

HOSPICE  
OF SANTA CRUZ COUNTY

# GRIEF HANDBOOK

\* FOR TEENS \*





## SO YOU'RE HERE

You're reading this because someone in your life died. Likely, you don't have much experience with the confusing, messy, whirlwind of feelings coming your way. In these pages, you'll find some information and tools that may help you navigate your grief.

# NAVIGATING GRIEF

- 4 – What is Grief?**
- 5 – Riding the Wave**
- 6 – Feelings in Grief**
- 8 – How Does Grief Look?**
- 9 – Feelings Are Influenced by Relationships & Experiences**
- 10 – Write About It**
- 11 – Prompts for Writing**
- 12 – Common Grief Reactions**
- 16 – How Long Does Grief Last?**
- 18 – Grief Rituals**
- 20 – You Are Not Alone**
- 21 – Healing**
- 22 – When Should I Get More Help?**
- 23 – Youth Grief Support at Hospice of Santa Cruz County**

# WHAT IS GRIEF?

Grief can come and go like waves.

Grief is a natural, normal response to loss.

Your grief is your grief. There is no “right” or “wrong” way to do it.

Every death is different, and so is your response to it.

Grieving is not something to get over. It’s something you learn to live with.

Grieving is not done all at once. You may move in and out of grief.

Make space for your feelings. Figure out what helps and what doesn’t.



## RIDING THE WAVE

Grief and loss are stressful, baffling, and exhausting. Everyday tasks that used to seem simple can now feel hard. Keep your head above water by:

### GETTING GOOD SLEEP

**Grief can do a number on your sleep.** Get the zzzz’s you need to heal your body and mind. Nap, relax, and seek the quiet screen-free time that supports sleep. For better sleep, try removing yourself from all electronics 30-60 minutes before bedtime.

### EXERCISING

**It can be hard to get motivated to exercise.** Try to pull yourself off the couch and move. Even a short walk is like a restart button for your mood.

### EATING WELL

**While it’s tempting to eat junk food or skip meals when you are stressed,** your body does better with plenty of water and healthy food. Eating well supports your mood, sleep, and ability to cope.

### GOING OUTSIDE

**Being in nature can be soothing.** Try a few deep breaths in the fresh air or spend some time near trees or the ocean.



# FEELINGS IN GRIEF

Everyone grieves differently, and yet there are some common, universal feelings we share. You may experience all of them or some of them. Emotions may come over you like a tidal wave or sneak up when you least expect them. They're real and they're valid. Let yourself feel them.

## SHOCK

It may be hard to believe that your person has died and it may be some time for it to feel real. Even if you knew that your person was going to die, you may feel shock at the time of death. Shock can last for days, months, and sometimes longer. However it feels to you, it's a natural response.

## SADNESS

You might be crying a lot or find yourself unable to cry. Sadness can often feel like emptiness or a heavy heart. Everything may seem very hard. Sometimes it can be helpful to be with others even if you are not ready to talk about your sadness.

## LONELINESS

A loss can make you feel different. When you look around, other people might seem happy, carefree, or even silly. You might struggle to relate to your friends now. It's often hard to put words to what you are feeling. You may feel that no one can understand.

## RELIEF

Sometimes people feel relieved when someone dies. Maybe the person was sick for a long time, and you're glad that their suffering is finally over. Perhaps the person didn't treat you or others well. Relief is natural. You are still a good person.

## ANXIETY AND FEAR

Maybe you're preoccupied with thoughts of your friends, your family, and even you dying. You're feeling scared and anxious. It may feel like you're dying – shortness of breath, chest pains, headaches, or an upset stomach. While uncomfortable, these are normal reactions to the stress of your loss.

## GUILT

Regrets are common when someone dies. You may think of all the things you wish you had (or had not) said or done. You thought that you had a lifetime to say, "I love you," or "thank you," or "I'm sorry." Don't keep guilt locked up inside – talk or write it out. You're human. Forgive yourself.

## ANGER

Anger and death go hand in hand. Some people feel more anger than sadness after a death. Your anger might also be connected to hurt, pain, and confusion. It can also feel really good to get mad. Throw rocks in the ocean, scream your head off, or write an angry letter you'll never send. Find ways to let it out safely.

