

# GRIEF GUIDE

To help you cope with your loss



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Houston  
Light • Hope • Help







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# Welcome.

*Dear Reader,*

*Before reading this guide, we would like to acknowledge your willingness to learn more about grief as you process your loss or support someone through theirs.*

*Grief is a labyrinth of physical and emotional reminders of loss. Grief is not linear or bound by stages, there are good days and bad days, and everyone's grief is as unique as the person who died.*

*We hope this guide is helpful on your journey.*

*Take what you need and leave the rest behind.*

*With our wishes that this guide will offer you some comfort and strength,*

**The Staff of Behavioral Health  
and Mental Services**

ALEXANDER JEWISH FAMILY SERVICE

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## Some Thoughts About Language Used in this Guide

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In this we will be discussing many different types of grief that we may experience depending on the circumstances of the individual that died and their relationship to us.

One of the types of grief we will address is the grief that is experienced after someone dies by suicide. In this guide we use phrases such as “died by suicide” or “lost their life to suicide” rather than “committed” suicide. The word “commit” is often associated with something that is considered a sin or a crime. Using neutral phrases like “died by suicide helps strip away the shame/blame and stigma.

In this guide we also use “people first” language. We believe that putting the person before the condition shows respect for the individual, reinforcing the fact that their condition does not define them. As a result, we say things like, “s/he is experiencing suicidal thoughts” or “s/he is living with a mental illness” or “s/he struggles with addiction”.

We also don't believe that suicide is a choice. Viewing suicide as a choice can promote the misunderstanding that people who die by suicide are selfish. Individuals who are having suicidal thoughts are experiencing the symptoms of a serious health issue, are suffering deeply, and are not experiencing those thoughts by choice. Suicidal thoughts are symptoms of a very serious mental health crisis that is related to either a mental illness or an overwhelming life situation.

## Who should use this guide?

This guide is a resource for those that have experienced the death of someone in their lives. It is also a helpful resource for supporting family members or friends while grieving.

The information gathered in this guide is a culmination of the experience and recommendations from grief experts in the mental health field and individuals who have experienced loss.

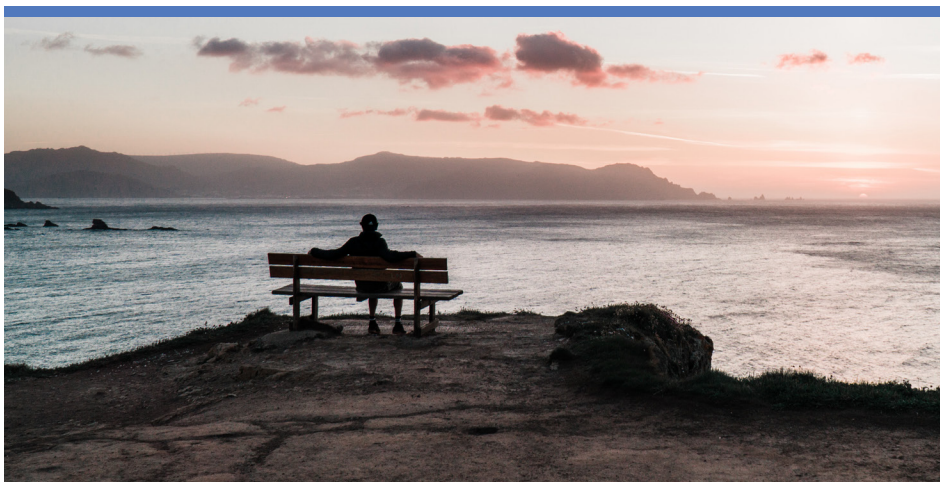
## How should I use this guide?

Please feel free to read the guide in its entirety or skip around to what is important to you. Then, refer to the information when you have a question or give it to a friend as a helpful resource.

Much of this information is brief and specific.

We have also included blank spaces for you to jot down your thoughts, draw pictures, or paste in photos, stickers, or anything important to you. This is a helpful way for you to remember the things that seem most helpful and to jot down questions, thoughts, concepts, or ideas that you want to explore further.

This booklet is for you to use in a way that best suits your needs at the moment, so we encourage you to be creative and experiment with different ways of using and interacting with the guide.







Below is an overview of what you will find in each section of the guide. There is no need to read the guide in any particular order so feel free to explore in whatever order works best for you.

**Part 1 – In the beginning.**

Insight into what to expect when you are grieving, how to ask for help, and ways you can support yourself.

