Holding Love Through Loss Workbook

A gentle worksheet for naming grief, pacing the day, and honoring what matters without pressure.

Use this at your own pace. Skip, adapt, pause, or stop. You are allowed to choose what fits your body, culture, privacy, energy, safety, access needs, and real-life limits today.

This is a reflection tool, not a test. One honest sentence, one checked box, or one small next step can be enough.

Holding Love

Through Loss

A Grief, Family Connection &

Compassionate Support Workbook

HONOR THE PERSON (cid:127) SUPPORT THE FAMILY

Find Steadiness Without Rushing Grief

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A Compassionate Welcome

Before You Begin

The death of a child can alter every part of a family. Grief may affect the body, attention, memory, relationships, identity, faith, routines, and the sense of what the future was supposed to be.

This workbook may also support anyone grieving a significant person or trying to comfort someone who is grieving. Use the pages that fit your relationship and leave the rest.

Grief can include:

Sadness or yearning Numbness or disbelief

Anger

Guilt or regret Relief mixed with pain Fear or anxiety Difficulty concentrating Changes in sleep Changes in appetite Physical heaviness Brief moments of joy Need for solitude Need for closeness Spiritual questions

Other:

There is no correct timeline and no single right way to grieve.

Pause, skip, or adapt any page. Feeling worse for a moment does not mean you are doing grief wrong. Seek human support when the weight is too much to carry alone.

Understanding The Experience

What Is Grief?

Grief is a natural response to losing a person, relationship, future, role, or sense of safety that mattered. It is not only sadness. It is the whole-person process of adapting to a reality we did not want.

Grief may touch several parts of life at once:

Emotions Friendships

Thoughts and memory Work or school The nervous system Faith or worldview Sleep and appetite The imagined future Identity and purpose Daily routines Family roles The sense of safety Grief does not usually move through neat stages. People may feel several reactions at once, revisit them, or not experience some of them at all. Models of grief can offer language, but they should not become deadlines or tests.

Grief is not a problem to solve. It is an experience to carry with support.

Adaptation may include moving back and forth between facing the loss and attending to daily life. Both grieving and taking breaks from grief can be healthy.

The Brain, Body & Grief Bursts

Why Grief Can Feel Unpredictable

The brain may repeatedly register the loss as it updates expectations: the person is not answering, entering the room, attending the event, or sharing the future. Reminders can create sudden "grief bursts," even after calmer periods.

Common experiences may include:

Brain fog Fatigue Forgetfulness Aches or heaviness Trouble deciding Restlessness Searching or expecting Feeling unreal or detached Dreams about the person Sensitivity to reminders Numbness Relief after prolonged stress Tears without warning Moments of normalcy

Irritability Other:

These reactions can be understandable in grief, but new, severe, dangerous, or persistent symptoms deserve professional attention. Physical symptoms should not automatically be assumed to be "just grief."

A reaction I understand differently after reading this:

What my body or mind may be asking for:

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A Developmental Guide, Not A Rule

How Children Understand Death

Children develop their understanding over time. Individual differences, disability, culture, prior experience, and the circumstances of the death matter more than age alone.

Young children May see death as temporary or reversible, repeat questions, use magical thinking, and communicate through play or behavior. Use simple concrete words, routines, reassurance, and repetition.

School-age children Increasingly understand that death is permanent and happens to living things. They may want facts, worry about responsibility or safety, show body complaints, or move quickly between grief and play.

Teens

Usually understand death in adult-like ways but may feel invulnerable, intensely private, different from peers, angry, guilty, or responsible for protecting the family. Offer honest information, choices, peer connection, privacy, and dependable adult availability.

At every age Say clearly that the person died, the body no longer works, and the child did not cause it. Avoid graphic detail unless needed, welcome repeated questions, and say "I do not know" when that is truthful.

What seems to fit this child's current understanding?

What might they need explained or repeated?

