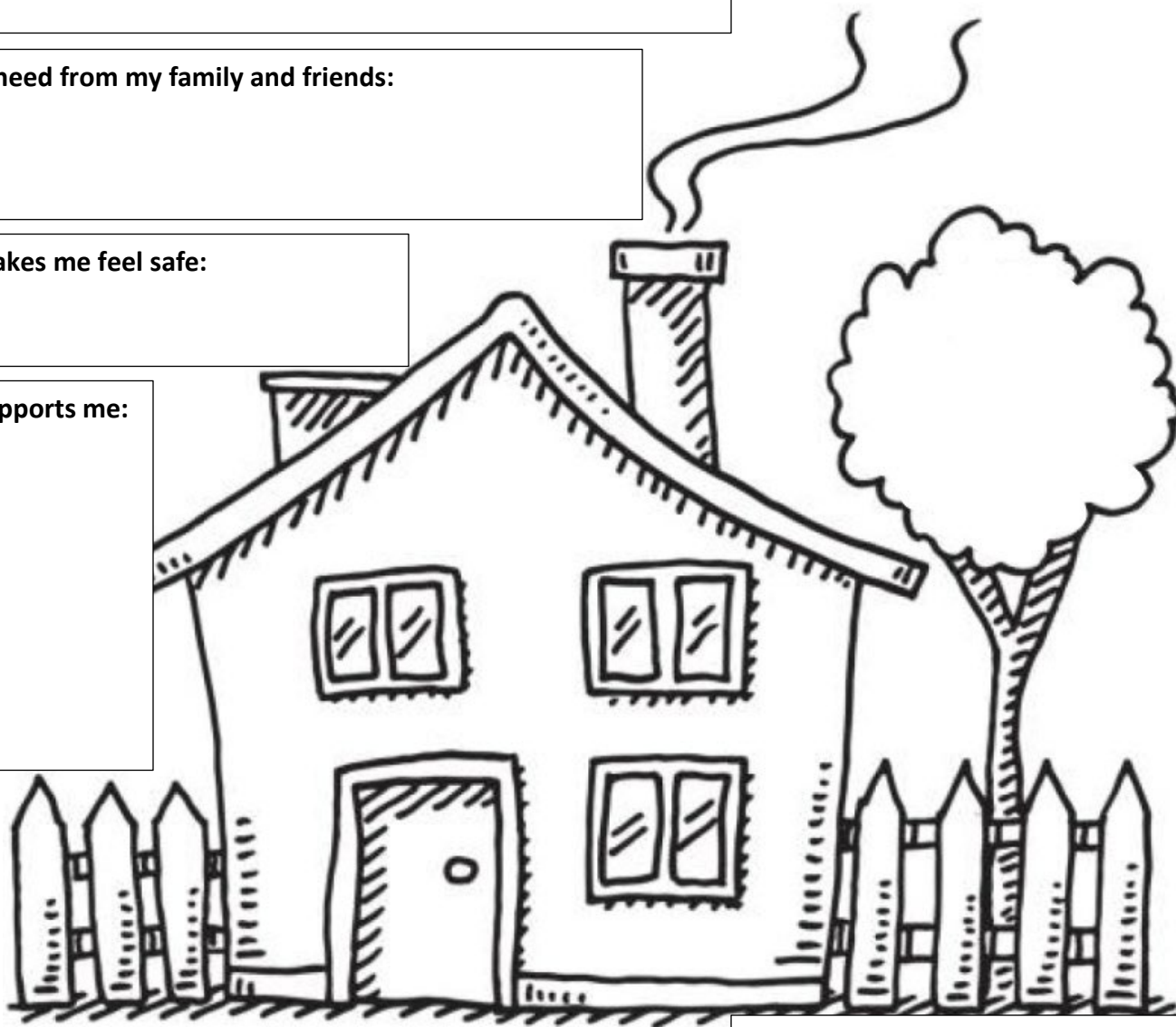


Healthy ways I can express my grief and work through my thoughts and feelings:

Things I need from my family and friends:

What makes me feel safe:

What supports me:



Things I'm scared to talk about or keep hidden from others:

My grief is unique because:

Remembering Your Loved One

Objective

To identify ways to honor the memory of your deceased loved one during your grieving process.

You Should Know

Losing a loved one is a devastating human experience, and the grief process is different for everyone. There is no timeline or predictable course. At first, thoughts, feelings, and memories of your loved one will likely be the focus of your attention. Over time, the memories can dissipate, but that does not mean that your loss is any less powerful or that your sadness is gone. Finding a balance in your life—grieving *and* going on with your life—is a process that can be challenging for most people. But, as they say, “the only way out is through.”

Keeping the memory of your lost loved one alive is an act of love that continues in the present and bonds you together despite their absence. It can also aid in your grief process. Depending on your spiritual beliefs and experiences, you might sense their presence every day, which can be very comforting. But you might want to do something tangible or public to keep them “alive.” In this worksheet, you will choose several ways to honor the memory of your lost loved one.

What to Do

Here are some things that people do to remember their lost loved ones, including simple activities and ones that are more complex. Most do not cost anything, but some might involve spending some money.