Questions I may want to explore:

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**Part 2 – Traumatic loss.**

Death by suicide, overdose, murder, or an accident can leave the survivor with many unanswered questions. In addition, there are unique and intense feelings of guilt and anger that come with traumatic loss. This section focuses on your experiences and how you can support yourself or your family after a traumatic death.

Questions I may want to explore:

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**Part 3 – Parenting and grief.**

This section focuses on how children experience grief depending on their age and stage of development and what parents can do to support the entire family.

Questions I may want to explore:

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## Part 4 – Supporting someone grieving.

This section covers tips on supporting and acknowledging the uncomfortable feelings that come with bearing witness to grief.

Questions I may want to explore:

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“Grief is not a disorder, a disease or a sign of weakness. It is an emotional, physical and spiritual necessity, the price you pay for love. The only cure for grief is to grieve.”

**Earl Grollman**



# PART 1

## Where to Start

### A guide for the newly grieving person.

Grief has no timeline, and the theories around stages, phases, or processes of grief may not apply to you. This guide will help inform you of what to expect when you are grieving. It is important to note that your grief is unique, and what you experience is also unique to you. The circumstances of the death you have experienced, and your relationship with the person who died, influence how you grieve. Many of the emotions and reactions to grief are natural, and there is hope that you will begin a new way of living with grief.

### The Myth of a Timeline.

Two terms used when we experience the death of someone are grief and mourning.

**Mourning** refers to the rituals and actions we participate in when someone dies. Many scholars refer to mourning as something we pass through, or stages we follow. The rituals around death vary from religion to religion and across cultures. Some examples of mourning rituals include hosting a wake, sitting shivah, holding a vigil, etc.

Throughout this guide, we focus more on grief.

Grief is the response to death, including feelings, behaviors, and reactions to the loss. The difference is that mourning is an action while grief is a reaction.

**Grief** does not follow a timeline and will potentially arise throughout your life. Grief reactions may occur when something we experience triggers a memory – they can occur on holidays, birthdays, or anniversaries, or when you hear a song, smell a familiar smell, or see a photo of the person that has died. The grief reaction's intensity can vary depending on coping strategies, support, and the length of time since the person died. Unfortunately, we never stop grieving, but the intensity of the grief is what changes.



## How you may feel



When someone significant to you dies, the experiences and feelings are unique to you and your relationship with the deceased. Your physical and mental health, support network, and the type of death the person experienced also influence how you will grieve. The following is a list of some common experiences you may have.

<b>Physical Reactions</b>	<b>Emotional and Behavioral Reactions</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Exhaustion / Fatigue</li> <li>Headaches</li> <li>Muscle tension in your body or chest</li> <li>Restlessness</li> <li>Upset stomach /Nausea</li> <li>Gaining or losing weight</li> <li>Increase or decrease in appetite</li> <li>Difficulty sleeping or sleeping too much</li> <li>Crying or sobbing</li> <li>Heaviness in your chest</li> <li>Digestive difficulty</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sadness</li> <li>Anger</li> <li>Guilt</li> <li>Self-blame</li> <li>Numbness</li> <li>Depression</li> <li>Helplessness</li> <li>Aggression</li> <li>Anxious</li> <li>Frustration</li> <li>Irritability</li> <li>Fear</li> <li>Longing for the loved one</li> <li>Distress</li> <li>Hopelessness</li> <li>Shock</li> </ul>
<b>Mental/Cognitive Reactions</b>	<b>Other Reactions</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Confusion</li> <li>Forgetfulness</li> <li>Lack of motivation</li> <li>Distractibility</li> <li>Rumination of the loss</li> <li>Nightmares</li> <li>Suicidal thoughts</li> <li>Intolerance</li> <li>Denial</li> <li>Avoidance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Difficulty with relationships</li> <li>Neglecting hygiene/self-care</li> <li>Difficulty with faith</li> <li>Preoccupied with "why"</li> <li>Loneliness</li> </ul>

(Source – Archer, Wordon, Mughal, 1999, Taylor & Frances/Routledge )

## Things that you can try to help manage grief reactions:

**Rest** - Try to establish a regular time for going to bed and waking up. You may need more rest now than you normally would. Establish a bedroom environment that will help you feel grounded and calm before bed.

**Make lists** - Feeling overwhelmed can make keeping track of dates, appointments, and your to-do list difficult. Try making a daily list and setting reminders to help keep track of what is needed. Also, consider sharing important dates/appointments with a trusted friend and relative who can help with the reminders.

**Exercise** - Try to move your body every day. It does not have to be strenuous; even a short walk can help. Try to set realistic goals and gradually add on as you feel ready. Any amount is totally OK in the beginning.