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No Stages, Scores Or Deadlines

Common Grief Ideas - Gently Explained

Oscillation

People often move between focusing on the loss and focusing on restoration: meals, work, parenting, paperwork, rest, or moments of enjoyment. Moving between them is not avoidance by default.

Continuing bonds A healthy relationship with memory can continue through stories, values, rituals, objects, inner conversation, creativity, spirituality, or acts of service.

Secondary losses A death can also change identity, finances, friendships, routines, family roles, confidence, belonging, and anticipated milestones. These losses deserve recognition.

Disenfranchised grief Some grief is minimized, hidden, stigmatized, or not socially recognized. Lack of recognition can add isolation; the grief is still real.

Meaning-making Some people eventually find meaning, purpose, or changed priorities. Others do not want to search for a reason. Meaning must never be forced or used to justify the death.

Post-traumatic stress and grief A frightening or sudden death can involve both grief and trauma responses. They overlap but are not identical, and qualified support can address both.

Which idea helps name part of my experience?

Part 1 - Beginning With Love

The Person We Are Remembering

This loss is part of the story, but it is not the whole story of the person who died.

Their life mattered. Their relationship with us matters still.

Their name and the name I use for them:

What I want people to know about them:

A quality, expression, habit, or detail I treasure:

Something they brought into our family or community:

A memory that feels important today:

Part 2 - Naming This Moment

My Grief Today

Grief changes from hour to hour and season to season. This page is a snapshot, not a permanent description.

Raw Confusing

Heavy Exhausting

Numb Unreal

Restless Quiet

Angry Changing

Lonely Other:

Tender

Today my grief feels like...

In my body, I notice...

The thought that keeps returning is...

What feels hardest today?

What feels even slightly supportive today?

What do I need less of? What do I need more of?

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Part 3 - Releasing The Timeline

Grief Is Not a Straight Line A calmer day does not mean you loved less. A painful day after a calmer one does not erase your progress.

Grief can soften, surge, rest, and return. None of this is failure.

A belief I have about how I "should" be grieving:

Where did I learn that belief?

How does that pressure affect me?

A kinder and more realistic belief might be:

What would I say to another grieving person in my place?

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Part 4 - Naming Secondary Losses

The Grief Beneath the Grief We may grieve the person and also routines, roles, plans, milestones, identity, safety, certainty, and the future we imagined.

Along with the person, I am grieving...

A routine or role that changed is...

A future moment I had imagined is...

Something others may not realize I lost:

What kind of acknowledgment would feel meaningful?

Part 5 - Compassion Without Avoidance

When Guilt Shows Up

Grief often searches the past for a different ending. Responsibility can be examined with care without treating pain as proof of blame.

The "if only" or "what if" thought I carry is...

What was actually known and within my control at the time?

What was outside my control or impossible to know?

What would compassion say about the person I was then?

If there is something to repair or learn, one grounded step is...

Part 6 - Getting Through The Next Wave

A Plan for the Hardest Moments This is not about solving grief. It is about making the next minutes more survivable and less lonely.

I do not have to carry this moment alone.

Feet on the floor Text or call someone Slow exhale Sit near a trusted person Hold something comforting Reduce demands Step outside Cry or rest

Sip water Other:

Name five things I see

My signs that a wave is building:

One place where I feel safest:

People I can contact:

Words I can send when I cannot explain:

What helps me through the next 10 minutes?

Reasons to stay connected to life today:

Part 7 - Basic Care Counts

Caring for a Grieving Body Grief is physical. Self-care may be small, repetitive, imperfect, and still worthwhile.

Drink water Gentle movement Eat something manageable Step into daylight Take prescribed medication Reduce noise or screens Shower or wash face Ask for practical help Change clothes Attend a medical appointment

Rest without forcing sleep Other:

The kindest care my body needs today:

A task I can make smaller:

A task someone else could help with:

A gentle plan for food, water, medication, or rest:

One non-demanding source of comfort:

Part 8 - Making Room For More Than Pain

Moments of Connection, Not Forced Joy Connection or laughter can coexist with grief. A moment of relief is not betrayal and does not erase love.