Note: If these activities do not apply to your situation, for instance, if you experienced a miscarriage or stillbirth, lost a newborn or a young child, you may wish to create different, meaningful ways to remember them. Activities are also helpful in expressing your hopes, wishes, regrets, and your experience of love.

- Cook their favorite meal and invite friends or family over to share food and memories.
- Write them a letter.
- Keep a journal recording your memories.
- Make a video for them, saying what you would like to say to them (you can share this with others or not).
- Create a photo album featuring them.
- Plant a garden with them in mind.
- Plant a tree in their name.
- Have a “conversation” with them, as if they were right there with you.

- Carry their picture with you, or make it your “home screen” on your phone.
- Celebrate their birthday, anniversary, or other milestones in their honor.
- Create a ritual or ceremony that you do once or regularly.
- Light a candle.
- Say a prayer.
- Create something from an item of theirs—a collage, a piece of jewelry, or a work of art.
- Take a trip someplace they always wanted to go—tell them all about it while it happens.
- Watch videos or look at photos of them.
- Visit places where you spent time together.
- Engrave a bracelet with their name.
- Spread their ashes somewhere meaningful (if relevant).
- Visit and tend to their gravesite (if relevant).
- Sponsor a fundraiser or create a scholarship in their name.
- Collect donations for their favorite charity.
- Donate a memorial bench in a park or public place.
- Create a postage stamp with their image on it: <http://photo.stamps.com>.
- Other: _____

Which of the above activities appeals to you? Write down three.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Make a plan to do those activities. Share your planning with someone you are close to and get their help if you wish. Do more activities as they feel important and meaningful for you.

| Activity/Item | Planned Date | Thoughts and Feelings After the Activity |
|---------------|--------------|--|
| 1. | | |
| 2. | | |
| 3. | | |

Reflections on This Exercise

Why did you choose the activities you did?

What other ways would you like to remember your lost loved one?

Are there others with whom you can share these experiences? Who are they?

When will you contact them? _____

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Remembering a Loved One on the Anniversary of Their Death

Objective

To plan an activity to remember a loved one on the anniversary of their death.

What to Know

Remembering a loved one on the anniversary of their death is an important way for you to continue processing your grief. Even though remembering your loss can be painful, it allows you to recognize the loss, remember your loved one, and process your emotions. You can give voice to your grief and sense of loss while integrating your loved one's absence into your day-to-day life.

There is no one right way to remember a loved one's death. It can be as simple as sharing a special photo on social media or as elaborate as having a memorial service with friends and family. Different religions have rituals to remember a loss; however, even if there are rituals in your religion, you may want to find a personal way to continue with your healing.

Here are some ideas that you might find helpful.

Visit the grave. You might bring some type of decoration, like flowers, a statue, or a wreath.

Sing or listen to a song. You can sing or play songs that help you remember your loved one. You could even make a playlist and share it with friends and family.

Read a children's book on grief. Books like *The Invisible String* and *Tear Soup* help children process grief through stories. Simple stories can be comforting for adults, too.

Share memories. Sharing stories with friends and families about the deceased.

Make your loved one's favorite meal. Invite family and friends to contribute food or help you prepare the meal.

Create a special place to commemorate your loved one. You could include a memory candle, photos, flowers, and favorite objects.

Create a family memory scrapbook. Collect favorite photos, write letters or poems, and include other memorabilia. Review the scrapbook each year.

Make a memory bracelet or paint a memory stone. Children as well as adults can make creative items that can help you think about and honor the deceased. The process of making the items can be very healing, particularly if you are in the company of others dealing with the loss.

Donate money or items to your loved one's favorite charity. You could donate to local organization important to you loved one or find a charity online. CharityNavigator.org rates charities on the efficiency, transparency, and accountability.

Write other ideas below:

What to Do

Use your creativity to adapt this exercise into an activity that is relevant and personal to you and your family.

Describe an activity you would you like to do.

Describe how you feel about doing this activity.

Share your ideas with family members or friends who will be involved in this activity. Write down who you will share this with, when you will do it, and where you will do it.

Plan the remembrance. Write down the details of what you will do. Include the date, time, who will be involved, and the steps necessary to complete the activity.

Once you complete the activity, you might want to do something to nurture and care for yourself. Describe what you could do.

Reflections on This Exercise

After completing the activity think about how it helped in your healing process. Did you find it helpful? Is this something you might repeat each year on the anniversary of your loved one's death? Why or why not?

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

What Would You Tell the Person You Lost?

Objective

To increase your ability to cope with grief by expressing unresolved issues and things left unsaid.

What to Know

If you have lost a loved one, you might regret not clearing things up, asking certain questions, or sharing your feelings. Your longing for resolution or connection can be sharp, painful, and demanding.

You might not be able to sit with that person and talk, but there are many ways to explore and communicate unsaid thoughts and feelings. Here is what you can do:

Step 1. Identify what you want to say. This might be the hardest part because you are overwhelmed with and exhausted by your feelings. It can be scary to sit down, identify your feelings, and reflect on them deeply enough to be clear about what you need to express or do. You might find writing helpful because it slows your thoughts and helps you organize them. Talking to a counselor or a trusted friend can also help you sort out what needs to be said.

Step 2. Express it in whatever way is right for you. As you do, your message may become clearer and stronger.