## CONFUSION

After a death, you can feel confused and unsure. Your perspective and assumptions about life may have shifted and you may find yourself questioning ideas and beliefs. It may be helpful to talk with a friend, your faith community, or a counselor. Writing in a journal may also help you sort out your thoughts and feelings.

I FEEL:

---

---

---

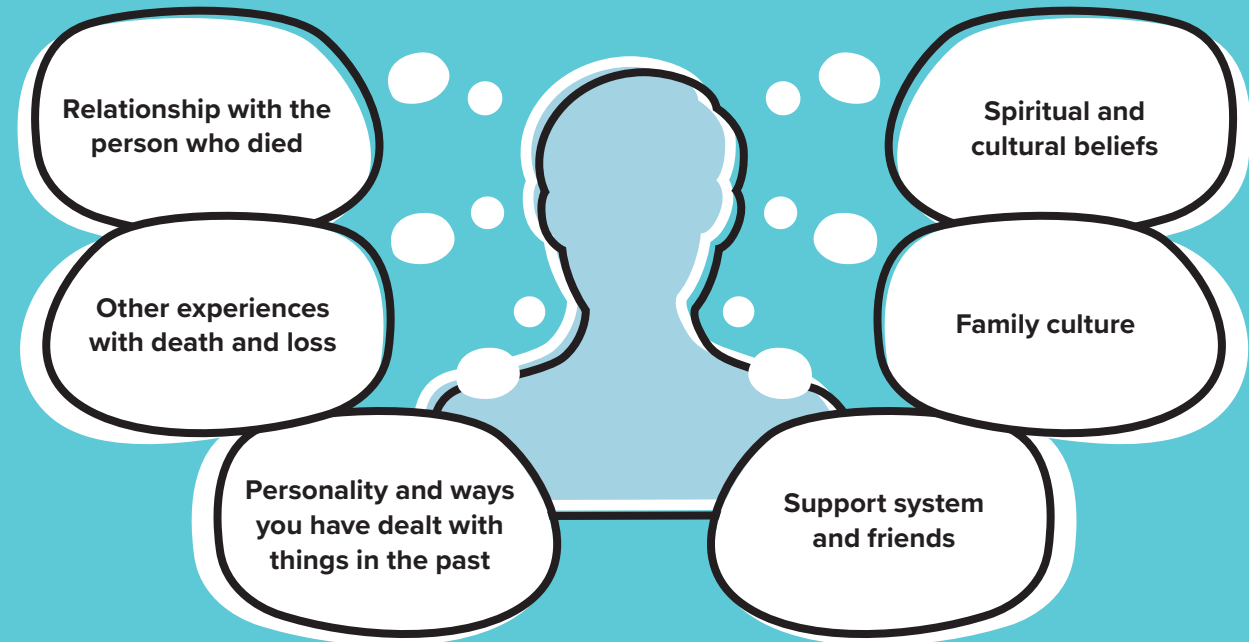


# HOW DOES GRIEF LOOK?

For each of us, grief is unique. Take a moment to consider what your grief feels like. You can use the space below to draw what comes to mind.

Lots of things affect the way you grieve,  
including your life experiences and relationship with  
the person who died.

Spend a little time thinking about your:



FEELINGS ARE INFLUENCED BY  
RELATIONSHIPS AND EXPERIENCES

## WRITE ABOUT IT

**Use this page to write a bit about the things that affect your grief.  
Putting your thoughts down on paper has power and can help you find clarity  
when everything feels muddy.**

## PROMPTS FOR WRITING

### I found out about their death when...

## My first feeling was...

**My experience with death before now was...**

## Now I feel...

## I worry about...

## I wish I could say...

## I wish I hadn't...

## I'm so happy that...

## My family is so...

## My life has changed...

### What helps me most is...

## What helps me the least is...

**I wish my friend(s) would...**





# COMMON GRIEF REACTIONS

## PHYSICAL

Crying  
Trouble sleeping  
Restlessness  
Change in appetite  
Weight loss or gain  
Lack of energy  
Headache  
Stomach ache/nausea  
Tightness in chest  
Shortness of breath  
Increased sensitivity  
Muscle tension  
Body pains