**Ask for help** - If certain tasks feel too heavy and overwhelming, ask a friend for help. Friends often want to help but feel at a loss for how. Asking for help can provide you and your friend with some relief.

Things I want to Remember:

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If you are ever concerned about what is happening or feel like you are having too intense of a reaction, seeking out a professional such as a social worker or psychologist can help develop coping strategies and provide a safe, nurturing environment in which to grieve.

## You Are Not Alone

Alexander Jewish Family Service is here to help.

To schedule a consultation with out mental health professional, please reach out to us:

CONNECT THROUGH OUR WEBSITE:

<https://www.alexanderjfs.org/services/bmhs/all-counseling#request-service>

EMAIL: [adultcounseling@alexanderjfs.org](mailto:adultcounseling@alexanderjfs.org) CALL: (713) 986-7825

If your physical symptoms give you concern, speak to your physician.

## Managing My Feelings

Grounding exercises are helpful for many situations where you find yourself becoming overwhelmed or distracted by distressing memories, thoughts, or feelings. It can be helpful to become familiar with some of these exercises and practice using them before they are needed so – if the need arises – you feel prepared.

### Let's try this grounding exercise:

What is around you?

You may experience moments where you suddenly feel slammed, overwhelmed, stuck, or heavy. In those moments, it feels like it's difficult to breathe or focus. A technique to try in these moments is to describe everything around you using all five senses.

Name two things you see ...

Name two things you smell...

Name two things you hear...

Name two things you taste...

Name two things your hands touch...

Perhaps you see a yellow chair or smell fresh-cut grass or hear a dog barking or taste the coffee you just had or feel the soft woolen fabric from your shirt. This will bring your focus to the present moment and slowly bring your body out of the negative feelings.



## Coping with Grief

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Below are some coping strategies and recommendations that have been effective in dealing with grief reactions.

### Use your support network

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Identifying those who are supportive is helpful during any period of grieving. During the early stages of grief, relying on others may feel burdensome but provides much-needed space for moving through the process. Close family, friends, and even coworkers are essential to coping with grief and prevent us from becoming isolated, which can exacerbate grief reactions.

When asking for help, try to be clear about your needs and set good boundaries. Consider how you would help someone in your situation and reflect that back to those who are available. Grieving is about relationships, those that want to help do so out of concern and care.

The key to coping is being able to ask for help and accepting it when you are ready. If you have a friend who may benefit from some education on how to support someone who is grieving, you can direct them to Part 4.

### Talk to a Therapist

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You may have noticed that there are a lot of possible grief reactions. It is natural to feel like you may be losing your mind and can't even determine a place to start. A therapist is an ideal resource to provide you with a nurturing, judgment-free environment for you to grieve. They can help you explore your emotions and be a neutral person who can be empathetic.

### Find a Support Group

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During the initial days of mourning, support can be most helpful coming from your closest relationships. Friends, family, coworkers, and congregants can be supportive during much of this time. However, confiding in your support network can sometimes be difficult for any number of reasons. Finding an outside support group provides a space for grieving with others who have experienced similar deaths. Support groups are not the same as a process or therapy group. The intent of a support group is to receive support from others and have an opportunity to provide support. Getting started with a support group is as easy as going online. There are virtual grief support groups, websites, online meetings, and resources available.



**Below is a list of considerations when selecting a support group either online or in person.**

- Groups will be confidential and recognize that everyone grieves differently.
- Groups provide space for everyone involved. Equal time is allowed for those who wish to share.
- Healthy groups will recognize that all feelings and experiences are valuable.
- While it can be tempting at times, advice is rarely given and often discouraged.
- If the group is facilitated by a trained professional or volunteer, they should be able to properly keep the group focused on grief and provide a safe place for all to share.

## Take Care of Yourself

Grief can be raw, painful, and messy. It is important during times of grief to take care of yourself. Self-care is a crucial part of the healing process and can help ease the suffering of the mind, body, and spirit. As every individual's grief is unique, so is their path to healing from a loss. What works for someone else, may not work for you and that's okay.

**We encourage you to seek out and find what self-care tips work for you. Here are a couple thoughts about how to get started:**

- First, give yourself space to tend to your family's needs, such as doctor appointments and maintaining your home, daily hygiene, or other regular routines.
- Second, give yourself a "grief break." Staying busy to keep your mind occupied is healthy. What makes distraction unhealthy is avoiding the emotions for extended periods. No matter what, grief is going to happen, but taking a break is perfectly reasonable.