Love for the person who died and moments of living can exist together.

A person, place, animal, activity, or memory that offers a little warmth:

What makes connection feel safer right now?

What kind of invitation feels possible?

What kind of social pressure do I need to decline?

A small moment I am allowed to receive without guilt:

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Part 9 - Understanding Sibling Grief

How Children & Teens May Grieve

Children may move in and out of grief, repeat questions, play, seem unaffected, regress, become clingy, have body complaints, struggle at school, or worry that another person will die. Teens may seek peers, privacy, information, control, or distance.

Repeated questions Withdrawal Sleep changes Risk-taking Clinginess Body complaints Irritability Fear of separation Regression Taking on adult roles

Play about death Other:

School difficulty

What changes have I noticed in the sibling?

What might this behavior be communicating?

What questions have they asked or repeated?

What reassurance or structure may help?

What support from school, family, peers, or a professional may help?

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Part 10 - Clear, Age-Appropriate Words

Talking Honestly With Children

- Use simple, concrete language. Euphemisms such as "went to sleep" or "went away" can confuse or frighten children. Give honest information in small amounts and correct misunderstandings gently.

You can ask me questions again. I will tell you what I know.

The words I plan to use:

What does this child already understand?

What question am I worried they may ask?

An honest answer I can give without unnecessary detail:

What can I say when I do not know?

How will I remind them the death was not their fault?

Part 11 - Reassurance Through Repetition

What Children Need to Hear Again

Children and teens may need the same message many times as their understanding develops.

All feelings are welcome. Harmful behavior still needs safe limits.

- My words for: "You did not cause this." My words for: "You are still loved and cared for." My words for: "It is okay to feel many things or nothing right now." My words for: "You may still play, laugh, learn, and be a child." My words for: "Tell me when you are worried."

A question I want to invite without pressure:

Part 12 - For A Child Or Teen To Complete

A Sibling Feelings Page

- Use words, colors, symbols, or drawings. An adult can write for a younger child.

Sad Left out

Mad Guilty

Scared Relieved

Confused Okay right now Lonely I do not know

Numb Other:

Today I feel...

I miss...

I remember...

Something I do not understand is...

Something I worry about is...

Something that helps me feel close to them is...

One thing I want the adults to know:

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Part 13 - Choices For Different Moments

A Sibling Coping Menu

Offer choices rather than demanding that a child talk. Coping can be active, quiet, creative, social, spiritual, or sensory.

Draw or color Write or voice-record Look at photos Hold a comfort object Make a memory box Visit a meaningful place Play outside Pray or practice a ritual Move the body Take a quiet break Listen to music Keep a familiar routine

Talk to a trusted adult Other:

Spend time with friends

Three choices that fit this child:

A choice they do not want right now:

How they can signal they need support:

A comforting routine we can repeat:

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Part 14 - Staying Available Without Pressure

When a Sibling Does Not Want to Talk

Silence does not mean absence of grief. Some children talk through play, behavior, art, music, humor, questions, or small moments over time.

You do not have to talk now. I am here when you want words, company, or help.

How this child tends to express hard things:

A low-pressure way I can be available:

What I can say instead of repeatedly asking "Are you okay?"

A shared activity that allows side-by-side connection:

Signs that would tell me more support is needed:

Part 15 - Good Enough In An Impossible Season

Parenting While Grieving

A grieving parent may have less energy, patience, attention, and emotional capacity.

Children need honesty, care, and repair - not a parent who never struggles.

- My child can see grief and still know they are safe, loved, and not responsible for fixing me.

What feels hardest about parenting right now?

What is essential today? What can wait?

A caregiving task I can share or delegate:

How I can explain my tears or low energy without making the child responsible:

A moment when "good enough" is truly enough:

Part 16 - One Family, Many Responses

Making Space for Different Grief Styles One person may talk; another may work, create, pray, organize, avoid, cry, joke, or seek solitude. Different styles can be valid unless they harm someone or prevent essential care.