- Just talk to the person. Use your imagination to invite him/her to meet you in a safe place and have that conversation. If you have a question, ask it and trust what comes.
- Write a letter, poem, or song.
- Use art to convey what you wish you had said, from painting to dancing.
- Write and/or record a tribute with all the things you did not/could not say at the memorial and wish you had.
- Plant a tree with a note under the roots.
- Make a memory box with photos or objects that relate to what you want to tell them.
- Write your message on ribbons and hang them from a tree in your yard.

Step 3. Repeat until you feel those feelings soften. New messages may come up. Keep going until these issues do not feel so urgent and painful.

What to Do

Write down what you need. For example, you might need more time, a supportive person, or simply deciding to do it.

How and when will you get what you need? Also schedule this on your calendar or planner.

Start here and now. List some of the things you wish you could have expressed.

List a few ways you will consider expressing yourself, and when you might do that.

Summarize your plan:

I will tell _____ what I _____ about _____.

I will use _____ to express how I feel, and I will do that on or by _____.

I will check in with how I feel after that to see if I need to do more.

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Why I Miss You

Objective

To express your thoughts, feelings, and emotions about the loss of a loved one.

What to Know

It might be helpful for you to write as an outlet to process your grief and heal. Writing can provide focus and act as an outlet for difficult thoughts and emotions.

Some people believe that writing through their grief was the only way they coped. You do not have to be a great writer, and no one needs to ever read what you write. When you use writing to process grief, it can be for your eyes only.

While it is true you may feel pain or sadness while writing, there are long-term mental and physical health benefits. Studies have shown that after only 15 minutes of daily journal writing for four days in a row, the immune system is enhanced. Writing can take many forms:

- a handwritten letter
- journaling
- story writing
- poetry

This worksheet gives you prompts to write about your lost loved one and why you miss them.

What to Do

Take your time and write down the answer to the following statements. You can also use a notebook or journal if you need more space.

When I think about you, I remember...

A secret memory I have with you that no one else knows about...

Whenever I am around _____, I think of you.

I remember you by...

I will continue to honor your memory by...

If you were sitting across from me right now, you'd say...

If you were sitting across from me right now, I'd say...

The most difficult part of grieving is...

I'm afraid of...

I'm proud of myself for...

As I grieve for you, I feel...

When you died, I had to...

When you were alive...

I want you to know...

You were...

My happiest memories of you are...

Funny moments I remember...

How you changed my life...

Things I wish I'd said or did...

Something I feel guilty about...

Things that have happened since you died...

What you meant to me...

Things I'll never forget...

Why I miss you...

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Creating a Personal Grieving Ritual

Objective

To identify personal rituals that can help you through your grieving process.

What to Know

They say that “time heals all wounds,” and for most people, even the terrible sadness of losing a loved one dissipates over time. George Bonanno, a clinical psychologist at Columbia University and author of *The Other Side of Sadness*, found in his research that 50-60% of mourners show no symptoms of grief after one month following the loss. This does not mean that a loved one is forgotten, but instead, even after a significant loss, people settle into their old routines or develop new ones, and their lives recover a sense of order. Although they may continue to be sad, their emotions are no longer dominating their-day to-day decisions.

For others, the loss of a loved one continues to disrupt their lives for months or even years, and they say they cannot regain a sense of “normalcy.” They report a sense of meaninglessness, hopelessness, and uncontrollable despair. Prolonged Grief Disorder, sometimes called complicated grief, has symptoms that last more than a year after losing a loved one. The following is a list of symptoms that define Prolonged Grief Disorder. Put a checkmark by any symptoms that describe your grief. You:

- feel intense sorrow and pain over the loss of your loved one
- find it difficult to focus on anything but your loved one’s death
- focus excessively on reminders of your loved one *or* go to great lengths to avoid reminders
- have intense and persistent longing or pining for the deceased
- really can’t accept the death
- feel numb or detached
- are bitter about the loss
- feel that life holds no meaning or purpose
- have a hard time trusting others
- are unable to enjoy activities, even ones you used to love
- have trouble carrying out normal routines
- isolate yourself from others and withdraw from social activities
- experience depression, deep sadness, guilt, or self-blame
- believe you did something wrong or could have prevented the death

_____ feel life isn't worth living without your loved one

_____ wish you had died along with your loved one

Research suggests that personal rituals can be a great aid in the healing process. Public rituals like wearing black clothing or “sitting shiva” in Judaism (seven days when guests visit the bereaved) can help, but personal and private rituals seem to be even more important.

Researchers Michael I. Norton and Francesca Gino studied how people cope with extreme loss. A study published in the *Journal of Experimental Psychology* reported that personal rituals could play an essential role in helping people cope with their grief. However, the rituals people found most helpful were usually not done in a social setting or religious observance. Instead, they were private and personal.

This worksheet is designed to help you think about personal rituals which can help you through your grieving process. For example, you might choose to do a ritual every day, or you might only perform rituals on the anniversary of your loss.

What to Do

Check off the rituals that sound like they might be helpful. Then add your rituals to this list.