## Be Prepared for Important Dates

Birthdays, holidays, and anniversaries are some of the most challenging times for a grieving person. These dates are reminders of good times and difficult times. During the first year in particular, every significant date can come with a new round of grief reactions. Unfortunately, each year after can have a dose of grief. This is sometimes referred to as an anniversary reaction (Mayo Clinic). Keeping these dates in mind and preparing yourself will help you cope with these grief reminders.

### Here are some tips to prepare for important dates:

**Prepare:** Make a plan for the day to ensure that you are taking care of yourself. Let your support network know the day will be difficult. Reach out to those who are helpful. Plan to spend some time reflecting and acknowledge that the day will be difficult. Going into these days without a plan can leave you vulnerable to more intense emotions.

**Traditions:** Consider what you would be doing if the person was still alive or what they would want you to do on this day without them. Consider making new traditions such as watching their favorite movie or baking something that they always enjoyed.

**Emotions:** Allow yourself to grieve. Some of these important dates can be truly sad days. When we fight emotions, it can become more distressing. Try to prepare yourself for this day by practicing some of your coping strategies. If it gets too intense, seek out some support. You don't have to grieve alone on these days.

**Connect:** It can seem easier to stay away from others because you may be worried about making them sad. While this is a natural way of thinking about your grief, it is not the healthiest way to cope with difficult days. Instead, connect with friends or family. Let them know that you could use their support.

**Avoid:** As mentioned earlier, avoiding reminders is not always a bad strategy. For those who have experienced traumatic loss, grief reminders of the death can be debilitating. Making plans to get through the day safely with distractions can help make the day pass with a bit of ease.

Things I want to Remember:

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**A special note about grief reminders:** reminders of the person who died will happen often. It occurs at any moment that a habit of connection occurred. For example, when you order take-out and there is one less meal, when you are heading home from work and want to tell your loved one about your day, or when you are faced with managing finances for the first time. These are all reminders that, over time, become less intense.

What is important is to recognize that the person that died is still an important part of your life. Grief reminders are just that, reminders of the person we love and not only the person we lost.

**Key Milestones:**

**0 to 60 days – rely on your support network.**

**60 days plus – consider seeing a therapist if grief is not subsiding.**

**Ninety days – seek out continued support for the next 12 months.**

What are some of my grief reminders?

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# PART 2

## Traumatic Loss

### What is Traumatic Loss?

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While we recognize that any death that someone experiences can be considered distressing, and that studies have shown that death due to foreseen circumstances like cancer may also be experienced as traumatic because of the characteristics of the grief response (Kirstensen, et al), this section focuses on sudden unexpected deaths related to suicide, overdose, accidents, or other violent circumstances.

This type of death can include any situation where the person who died did so without warning, where the person mourning has the belief that the person suffered, the death was preventable, or another person caused the death. In addition, a traumatic loss can also include any situation where the survivor witnessed the death, experienced multiple deaths at one time, or was in a position where their life was also in danger.

These types of death experiences can cause a particularly intense acute stress response that may develop into prolonged grief, so it is important to be alert to difficulties that arise and seek additional support and/or counseling.

### Grieving a Traumatic Loss

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The first thing to keep in mind about experiencing grief after a traumatic loss is that the feelings that come with traumatic grief are much more intense.

You may find yourself experiencing symptoms such as nightmares or flashbacks - you may even have thoughts of suicide or "just not being here." For some, this may come as a shock. If these types of thoughts arise, we ask that you talk to someone immediately. Although these feelings are common when we have experienced this type of loss, they are serious and professional support to help us manage them safely.



Below is a way for you to contact someone immediately when or if these thoughts occur.

<p><b>National Suicide Prevention Lifeline</b></p> <p>Text or call 988 Lifeline (988lifeline.org)</p> <p>Free, confidential, and available 24/7</p>	<p><b>Crisis Text Line</b></p> <p>741741 <a href="http://www.crisistextline.org">www.crisistextline.org</a></p>
<p><b>National Domestic Violence Hotline</b></p> <p>1.800.799.SAFE (7233) <a href="http://www.thehotline.org">www.thehotline.org</a></p>	<p><b>Trevor Project: Crisis and Suicide Prevention for LGBTQ Youth</b></p> <p>866.488.7386 <a href="http://www.thetrevorproject.org">www.thetrevorproject.org</a></p>

Things I want to Remember:

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## What does traumatic grief look like?

Most likely, you will experience many of the same grief reactions discussed in Part 1. In addition, however, there are some unique characteristics of traumatic grief that are important to recognize.

**Rumination:** For many, the questions of “why,” “what could I have done differently”, “could I have prevented this?” are all questions that you may ruminate over. Rumination is a normal grieving response when the death is traumatic. Part of our grieving is attempting to reason with the loss and identify where we were at fault, which can be difficult to manage, so please review the section on ways to cope.