- My grief style tends to look like...

Another family member grieves by...

A difference we keep misunderstanding is...

What respect could look like without forcing sameness:

A shared point of connection we still have:

Part 17 - A Repeatable Ritual

Family Check-In Without Pressure

- Keep check-ins short and predictable. Anyone may pass. Adults remain responsible for adult support.

You may share, draw, point, or pass.

One word for how I feel:

Something that was hard today:

Something that helped even a little:

Do I want listening, comfort, help, space, or distraction?

One thing we need tomorrow:

A memory or loving thought we want to share:

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Part 18 - Love After Death

Keeping a Continuing Bond Remembering is not the same as being stuck. Many people carry an ongoing inner relationship through memory, values, stories, rituals, objects, actions, or community.

A way I already stay connected is...

A value or quality of theirs I want to carry forward:

A story I want the family to keep telling:

A ritual that fits our beliefs and culture:

How siblings can choose whether and how to participate:

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Part 19 - Family & Sibling Activities

Memory-Making Together

Activities should be invitations, never tests of love. Let each person choose the timing and level of participation.

Memory box Donation or service Photo album Annual ritual Playlist Story recording Recipe or meal Art or quilt Letters or cards Special object display

Memory jar Other:

Plant or garden

An activity our family may want to try:

Materials or support we need:

How each person can participate or opt out:

What we hope this activity gives us:

What we want to do with the finished item:

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Part 20 - Planning For Tender Dates

Birthdays, Holidays & Anniversaries

Anticipation can be as difficult as the date itself. Plans may change. Choosing less is allowed.

The date or event approaching:

What feelings or worries are showing up?

What traditions do we want to keep, change, or pause?

How will we include or remember the person?

What do the siblings want?

Our exit plan, support person, or recovery time:

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Part 21 - Helping Others Help The Sibling

School, Childcare & Community Support

A brief, privacy-respecting plan can help adults respond consistently. Ask the child or teen what they want peers to know when possible.

What the school or caregiver needs to know:

What may trigger or overwhelm the child:

Signs the child needs a break:

A safe person and safe place:

Academic or attendance flexibility to discuss:

What information may be shared, and with whom?

Part 22 - Noticing Without Panicking

When Grief Needs More Support

Intense grief can be expected. Seek prompt professional help when functioning or safety is deteriorating, symptoms are severe or persistent, or your instincts say more help is needed.

Talk of wanting to die Extreme guilt or self-blame Self-harm or dangerous behavior Persistent traumatic distress Unable to meet basic needs Hallucinations or loss of reality Severe or persistent withdrawal Violence or threats Major sleep or eating changes Other urgent concern Substance misuse

Changes I am concerned about:

How long they have been happening and how they affect daily life:

Who I can contact for assessment or support:

What I can do today to increase supervision, connection, or safety:

Part 23 - Presence Over Perfect Words

Supporting Someone Who Is Grieving

You do not need to fix grief. Reliable presence, practical help, remembering the person, and following the grieving person's lead are often more useful than advice.

Listen without correcting Accept silence

- Use the person's name Follow up later Acknowledge the loss Respect beliefs and rituals Offer a specific task Avoid comparisons Remember important dates Avoid forced positivity

What I know about this person's needs and culture:

A specific offer I can make:

How and when I will follow up:

The person who died and something I can remember aloud:

How I will care for my own limits without disappearing:

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Part 24 - Compassionate Scripts

Words That May Help

Simple, sincere words are enough. Adapt these to the relationship, culture, and moment. "I am so sorry." "Can I bring dinner Tuesday?" "I remember them." "I can sit with you." "I am here to listen." "There is no rush." "You do not have to respond." "I will check in again."

My natural version of an acknowledgment:

A specific practical offer I can make:

What I can say when I do not know what to say:

A follow-up message for next week or next month:

A phrase I will avoid because it may minimize or pressure:

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Part 25 - Replacing Platitudes With Presence

What Often Hurts, Even When Well-Meant

Statements about reasons, timelines, strength, gratitude, replacement, or "moving on" can unintentionally silence grief. Follow the grieving person's beliefs rather than imposing your own.