___ play music that reminds you of your loved one

___ watch a movie that reminds you of your loved one

___ write a letter to your loved one

___ take flowers and throw the petals into a body of water, and with each petal say something to your loved one

___ light a candle at special times of the day or week to remind you of your loved one

___ create a memory scrapbook, filling it with photographs, letters, postcards, notes, or other significant memorabilia from your life together

___ spend time listening to your loved one’s favorite music or creating a special mix of music that reminds you of them

___ plant a tree or flowers in your loved one’s memory

___ Donate to a charity that your loved one supported or volunteer for that organization

___ visit your loved one’s burial site

___ carry something special that reminds you of your loved one

___ create a work of art in your loved one’s memory

___ prepare and eat a special meal in honor of your loved one

___ create a memorial to your loved one with pictures and objects that were important to them

___ light a special candle used only for your ritual purposes

___ read or say aloud an inspirational verse, poem, or prayer

___ sing a song to a photo of your loved one

___ chant or pray

___ ring a chime or bell

___ other ritual _____

___ other ritual _____

Now, use the chart below to record how the rituals you tried affected you. In the last column, rate each ritual on how successful it was in helping you feel more resilient, hopeful, and in control of your feelings, with 1 = not helpful, to 10 = very helpful. Use this chart for as long as you like. Filling it in may even become part of your ritual.

| Date | Ritual | Immediate Emotional Reaction | Longer-Term Emotional Reaction | Rating |
|------|--------|------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------|
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |

Write down dates and times when you think a personal ritual might be most helpful.

Write down people you know who you might want to talk to about your ritual and your reaction.

Write down specific ways you will know that a personal mourning ritual has helped you.

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Creating a Forgiveness Ritual

Objective

To conduct a forgiveness ritual following the loss of a loved one.

What to Know

Forgiveness is a conscious decision to let go of anger or resentment you feel toward a person who has hurt you. Forgiveness does not mean you have forgotten, minimized, or excused an offense. Instead, it means recognizing it and making a conscious decision to let go of the pain. When forgiving someone, it is not necessary to reconcile with the person. You might believe reconciliation occurs along with forgiveness, but this is not always the case. For example, you may be able to forgive a family member who said hurtful things to you, but it might be harmful, both mentally and physically, to maintain a close relationship with that person. Forgiveness might take time, especially if the offense was serious. When someone causes serious harm, either deliberately or accidentally, true forgiveness can be challenging.

Here are some suggestions to forgive someone who has hurt you:

- Understand why the other person hurt you by talking about the issue.
- Empathize with the other person's situation.
- Avoid focusing on the feelings directed toward the person who did wrong.
- Reflect on when you hurt someone else and treat forgiveness of another person as forgiveness of yourself.
- Tell the other person directly they are forgiven.
- Draw from spiritual, cultural, and/or religious teachings.

Forgiveness benefits you as well as the person you choose to forgive. Studies show an inability or unwillingness to forgive can have a negative impact on your mental health and well-being, contributing to depression and anxiety. If you forgive easily, you tend to experience increased happiness, better physical health, and stronger relationships. In general, you are less likely to experience the negative effects of stress. You can resolve conflicts more easily, repair damaged relationships, and experience higher levels of empathy. You are also likely to be more resistant to illness than those who hold grudges, as studies show people who hold grudges are more likely to have compromised immune systems.

According to acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT), like all other thoughts and feelings, the thoughts and feelings that accompany forgiveness exist to be observed and held lightly while focusing on your personal values. Forgiveness is viewed as an action, not a feeling. If you offer forgiveness, you will likely feel a sense of relief, lightness, peace, and ease. However, these feelings will come and go. In the past, you might have forgiven someone and felt good, only to realize later your positive feelings passed and anger replaced them! What can you do?

Feelings and emotions come and go, so that is why it is useful to view forgiveness as an action. You can choose to behave in a forgiving manner as your feelings come and go.

What to Do

One action you can take is creating a forgiveness ritual. You can use your creativity to adapt this exercise into something more relevant and personal to you.

First, think of a time when someone hurt you. Choose a situation that is unresolved, and you have not forgiven the person. Describe.

Step 1. Complete the following statements:

The thoughts, feelings, and memories I have been holding on to:

Holding on to these feelings and thoughts have hurt me in the following ways:

Step 2. In your own words, write a commitment statement that describes how you will let these painful thoughts and feelings come and go, no matter how many times they return— without holding on to them, getting caught up in them, or allowing them to cause additional hurt.

My commitment is to:

Step 3. Now, plan to read your answers from steps 1 and 2 aloud to a trusted family member or friend. Write down who you will read your statements to, when you will do it, and where you will do it.

Step 4. After you read your statements, do something that symbolizes starting over—for example, burn your statements and scatter the ashes. Write down what you will do.

Step 5. After completing the ritual, do something to nurture and care for yourself. Describe what you will do.

Reflections on This Exercise

After completing the forgiveness ritual, reflect on your values. If you could respond mindfully when someone hurts you, acting on your deepest values, what would you say and do? Are you willing to forgive, let go, and move on? Are you willing to release your painful feelings and let go of unhelpful thoughts? Explain your answers.

When someone you care about hurts you, how will you ideally respond?

When you hurt someone, how will you ideally respond?

What will you say or do to make amends?

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Expressing Grief Through Art

Objective

To increase your ability to understand and work with the grieving process using art.