**World View:** You may have a different outlook on the world. You may feel like the world isn't safe or that people are evil. You may begin to question your faith or higher power. There can also be an intense feeling of helplessness or vulnerability.

**Preoccupation:** If the person who died was involved in a violent death, you may have become preoccupied with what happened, did they know they were going to die, were they scared, were they in pain. Much like rumination, these are common thoughts that can cause intense anxiety.

**Guilt and Shame:** Both guilt and shame are common grief reactions. However, with traumatic loss, the feelings can be more intense. The intensity may be due to some conflict you had with the person who died or feeling that you could have prevented the death. Both feelings are important characteristics of traumatic grief that can become problematic for your mental health if not managed.

**Acute Stress:** Acute stress is when you may feel out of control, have sudden fear of grief, and have more physical reactions. Symptoms can come on at any moment, feel more intense within the first three months of the death, and may cause you to feel out of control or going crazy. These are uncomfortable feelings that may cause you to avoid seeking help.



## When should you seek help?

If you're experiencing symptoms of traumatic grief, if that grief is disrupting your life and ability to meet daily responsibilities and needs, it may be time to talk with a licensed professional who can help you process grief reactions, difficult emotions and develop coping strategies.

Alexander JFS provides supportive consultation during office hours if you are unsure whether you or your loved ones can benefit from seeing a licensed professional.

**We are here for you.**

CONNECT THROUGH OUR WEBSITE:

<https://www.alexanderjfs.org/services/bmhs/all-counseling#request-service>

EMAIL: [adultcounseling@alexanderjfs.org](mailto:adultcounseling@alexanderjfs.org)

CALL: 713-986-7825



## Death by Suicide



Some scholars believe that death by suicide can be one of the most complex types of loss to experience. One of the more challenging aspects of suicide is that it can be hard to talk about and experienced in isolation. Guilt, shame, anger, and blame are more intense reactions due to suicide. When the death is after a sudden interpersonal conflict, feelings of guilt can become overwhelming. Below are some grief reactions specific to suicide that may occur:

**Rejection:** Survivors often feel rejected or abandoned following a death by suicide. The circumstances around the suicide and evaluation of how the person felt can increase this emotional reaction. When these feelings become too intense, seeking out support or finding a suicide-specific support group is recommended.

**Anger:** Intense feelings of anger can often arise after death by suicide; feelings of rejection can bring on anger. You may feel angry at yourself or other people for the loss. If you are a person of faith, you may be angry at your God. You may find yourself questioning your faith. If this occurs, a trusted clergy member may be a resource. Anger is a difficult emotion to manage when we think that we must take on more responsibilities after the person's death. Many of these emotions are directly associated with feelings of victimization and rejection.

**Guilt:** A death by suicide is often the only option that the person sees at that moment to end the emotional or physical pain they were experiencing. For many survivors, the feelings of guilt for not preventing the death are intense. Guilt is anger turned inward. Feeling guilty about not preventing suicide is a natural response. However, it is vital to recognize your limitations to being able to stop the person from dying. Remember, just as diseases like cancer or heart disease can be life-threatening, so too mental illness can be life-threatening. Remember, there is a big difference between guilt and responsibility. You may feel guilty about their suicide, but you are not responsible for their suicide.

**Blame:** Blaming yourself, your family, or your friends is a common reaction after a death by suicide. There may be feelings of blame towards the person's employer or other external systems. These feelings are natural responses to the question "why?" Seeking answers and searching for an explanation is part of our need to resolve the death and make sense of our new world without the person that died.

**Fear:** It is common for families who have experienced a death by suicide to have intense fear about it happening again. If the person had had a mental illness, there could be concern about other members in the family with similar issues. If you feel like you need to have a conversation with others and do not know what to say, contact the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline listed above. Their website has a lot of helpful information on this very topic.

If you are unsure when to get professional help for yourself or your loved ones

**We are here for you.**

Alexander JFS provides supportive consultation during office hours.

CONNECT THROUGH OUR WEBSITE:

<https://www.alexanderjfs.org/services/bmhs/all-counseling#request-service>

EMAIL: [aduldcounseling@alexanderjfs.org](mailto:aduldcounseling@alexanderjfs.org)

CALL: 713-986-7825

Things I want to Remember:

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## Death by Overdose

If you have experienced a death of a loved one from an overdose or substance abuse, your grief reactions may be similar to a death by suicide. However, specific reactions like blame and guilt are slightly different. Because substance abuse may have repeated trauma and family conflict events, there may be more rumination about what could prevent the overdose or help the person survive.