I am sorry. That came out in a minimizing way. I want to listen and understand.

A comment that felt painful or dismissive:

What I wish had been said instead:

A belief or explanation I should not impose on someone else:

How I can respond if I say the wrong thing:

A repair statement I can use:

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Part 26 - Turning Care Into Action

A Practical Support Plan

Grief can make open-ended requests hard to answer. Specific, consent-based support reduces decision fatigue.

Meal or groceries School coordination Transportation Appointment companion Childcare Quiet company Pet care Memory sharing

Household task Other:

Paperwork support

Person or family I want to support:

Tasks they have welcomed:

What I can realistically offer and when:

Other helpers or services that may be involved:

How we will protect privacy and dignity:

When I will check whether the support is still useful:

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Part 27 - Grief Needs More Than One Container

- My Circle of Support

No single person can meet every need. Build layers of emotional, practical, cultural, spiritual, peer, and professional support.

People who can listen:

People who can help practically:

People who understand child or sibling grief:

Cultural, spiritual, or community supports:

Professional or peer grief supports:

Who can support me when I am supporting others?

One connection I am willing to make:

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A Week Of Small Supports

A 7-Day Gentle Care Practice

- Choose the smallest version of each practice. Skip or repeat days as needed.

Small care is still care. A pause in pain is not a pause in love.

DAY 1 - Drink water, eat something, or attend to one basic need.

DAY 2 - Contact one safe person, even with a one-word message.

DAY 3 - Spend five minutes with a memory, then ground in the present.

DAY 4 - Invite a sibling or family member into a low-pressure activity.

DAY 5 - Let someone help with one practical task.

DAY 6 - Make room for rest, movement, nature, creativity, or spiritual care.

DAY 7 - Notice what supported you; release what did not.

A moment of steadiness I noticed:

A connection I want to continue:

What I need next week:

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Part 28 - Love, Memory & Unsaid Words

A Letter to the Person I Miss Write, draw, dictate, or simply sit with the prompts. Stop whenever you need to.

What I miss today is...

What I wish I could tell you...

What I hope you knew...

A memory I want to protect...

Something of you I carry with me...

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Part 29 - Carrying Love Forward

Our Family's Next Gentle Step Moving forward does not mean leaving anyone behind. It can mean carrying love while slowly rebuilding life around the loss.

We are allowed to grieve differently and still belong to one another.

What our family needs most right now:

One way we can be more connected without forcing conversation:

One way we can support the siblings:

One way the adults can receive support:

One tradition, value, or memory we want to carry:

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Educational Wellness Information

Please Read Before Using This Resource

This does not replace professional care This workbook is a general educational and self-reflection resource. It is not therapy, grief counseling, medical or psychiatric care, diagnosis, treatment, legal advice, spiritual direction, or crisis intervention. It may support work with qualified professionals but does not replace those services.

- Use choice and care Skip, adapt, pause, or stop any activity. Grief reflection may intensify sadness, traumatic memories, guilt, anger, numbness, or physical sensations. Use grounding, connect with a trusted person, and seek appropriate support when needed.

Children and teens need individualized support A child's understanding and response depend on age, development, circumstances of the death, culture, prior experiences, and support system. Caregivers should consult qualified pediatric, school, grief, or mental health professionals when concerned.

Emergency and crisis needs This PDF and My Reflective Collective do not provide monitored emergency services. If someone may harm themselves or another person, cannot stay safe, or has an immediate medical or psychiatric emergency, call 911 when safe and appropriate. In the United States, call or text 988 for suicide

or crisis support. Outside the United States, use local emergency or crisis resources.

Created by Michelle D. Elder with AI used as a collaborative drafting and organizing tool.

AI-assisted material can contain errors or oversimplifications. This resource is educational and is not personalized professional judgment. professional relationship. Last reviewed August 15, 2026.

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