What to Know

Art is a great tool to use throughout your life, as it can bring you joy and pleasure, and it can also help you process feelings. Art and imagery access parts of your brain, heart, and imagination that can support your healing and calm you when you are grieving. The goal of this exercise is not to produce something beautiful or accomplished – it is to gain a new perspective on and expression of your grief. Art is enlivening and energizing, and it can change your mood.

If you are thinking, “But I am not an artist,” that is good. You will be able to create without worrying about using your skills or living up to your own standards. If you dread making something that does not look good, let that go. The result of your effort is unimportant because it is the process of doing art that can help.

1. Choose a medium. You do not need to take a class, read a book, buy expensive materials, or anything else, although you certainly can. What is important is to choose a medium that sounds fun and go for it. Here are just a few ideas:

| | | | | | |
|---------------------|----------------|--------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------|------------------|
| Draw | Make postcards | Sing | Practice photography | Make a video | Finger paint |
| Use a coloring book | Dance | Sculpt clay or playdough | Write a song, poem, or story | Paint | Quilt or knit |
| Build a memory box | Make an altar | Design a gravestone | Carve | Make a grief mask | Design a collage |

2. Create the space.

- Gather any materials you need.
- Go to a private space where you feel safe.
- Protect this time from distractions or other people (turn off your phone).
- Settle down. Do some deep breathing, light a candle, play some music—whatever helps you settle into yourself.
- Allow whatever feelings are there to come. What color are they? What is their shape, temperature, texture? How do they move?

3. Play with art. Allow your feelings to flow into whatever medium you have chosen. Represent your grief with colors, shapes, forms, textures, sound, movement, and so on. If it is hard to get started, do it with your eyes closed or with your non-dominant hand. If you want to do something different, drop what you were doing and go in another direction.

4. Reflect. When you finish, pick up pen and paper and write how it felt to create something with your grief. What was the process like? What feelings does your creation represent? What will you do with this piece of art? If you get stuck, tell the person you lost about your piece.

What to Do

Write down a few mediums or projects that appeal to you.

Schedule some time for yourself. Try to do two art projects a week for three weeks and fill out the tables below to record your progress.

Week 1

| Scheduled for: <i>(day and time)</i> | Medium I tried | How it felt | What I learned |
|--|-----------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|
| | | | |
| | | | |

Week 2

| Scheduled for: <i>(day and time)</i> | Medium I tried | How it felt | What I learned |
|--|-----------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|
| | | | |
| | | | |

Week 3

| Scheduled for: <i>(day and time)</i> | Medium I tried | How it felt | What I learned |
|--|-----------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|
| | | | |
| | | | |

Reflections on This Exercise

What worked best for you?

What was the most challenging part of this activity?

Will you continue to use art as a tool in your grief and your life in general? Why or why not? If so, how, and when?

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Write a Letter to Help with Your Grieving

Objective

To write a letter to your deceased loved one.

What to Know

This is a hard time because you are coping with the death of someone you love. You might feel overwhelmed by waves of sadness, confusion, shock, disbelief, and even anger. Maybe the only thing you can do right now is cry.

You might want to hide your emotions or act “fine” when you’re not OK.

It’s OK to cry, distance yourself, and do what brings you comfort, if you don’t harm yourself.

Here are some ideas that might help you cope.

Participate in rituals. Memorial services, funerals, wakes, and other traditions help people get through the first few days following a death and honor the person who died. Just being in the presence of other people who knew your loved one can be comforting.

Express and release your emotions. Don't worry if doing certain things is painful because it brings back memories of the person you lost. It's OK to cry and it’s natural to feel upset. After a while, it becomes less painful.

Talk about it. You might find it helpful to share stories about the loved one you lost or talk about your feelings. But sometimes you might not feel like talking, and that's OK, too.

If you don't feel like talking, find ways to express your emotions and thoughts. Write in a journal, or write a song, poem, or tribute about your loved one.

Join a support group. You might want to join a grief support group. Ask a parent, school counselor, or religious leader how to find one. Check out www.dougy.org for resources.

Preserve memories. Create a memorial or tribute to the person who died by planting a tree or garden, or honor the person another way, like taking part in a charity walk. You might want to make a memory box or folder. Include mementos, photos, quotes, or anything else.

In this exercise, you will write a letter to the person. You might want to include your feelings, things you want to say, or maybe thank your loved one for being part of your life.

What to Do

It can be helpful to write a letter to say things to the person who has died. It might make you feel better – and feel a little bit more in control of the situation. You can even write the letter with someone else who has experienced the loss.

Who might that be? _____

If you decide to write the letter with someone else, sit down together and share what you would like to say before writing your letter.

What are some things you'd like to include in the letter?

You can write the letter by yourself but writing the letter with someone else will help you both talk about how you're feeling. You can share ideas about how to manage those feelings and talk about special memories.

You might want to include drawings or stickers, use bright colored pens or markers, or put special keepsakes in the envelope.

Once you have written your letter, decide what you want to do with it. For example, you might want to keep it in a special place and re-read it together in the future.

On the next page, write your letter. You can make a copy if you need more space or use additional pieces of paper.

What are you going to do with your letter?

If you decided to write the letter with someone else, was it a positive experience? Why or why not?

What are some other things you can do to honor your loved one?