## MENTAL

Trouble concentrating  
Difficulty making decisions  
Confusion  
Disorganization  
Forgetfulness  
Strange dreams  
Withdrawing  
Preoccupied with the death  
Disbelief/trouble accepting  
Drop in grades  
Lack of motivation/interest in school or extracurricular activities  
Overachievement in school or other activities

## SOCIAL

Withdrawing  
Feeling left out  
Feeling different/inability to relate with peers  
Wanting to spend more/less time with friends  
Feeling frustrated by what peers talk about

## BEHAVIORAL

Engaging in reckless or self-harming behavior  
Missing school or not doing school work  
Suspending involvement in sports or other activities that you previously loved  
Using alcohol/drugs to deal with the pain  
Avoiding feelings through things like binge watching TV  
Engaging in sexual activities as a way to escape painful feelings

## SPIRITUAL

Loss of faith  
Wondering where the person is now  
Questioning God/faitb/belief systems  
Anger toward faith/God  
Searching for the meaning of life  
Questioning why bad things happen  
Wondering about your own/others' deaths  
Unusual occurrences – seeing the person, hearing the person, feeling the person with you

**“Grief is like the ocean, it comes in waves ebbing and flowing. Sometimes the water is calm, and sometimes it is overwhelming. All we can do is learn to swim.”**

**Vicki Harrison**





## THE GUEST HOUSE

**“This being human is a guest house.  
Every morning a new arrival.**

**A joy, a depression, a meanness,  
some momentary awareness comes  
as an unexpected visitor.**

**Welcome and entertain them all!  
Even if they’re a crowd of sorrows,  
who violently sweep your house  
empty of its furniture,  
still, treat each guest honorably.**

**He may be clearing you out  
for some new delight.**

**The dark thought, the shame, the malice,  
meet them at the door laughing,  
and invite them in.**

**Be grateful for whoever comes,  
because each has been sent  
as a guide from beyond.”**

**Jalaluddin Rumi**

*From Rumi: Selected Poems, trans Coleman Barks with  
John Moync, A. J. Arberry, Reynold Nicholson*



# HOW LONG DOES GRIEF LAST?

## TIME OF DEATH

Right when it happens, you may feel ALL the feelings, or none at all. To name a few: shock, denial, numbness, disbelief.

## FIRST WEEKS AFTER

After the initial weeks, things start to slow down and you might start to notice all the little (and BIG) ways your life will be changed. You might wonder how you're going to get through it all. You may be noticing how it might feel like too much to even think about.

## GOING BACK TO SCHOOL

Going back to school may feel difficult and a little awkward. Your friends and teachers may be uncomfortable and not know what to say. It may be helpful to plan what you want to share and what you don't. You may consider ways that your teachers and friends can assist you with this transition. Consider talking with your parent, teacher, and/or school counselor about things like a modified workload, a quiet place to go during the school day, etc.

## FUTURE & ONGOING...

You may have spikes in your grief on special occasions where you can sense a lack of your person's presence.

Holidays, birthdays, special milestones (like getting your driver's license, going to prom, graduation, getting into college, or getting a job you've always wanted) can all trigger strong feelings of missing your person. This may be a time to think of ways you can honor and remember them – lighting a candle, framing a special photo, practicing a ritual, etc. are some ways you might create a lasting connection.

## DAYS RIGHT AFTER THE DEATH

It still may not feel real. You might fall into a sort of auto-pilot... the days may feel like a daze. It may be difficult to know how you are actually feeling. It might be hard to cry (or not!). Often, this is when the most care and attention come in from friends, extended family, neighbors, and other communities.



## EARLY MONTHS TO A YEAR OUT

The reality and pain may start to settle in as the permanency of the loss becomes real. Support may start to taper off and you may feel alone, isolated, and like you're supposed to be "better" or "over it" by now (definitely NOT true). It may be difficult to get back into the routines and demands of school and activities. This is an important time to consider getting extra support, like counseling, or talking with someone you trust.

## YOUR GRIEF IS YOUR OWN...

There is no exact timeline. There are no rules or schedules. No right or wrong. You deserve kindness and patience – even from yourself.