If the person was struggling with addiction for a prolonged period, feelings of relief might even occur. However, these feelings may increase guilt and shame during the grieving process.

What is important to remember is that these experiences of grief are the results of a tragic loss that may have a significant relational and family history. When seeking support, it is helpful to describe the type of loss as traumatic to connect with a professional who has the skills to treat trauma.

Things I want to Remember:

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“The risk of love is loss, and the price of loss is grief—But the pain of grief is only a shadow when compared with the pain of never risking love.”

**Hillary Stanton Zunin**

# PART 3

## Parenting and Grief

### Parenting a grieving child

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One of the hardest things about being a parent is managing your emotional health while supporting and nurturing a child. When our families experience death, keeping a strong parental front requires an entirely different level of skill. Even among families, grief is unique to every person involved and has a lot to do with the family members' ages.

Children, like adults, experience grief and they may express their grief differently. Depending on the child's age, their understanding and response to grief may also change over time.

Children in preschool or younger than the age of 5 do not have an understanding of time and a general ability to think of their world outside of themselves. Depending on the person who died, their expression of grief may be sporadic. One moment, they may become sad and ask a direct question about the person who died. Within minutes, they will be right back to play. For a parent supporting a grieving child, this can become confusing. The key is to allow the child to grieve and recognize that they are responding to new and unfamiliar emotions. Be honest and age-appropriate when answering questions and comfort the child while allowing them to feel their emotions.

Once a child begins elementary school, their reactions to grief change quite a bit. They begin to recognize the finality of death and may start to ask for a lot of details about the person who died. Their questions may seem intrusive or too graphic to explain. They may begin to experience guilt or believe they had something to do with the death. This age is also when children may start acting out, losing sleep, and sometimes regressing to behaviors like bedwetting.

The best support you can give a child in this period is to follow their lead. Answer their questions using concrete terms and language they understand. When they have difficulty with "big emotions," you can provide them with an understanding that these feelings can be scary or frustrating. Allow them the opportunity to act out their emotions and help them identify the emotions with words.



Parenting a young child who has experienced loss is a challenge. It also can be easy to put your grief aside to support your child. Prioritizing your children is a natural response and one that needs monitoring when dealing with grief.

If parents are not taking care of themselves, then the grieving child may have difficulty getting their own emotional needs met. Parents do not have to do this alone. If it gets too overwhelming, seek out a professional, join a support group, talk to a friend, and get help for you and your children.

**Here are some Children's Books about Grief that you can consider reading together with your children:**

***A Story for Hippo*** by Simon Puttock

***The Invisible String*** by Patrice Karst

***Gentle Willow*** by Joyce C. Mills

***The Memory Box*** by Joanna Rowland and Thea Baker



Things I want to Remember:

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# PART 4

## Supporting Those Grieving

### How to be supportive

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Chances are that at some point in everyone's life they will have a friend or family member that has experienced a loss. It is natural to want to take care of those we love and help them in any way possible. However, it is also possible to overdo the nurturing. In those cases, the response from those grieving can be harsh, confusing, and often uncomfortable. Rest assured, just being present for those that have experienced a death is often the most valuable response you can give.

Shortly after a death and even after the mourning process, many people need continued support. A common concern for those grieving is feeling like others have moved on when the grief is still very present in their personal life.

As mentioned earlier, grief never ends, it just becomes more manageable. So, too, is the support of a friend or family member. The role of supporting can be challenging when faced with the harsh reality of our own mortality. Bearing witness to those grieving can cause a lot of discomfort and often we are at a loss for words or are unsure of what to say.

### Steps to being a supporter

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**Step 1: *Listen and be present.*** It can be difficult to know just what to say, and it is completely natural to be afraid of saying the wrong thing. But being a supportive listener is what people appreciate the most when grieving. And, for those times you don't know what to say, let the other person know. Sometimes, the best medicine is to just sit with the other person and be in their presence of grieving.

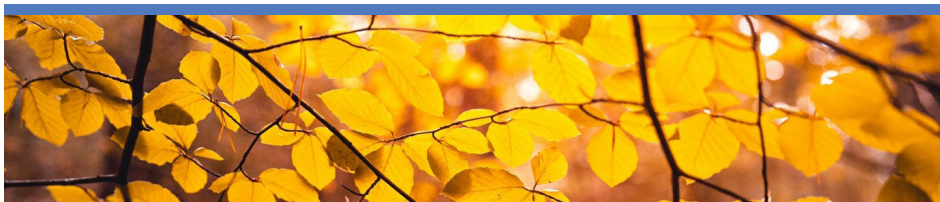
**Step 2: *Show up.*** Birthdays, anniversaries, the anniversary of the person's death, and holidays are the hardest days for a grieving person. Showing up during important dates can be a source of strength for your friend and helps them know they are not alone in their grief. Send a card or give them a call. Be open and honest about why you are thinking of them on these dates. And then, just sit and listen.