Reflections on This Exercise

What was the most challenging part of this activity?

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Section 7. Moving Forward

Assessment: Are You Grieving Too Long?

For the Therapist or Counselor

Intense grieving over a long period of time is referred to as Complex Grief Disorder or Persistent Complex Bereavement Disorder. The amount of time may vary with the circumstances. But if you have a client who is having extreme difficulty coping with a loss after six months, then he or she may be suffering from this disorder. The chart below can help you determine if your client meets the criteria for Complex Grief Disorder. The assessment on the next page can be given to the client to help him/her understand and discuss the specific symptoms.

If you are treating a client with Complex Grief Disorder, you should be aware that there is a well-researched protocol that has been developed at Columbia University to treat this disorder. To purchase a handbook or learn about training opportunities, visit the website of the [Center for Complicated Grief](#).

| Symptom domain | Criteria |
|----------------------------|--|
| Separation distress | <p><i>The client has more one or more of the following four symptoms:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Persistent, intense yearning or longing for the deceased 2. Frequent feelings of intense loneliness or emptiness 3. Recurrent negative thoughts about life without the deceased or recurrent urge to join the deceased 4. Preoccupied by thoughts about the deceased that impair daily functioning |
| Thoughts | <p><i>The client has two or more of the following eight symptoms:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Rumination about the circumstances of the death 2. Frequent disbelief or inability to accept the death |
| Feelings | <p><i>The client has two or more of the following eight symptoms:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Persistent feeling of being shocked, stunned, or emotionally numb since the death 2. Recurrent feelings of anger or bitterness regarding the death 3. Difficulty trusting or caring about others since the loss 4. Experiencing pain or other somatic symptoms the deceased person had, hearing the voice of the deceased, or seeing the deceased person 5. Intense emotional reactions to memories of the deceased |
| Behaviors | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Excessive avoidance or excessive preoccupation with places, people, and things related to the deceased |

Losing a loved one is difficult, and the healing process can seem slow and painful. Most people notice that their grief symptoms start to fade after about three months. After six months, although there is continued sadness, life has pretty much returned to normal.

If you continue to have extreme difficulty coping with your day-to-day life after six months, you may want to seek professional help.

If after six months you feel that you are still having extreme difficulties coping with your loss, then you should use this checklist to help identify what is going on. Rate the following statements on the scale, where 1 = strongly disagree, and 10 = strongly agree.

- _____ I have intense sorrow and pain every time I think about my loved one.
- _____ I can focus on little else but my loved one's death.
- _____ I frequently focus on reminders of my loved one.
- _____ I go to great lengths to avoid reminders of my loved one.
- _____ I have intense and persistent longing for my loved one.
- _____ I have a real problem accepting the death of my loved one.
- _____ I frequently feel numb and/or detached.
- _____ I am very bitter about my loss.
- _____ I feel that life holds no meaning or purpose.
- _____ I am often irritable and agitated.
- _____ I have difficulty trusting others.
- _____ I find it very difficult to enjoy life without my loved one.
- _____ I have trouble carrying out normal routines.
- _____ I often withdraw from social activities I once enjoyed.
- _____ I frequently experience depression or deep sadness.
- _____ I frequently have thoughts of guilt or self-blame.
- _____ I believe that I did something wrong or could have prevented the death of my loved one.
- _____ I have lost my sense of purpose in life.
- _____ I often feel that life isn't worth living without my loved one.
- _____ I sometimes wish I had died along with my loved one.

Has Your Grief Turned into a Problem?

Objective

To identify signs that indicate your grief has turned into a psychological problem that needs to be addressed.

What to Know

Healing from a loss is difficult and is almost always accompanied by feelings of sadness, anger, guilt, fear, and other emotions. Grief is a normal human emotion. It can be painful and intense in the immediate period following the loss, and then it often dissipates over time, though it may never disappear completely.

Sometimes, however, the intensity of grief does not dissipate and can develop into a serious psychological problem that can keep you from going about your daily activities or functioning adequately in your family or work life. You might be experiencing depression, anxiety, substance abuse, angry outbursts, eating disorders, or other coping strategies. Or, for many, some or all those symptoms might have been present before the loss, but now they are getting worse, and the ability to cope is becoming more and more challenging. This is called “complicated grief disorder.”

Researchers estimate that between 10 and 20 percent of people who lose a loved one develop complicated grief. Some risk factors for developing the disorder include:

- Experiencing more than one death within a short period of time.
- Being very dependent on the individual who passed away.
- Deaths that are shocking, premature, and unexpected.
- Witnessing the death or suffering during the period when the deceased person had an extended illness.
- History of depression, PTSD, or substance abuse.

This worksheet is designed to help you understand the difference between the “normal” emotions that accompany grief and those that fall under the category of “complicated grief,” and learn strategies for healing.

What to Do

Write down the name of the person(s) you lost and the date of the loss (or approximate date if you cannot recall). Note: Your loss might not be of a person—it might be a pregnancy, a beloved job, a love relationship, a pet, or something else.

Remember, there is no universal timeline for grief. Here are some typical signs and symptoms of what can be considered “normal grief,” which may last days, weeks, or several months. Place a checkmark next to the symptoms that apply to you.

