

Things which may help: *keeping a journal*

Two Pages

As each person's loss is unique, there are no cure-alls for the pain and suffering grief brings. But many bereaved people have told us they found solace and gained understanding about some of their feelings from the discipline of writing or keeping a journal.

The exercise demands little of us - an inexpensive notebook, or bound diary, a pen or pencil, and some time alone. There is no one to criticize or correct what is written; no right or wrong way to accomplish the task.



At the beginning of grief, it is often too painful to try and write. Our emotions are too raw, and concentration lacking. But several weeks or months later, you may find your memory returning, as well as the ability to read or focus on written materials. This is a good time to think about writing down some of your feelings.

One of the benefits of keeping a diary is the chance to express exactly how you feel without having to edit or soften those feelings. It also allows you to say what you need to say, without worrying about other people or their feelings or reactions. It is a perfect place to rage, to ask all the questions left unanswered, to express some of the guilt or regret you may hold inside. Sometimes expressing these strong feelings, even if it's only on paper, can bring a sense of release.

A journal can also be a helpful place to vent anger at certain statements or behavior of those around us after the death. One young widow was so appalled at comments made after her husband died of cancer that she decided to document these "stupid remarks" and then compose the replies she WISHED she could have made. "It really helped me, and I ended up feeling stronger rather than just victimized by the insensitivity of those around me," she explained.

Entries in a diary can also be a reflection of how you are doing as you grieve. Many of our clients have said that they go back and read their journals and are amazed to see the progress they have made in a year. "I didn't realize how depressed I was back then, but I can really see how far I've come, and it makes me feel more hopeful."

Apart from all of these benefits, a diary or journal can also be a wonderful opportunity for commemoration and creativity. It can be the repository for notes, momentous, precious sympathy cards, photographs, poetry, or even collages of images which remind us of the one who died. Artistic journals such as these are especially effective for children or teenagers who enjoy the process of searching for "treasures" that remind them of their loved one who died.

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One grandmother wrote over 100 poems after her 17 year old granddaughter died in a car crash. Her simple poems, addressing every imaginable facet of the tragic loss, allowed her to express her painful feelings while at the same time she created something beautiful. She had her collection bound, and now shares these poems with other grieving parents and grandparents.

One of the most famous journals kept after a loss is that of author C. S. Lewis, who made regular entries in his diary the year after his beloved wife died. Published as *A Grief Observed*, his descriptions of his feelings are vivid and have helped many other widows and widowers as they struggle with their own grief:

“Tonight all the hells of young grief have opened again; the mad words, the bitter resentment, the fluttering in the stomach, the nightmare unreality, the wallowed-in tears. For in grief nothing ‘stays put’. One keeps on emerging from a phase, but it always recurs. Round and round. Everything repeats. Am I going in circles or dare I hope I am on a spiral? But if a spiral, am I going up, or down?”

The exercise of writing in a diary or journal will never take away your grief. It may allow you to set some of your feelings outside yourself, if only for a spell. Here, you can see them more clearly, intensify or soften them as your mood requires, or treasure them as a remembrance of a loved one lost. A journal is what you want or need it to be, the material manifestation of something too broad and personal to be fully grasped. It is a gift to yourself, whenever you are ready to receive it.