**Step 3: Avoid giving advice.** Even in the best of times, advice is annoying. Being supportive means not passing judgment and attempting to expedite a person's grief. Statements like "Soon you will feel better" or "You just need to cry it out" are far from helpful and even hurtful.

**Step 4: Use the name of the person who died.** Grieving is not a process of removing the memory of someone. The person who died is important to your friend. Use their name and talk about them. Tell your friend how much you miss them, too. If your friend gets sad and you're not sure what to do, see Step 1.

**Step 5: You're friends, so be friends.** We can't forget having a friend is a positive experience. We like to do things together, watch movies and share meals. So, offer up the opportunity to be a friend. Their world has changed a lot, and your friendship shouldn't. Ask them what they need and be prepared for them to reject the idea. If they can't tell you, well, you can always use Step 1.

Supporting a friend who is grieving is never easy. We don't look forward to this role, but it is a crucial role to take. Knowing the basics of supporting someone grieving is an act of love we all will need at some point in our lives.



## The 11 Tenets of Companionship

Dr. Alan Wolfelt, a leading educator in grief counseling, refers to the role of support as "companionship" and incorporated 11 tenets for being a supportive companion to those grieving. The 11 tenets are simple and a good starting point for anyone who wants to be supportive.

1. Companionship is about **being present** to another person's pain; it is not about taking away the pain.
2. Companionship is about **going to the wilderness of the soul** with another human being; it is not about thinking you are responsible for finding the way out.
3. Companionship is about **honoring the spirit**; it is not about focusing on the intellect.

4. Companionship is about *listening with the heart*; it is not about analyzing with the head.
5. Companionship is about *bearing witness to the struggles of others*; it is not about judging or directing these struggles.
6. Companionship is about *walking alongside*; it is not about leading or being led.
7. Companionship means *discovering the gifts of sacred silence*; it does not mean filling up every moment with words.
8. Companionship the bereaved is about *being still*; it is not about frantic movement forward.
9. Companionship is about *respecting disorder and confusion*; it is not about imposing order and logic.
10. Companionship is about *learning from others*; it is not about teaching them.
11. Companionship is about *curiosity*; it is not about expertise.

Things I can do:

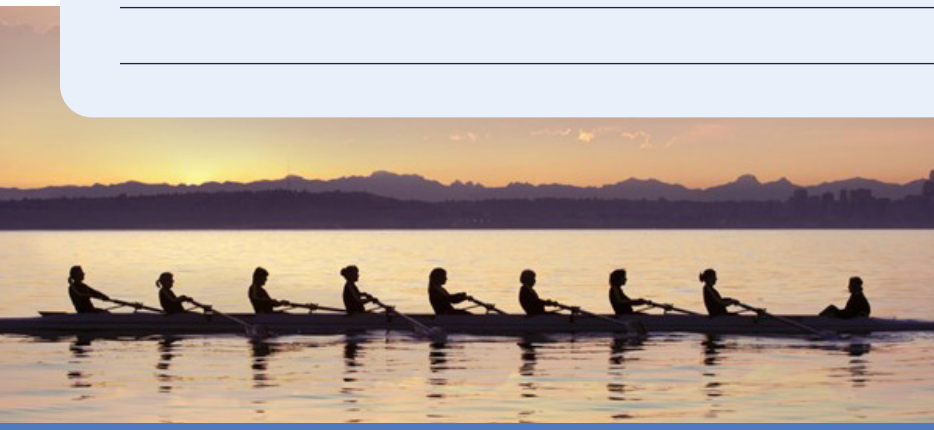
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# PART 5

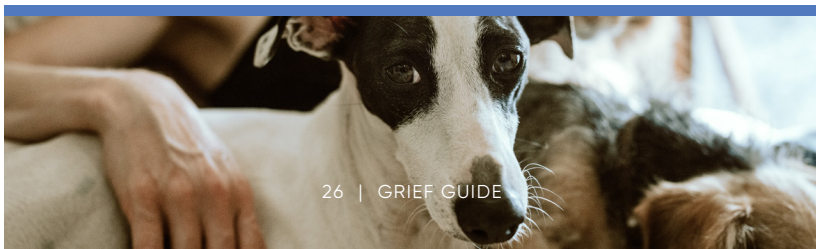
## Other Types of Grief

### Loss of a pet

Losing a pet is painful to experience but does not need to be treated differently from any other type of grief. Pets are an important part of the family, and it is healthy to grieve the loss. Your grief is a unique experience that equates to the love you have for your pet. Below are some considerations when you find yourself grieving the loss of your loving animal.