- Crying or sobbing.
- Sleep disturbance—too much or too little, or trouble falling asleep.
- Lack of energy.
- Feeling apathetic or lethargic about getting through the day.
- Appetite changes—under- or overeating.
- Social withdrawal, including avoiding people or social events.
- Trouble concentrating or focusing on tasks at work, home, school, or elsewhere.
- Confusion or questioning your spiritual or religious beliefs, general life goals, and choices.
- Feeling angry, guilty, lonely, depressed, empty, sad, etc., but still capable of feeling happy or content.

If you checked many or all of these, you are experiencing normal grief after a loss. Experts agree that intense feelings of grief tend to diminish after about three months and sometimes up to six months. If your grief is persisting or intensifying beyond six months, then you might be experiencing complicated grief and you might benefit from professional counseling to help you through this difficult time in your life.

Here is a list of symptoms that are associated with **complicated grief**. Place a checkmark next to any items that apply to you.

- Obsessing or ruminating constantly over your loss.
- Feeling a deep, unbearable sadness that does not ease up.
- Expressing a sense of doom, gloom, and despair about your life.
- Being irritable and short-tempered.
- Ongoing sleep problems.
- Poor grooming and personal appearance (not caring about how you look).
- Refusing to or unable to leave your home.
- Feeling angry and bitter toward the world.
- Feeling guilty or self-blaming, thinking perhaps the death was your fault.
- Difficulty trusting others, pushing others away.

- Extended period of withdrawal from social interactions and previous activities.
- Minimizing, denying, or getting defensive when asked about your grief.
- Feeling distracted or disengaged at work, school, or home.
- Numbness or detachment.
- Escalation of preexisting psychological problems (e.g., depression, PTSD, anxiety disorder, substance abuse, etc.).
- Needing to be around mementos and reminders of your lost loved one, or, by contrast, strongly avoiding any reminders.
- Trouble managing daily affairs or completing tasks.
- Being reckless, impulsive, or potentially self-destructive.
- Persistent wish that you had died along with your loved one.
- Talk of suicide, or actual suicide attempts.

Note: If you are thinking about suicide, talk to someone you trust. If you think you may act on suicidal feelings, call 911 or your local emergency number right away. Or call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 800-273-TALK (800-273-8255) to reach a trained counselor.

Now that you have a better sense of “normal” vs. “complicated” grief, here are some tips and strategies for working through this difficult time, especially if you have been suffering for longer than six months:

- Seek the help of a mental health professional, ideally one who specializes in grief, loss, bereavement, and so on.
- Get help identifying what preexisting conditions might be hampering your recovery from your loss, such as depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and so on.
- Ask for help from your counselor or doctor in finding a bereavement support group—breaking through your isolation can be powerfully healing.
- Consider a medication evaluation with a qualified psychiatrist.
- Learn and practice holistic mind-body techniques like yoga, meditation, art therapy, music therapy, acupuncture, Reiki, massage, or narrative writing therapy.
- Set goals to resume some of your previously pleasurable activities. Ask a friend or loved one for help in pushing through any resistance.
- Be kind to yourself as you readjust to your “new normal.”

It is important to know that by working on your healing and resuming pleasurable activities, you are not dishonoring your lost loved one. You are moving on with your life *and* honoring their memory and your loss at the same time.

What other ideas do you have for what might help you in your grieving process?

By what date would you like to reach out for help? Having a goal in mind can help you become active again and feel better more quickly. _____

Reflections on This Exercise

What is the most pressing symptom of grief that you are experiencing right now?

Whom can you talk to in the next few days about your grief?

What might get in the way of your taking action during this difficult time? What can you do to push through those obstacles?

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What could you do differently to make progress in this area?

Moving On After a Loss

Objective

To identify ways to move forward and what “moving on” means to you following the death of a loved one.

What to Know

“Moving on” is a commonly used phrase related to grieving. What does it mean, and is it actually possible to move on? And if it is possible, how do you do it?

Grieving can involve many complicated and painful emotions. The weeks and months following the death might pass in a blur as you adjust to life without your loved one. Healing takes time, and there are no concrete timeframes for grieving because everyone copes with loss differently.

Moving on does not mean ignoring painful emotions. It does mean moving forward with hope for the future. Here are some suggestions to consider as you move forward.

Seek support. You might want to spend time alone as you grieve. Avoid isolating yourself because connections with loved ones can help you heal. Joining a support group or meeting with a counselor or spiritual leader can also help you gain perspective and hope.

Find joy. Consider adopting a pet, traveling, scheduling regular dinners with a friend, or joining a club.

Avoid expectations about timeframes. Grieving is not a time-limited experience, as it can suddenly reappear many years after the loss. You cannot process grief on a schedule.

Take care of yourself. After some time has passed, reestablish healthy habits to get your life back on track.

- Even if you are not hungry, try to eat nutritious meals at regularly scheduled intervals.
- Physical activity can elevate your mood, especially if you exercise outdoors on a sunny day.
- Try to sleep 7-8 hours each night.

Avoid self-medicating with alcohol or drugs. While substances might seem to provide relief, they can make it more difficult to heal. Healthy habits will be more effective in supporting you as you move on.

Establish new patterns, routines, or habits. If your old habits make it difficult to move on, develop some new routines or patterns. Here are some examples.