# GRIEF RITUALS

Grief is complicated. Rituals are structured activities that you can do by yourself or with others. They can help you express important thoughts and feelings related to your loss. It might take time for you to be ready to do this, so you can try these suggestions when/if the time is right for you.

**Leave something at the gravesite.** Leave flowers, balloons, a painted stone, a letter or photo, or even their favorite candy bar. Take the time to sit and “talk” with the person who died.

**Remember and celebrate anniversaries, birthdays, and holidays.** Mark your calendar, create rituals to honor your person. You might plant a tree, do something you used to love doing together, light candles, or dance to songs you both love – whatever holds meaning for you.

**Keep the memory of your loved one alive.** Identify things that hold special meaning – little things like a shell you found on a walk together, a picture of you two, a concert ticket stub, their favorite flower. Put it somewhere special and share the story behind it with others if you’re up for it.

**Let their light shine on.** Gather with friends and family to create a luminaria in honor of the person who died. Decorate a lunch bag with their name, drawings, or cut-out shapes, then place candles inside so the luminaria can light up the dark in remembrance and celebration of your person.







# HEALING

Exploring and feeling your grief is healing. Here are some ideas of activities that can be helpful after a loss.

**Go ahead and cry.** Tears are a natural and necessary part of grieving. They are not a sign of weakness; they are a sign that you have loved.

**Write it out.** Writing poems, stories, or thoughts about the person who died helps you figure out and explore how you’re feeling.

**Music matters.** Whether listening, playing, singing, making playlists of songs that remind you of your loved one, or just rocking out, music promotes healing.

**Talk. Talk. Talk.** Share your story, feelings, reactions, fears, and memories with friends, family, and other people who you trust.

**Express yourself.** Being creative helps dig into your feelings where words may fail you. Painting, drawing, creating a memory book or collage inspired by the person who died brings life and color to your memories.

**Get moving.** Physical activities like dancing, surfing, running, swimming, and exercise helps release energy and emotions and get you back in your body.

**Be good to yourself.** Get the rest you need, balanced with exercise and good food. You may not feel motivated to do these things now, but they are essential for your physical and mental wellbeing.

**Avoid self-destructive behaviors.** It’s tempting to use alcohol, drugs, and other reckless behavior as a way to escape from painful feelings, but these behaviors tend to complicate the grief process.

# WHEN SHOULD I GET MORE HELP?

**Grief is tough.** It can make life seem almost impossible at times. What used to be easy might now feel hard, and what used to be hard might now feel unmanageable. It's natural to want and need more support during these difficult times.

Many people share that they can't tell if they are grieving naturally, grieving for too long, or are depressed. It's important to know that asking for support, whether talking with someone you trust, checking in with the school counselor, or meeting with a grief counselor, is a sign of strength. If you're struggling with eating, sleeping, school, or other daily parts of life, it's important to check in with someone who can help.

**No one should have to navigate the stormy and ever-changing waves of grief on their own. Asking for help is a first step toward healing.**

If you ever have thoughts of wanting to hurt yourself or someone else, the Crisis Text Line can be reached by **Texting "HOME" to 741741**, or you can call the Suicide Prevention Hotline (you don't have to be suicidal to call) at **1-877-ONE-LIFE/1-877-663-5433**.

# YOUTH GRIEF SUPPORT AT HOSPICE OF SANTA CRUZ COUNTY

**WE'RE HERE FOR YOU:**

**Individual Grief Support  
Teen Grief Groups  
Camp Erin® Santa Cruz**

Every person — no matter your age — is different and unique.  
We are here to meet you where you are. Call, email or check our website for the most up-to-date information on individual and group grief support offerings.

 831 430 3000

 [griefsupport@hospicesantacruz.org](mailto:griefsupport@hospicesantacruz.org)

 [hospicesantacruz.org](http://hospicesantacruz.org)







## SERVING OUR COMMUNITY FROM TWO LOCATIONS:

**The Mary & Richard Solari Center  
for Compassionate Care**

940 Disc Drive  
Scotts Valley CA 95066

**The Borina Family Center  
for Compassionate Care**

65 Nielson Street, Suite 121  
Watsonville CA 95076