#### **Points to consider when you have lost a pet.**

1. Coming to terms with your pet's death is difficult. Their absence will be felt emotionally and physically. Try to be gentle with yourself while acknowledging the loss. It may take some time to adjust to life without your pet.
2. Take time to recognize the significance of your pet's role as a family member. We create a unique attachment to our pets, and they love us no matter our faults. Give yourself time and space to grieve.
3. Feeling guilty is natural but can keep us stuck in how our pets died rather than the life they lived. Celebrate your pet's life when you find yourself ruminating on their death. Challenge your guilt with reality and acknowledge that being the perfect pet owner is unrealistic.
4. Continue your relationship with your pet through memories. Create a memory book, write a tribute, or donate to your favorite pet organization in their name.
5. Not everyone is going to understand your grief. Your loss is significant to you, and no other person can change that. When you are grieving the loss of a pet, seek out your pet-loving support network. Let those that are close know you are in pain.



Things I want to remember:

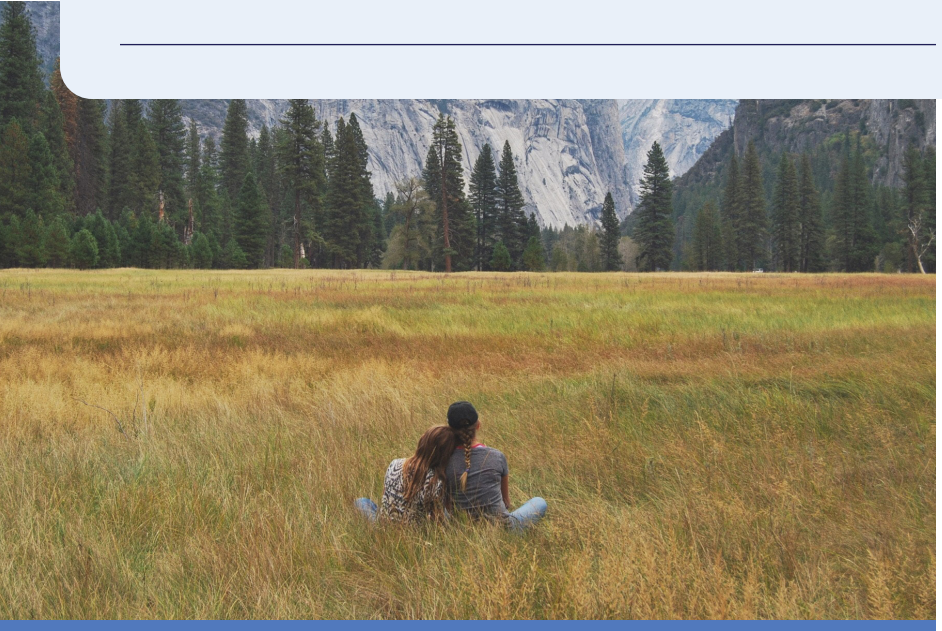
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Other helpful resources for me:

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# Glossary of Terms Used in This Guide

**Bereavement** is a period of grief and mourning after a loss.

**Companioning** is being present to another person's pain and helping to create a safe place for them to embrace and experience their feelings of loss.

**Grief** is a person's emotional response to loss.

**Mourning** is an outward expression of that grief, including cultural and religious customs surrounding the death. It is also the process of adapting to life after loss.

**Rumination** involves repetitive thinking or dwelling on negative feelings and distress and their causes and consequences.

**Traumatic Loss** is the loss of loved ones in the context of potentially traumatizing circumstances. Examples are losses due to homicide, suicide, accidents, and natural disasters, and losses resulting from war and terror.

## You Are Not Alone

Alexander Jewish Family Service is here to help.

To schedule a consultation with our mental health professional, please reach out to us:

CONNECT THROUGH OUR WEBSITE:

<https://www.alexanderjfs.org/services/bmhs/all-counseling#request-service>

EMAIL: [adulthoodcounseling@alexanderjfs.org](mailto:adulthoodcounseling@alexanderjfs.org) CALL: (713) 986-7825









# GRIEF GUIDE

To help you cope with your loss

**Joan and Stanford Alexander Jewish Family Service**

4131 S Braeswood Blvd | Houston, TX 77025

[www.alexanderjfs.org](http://www.alexanderjfs.org)