- If everything in your home reminds you of your loved one, donate items, redecorate, or rearrange the furniture.
- If you always watched certain television programs with your loved one, find a friend to watch them with you.

- If a particular neighborhood or street is a painful reminder, find a different driving or walking route.

Engage in favorite activities. Reintroduce favorite habits and activities into your life. They will distract you and allow you to get used to the “new normal.”

Return to work. Maybe you want to return to work because you love your job, or perhaps you must return for financial reasons. As you transition back to work:

- ask if you can have a lighter schedule at first
- work part-time or have reduced duties
- communicate your needs to your employer and co-workers

Avoid making permanent life-changing decisions. Maybe you want to sell your house or move to a new place. These are not decisions you want to make when you are in emotional pain. Take time to consider the consequences and seek advice if you do not feel you can make sound decisions.

Embrace new experiences. If you have always wanted to travel somewhere, or take up a hobby, now might be a great time to try something new. You might join others who are mourning a loss.

Forgive yourself. You might get distracted, make mistakes at work, or let things around the house slide. This is normal and to be expected. It might take a long time to feel normal after a loss. Forgive yourself and allow yourself time to recover.

Understand grief may not entirely disappear. Even if you believe you have moved on, grief might come back at unexpected times because it is like a wave that subsides and returns.

Imagine a bright future. Your deceased loved one would not want you to get stuck in a cycle of despair. Grieve, move forward, and create a happy future.

Remember these four important points:

1. You are not responsible for how other people feel about your grieving process. Others might expect you to stop:

- hurting
- talking about it
- remembering
- crying
- grieving

They may even encourage you to let go and just accept what happened. Have you considered that you might make them uncomfortable? It is difficult to watch someone they love hurting. But other peoples’ discomfort is their business.

2. Moving on does not mean forgetting. Moving on is learning to live a full and happy life even as you miss your deceased loved one. It is about remembering and honoring them while

embracing the beauty of the life you still get to live. Grief and loss are complex, multifaceted, and multilayered, and they integrate into your life. You can't simply get rid of them.

3. Moving on does not mean the end of grief. Moving on does not mean you are suddenly done grieving and you will never hurt again. Grief changes over time, and you will get stronger as you move forward.

4. You define what "moving on" means to you. You might have heard advice about how you should move on, when you should do it, and what it should look like. No one else can determine that for you because there are no timelines or rules for grieving. You will move through it at your own pace. Only you know when you are ready to move forward. Only you can decide what it means to move on.

This worksheet will help you identify ways to move forward and what "moving on" means to you.

What to Do

First, answer the following questions.

What does "moving on" mean to you?

What, if anything, concerns you about "moving on?"

Do you feel ready to move on? Why or why not?

Have you felt pushed or pressured to move on? Explain.

Using the chart on the next page, write down some activities you are willing to do as you process your grief and move forward. Refer to the list above or come up with some of your own ideas. Write down the date, what you did, with whom, and how you felt after. You can track

your activities for one month (or even longer if you wish). No pressure – if you want to do one activity/week to start, that is okay. If you want to do one self-care activity each day, that is also okay. Do what feels right for you.

| Date | What did you do? | With whom? | How did you feel after? |
|------|------------------|------------|-------------------------|
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Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Learning to Accept Reality

Objective

To identify ways to accept reality to reduce your distress.

What to Know

Sometimes you might have a difficult time accepting reality. Unfortunately, this can lead to a variety of problems.

Maybe you rewrite your past, interpreting events based on what you wished had happened rather than considering them from a realistic point of view. Perhaps you rewrite the present or distort the future. Things that will happen in the future are not reality because they have not happened yet. By predicting your future, you fail to see that your actions and decisions are the most important factors in shaping your future.

This worksheet will help you identify ways to accept your reality in three parts:

- Worksheet #1 will help you accept difficult things from your past.
- Worksheet #2 will help you accept difficult things in the present.
- Worksheet #3 will help you see ways you can act to help determine your future.

What to Do

Fill in the chart below as you think about ways you might have distorted memories of your past. Describe the difficulty, then explain how you might have distorted your thinking about what happened. Then, describe the reality of that situation.

Date: _____

Accepting Difficult Things in Your Past

| Past Difficulties | Distorted Thinking | Reality |
|-------------------|--------------------|---------|
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |

| Past Difficulties | Distorted Thinking | Reality |
|-------------------|--------------------|---------|
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Fill in the chart below as you think about how you are distorting things in the present. Describe difficulties you are having now, and ways you might be distorting each problem or difficulty. Then, try to describe the reality of each situation.

Date: _____

Accepting Difficult Things in The Present

| Current Difficulties | Distorted Thinking | Reality |
|----------------------|--------------------|---------|
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |

| Current Difficulties | Distorted Thinking | Reality |
|----------------------|--------------------|---------|
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Date: _____

Fill in this chart as you think about concerns and worries you have about the future and what actions you can take to create the kind of future you want.

Creating Your Future

| Worries About Your Future | Actions to Have Positive Future |
|---------------------------|---------------------------------|
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |

| Worries About Your Future | Actions to Have Positive Future |
|----------------------------------|--|
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Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What could you do differently to make progress in this area?
