

# GRIEF *Matters*

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*Compassionate support through the first year of grief*

6 MONTHS AFTER LOSS

Six months after a loss can feel like the first big milestone of grief. You've made it through half of a year without the person. You've watched seasons change, and you've survived special days and holidays without them there. You might have met new people or seen new places that the person might have loved to see, too.

For some people, especially those who haven't been through loss before, six months may seem like a long time to grieve. But if you knew the person who died for years, for all their life, or for all your life, six months is really no time at all!

At the same time, the toll of grieving for years. Though time can ease pain, it may feel like it's making the burden of grief heavier at this point. This newsletter offers support, guidance, and practical ways to move forward while honoring your loss at half a year into your grief journey.

**"To live in hearts we leave behind is not to die."**

—Thomas Campbell, Hallowed Ground



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## The six-month peak

Grief experts say that the hardest feelings of grief are the strongest for most people around six months after a loss. After grieving for so many months, this might not be very reassuring to learn. These emotional symptoms are different for everyone, but could include disbelief, anger, sadness, anxiety, depression, guilt, or any other feelings that cause you emotional pain. You may also still be dealing with tough physical symptoms.

Be patient with the process if you feel like you're backsliding or still struggling with symptoms you have had for months. This is a normal part of the grief process. Remember that these feelings will eventually ease up, even though they may be the strongest they have been so far.

If you haven't checked in with yourself for a while, now is a good time. **Note your symptoms in a journal, grief assessment, or simply reflect on them.** Acknowledging your emotions can help you process grief. Consider talking to a trusted care team member, friend, family member, or counselor. Sharing your feelings with others can provide extra support and insight.

## Coping strategies now

**Keep processing your pain.** This task has been ongoing for many months and will continue to be a work in progress. It's important not to run from your pain but to face it and process it in healthy ways, such as talking about your loss with someone you trust, journaling, going to therapy, or practicing self-care.

**Avoid avoidance.** Avoidance is something we do—consciously or unconsciously—to escape emotional pain. While avoidance might provide relief in the moment, avoiding the pain of grief all the time delays emotional healing. It can have serious effects on your mental and physical health. Common grief avoidance behaviors may include:

- **Keeping overly busy**, working long hours, and filling every moment with activity.
- **Avoiding reminders**, like refusing to look at photos, visit certain places, talk about the person, or avoiding anniversaries and memorials.
- **Substance misuse**, like using alcohol, drugs, or food to numb emotions.
- **Socially withdrawing**, isolating from friends, family, or support groups. *(Continued on next page)*

## “...BUT, WHAT IF I'M NOT SAD THAT THEY'RE GONE?”

Grief can be really confusing if your relationship with the person who died was strained, unresolved, or even abusive. This type of loss can result in “disenfranchised grief,” grief that is not understood or might be judged by others, and can often feel lonely and isolating.

### Grief doesn't require a perfect, loving relationship

Most information you'll learn about grief is based on the idea of a perfect, loving relationship. Even if you're not mourning the person you loved, you can be grieving—grieving missed chances to fix things, unspoken words, or the peace you never had.

### What you can do

- Don't judge yourself or compare your grief to others'. You may feel angry one day and nothing at all the next. Let yourself feel whatever comes up.

- If honoring the person doesn't feel right to you, make meaning in your own way—perhaps by choosing how you want to live differently or what cycles you want to break.

Writing a letter to find a lasting connection with the person, write to release all your anger and frustration—then burn or rip it up.

Grieving a difficult relationship takes courage. Be gentle with yourself as you sort through the past, and remember that healing doesn't mean having all the answers or “forgiving and forgetting.” It means giving yourself space to move forward on your own terms.

**If you are struggling with this kind of grief journey, contact us for extra support.**

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- **Minimizing your own loss**, shutting down emotionally, denying the loss's impact on you, or telling yourself things like, "It wasn't that big of a deal" or "I should be over this by now."
- **Being over-controlling** to make up for the loss of control the death brought, such as micromanaging your or others' schedules, creating rigid rules on how things should be done, or being overly protective of children or other loved ones to try to keep them safe.

If you have been avoiding processing your pain up to this point, it is never too late to start! Avoiding this important task now can make it harder to face future challenges. Make a commitment to yourself to confront, feel, and process your emotions.

**Build on your foundation.** Over the last six months, you may have identified old or new friends who are a solid support system for you in the grieving process. These are people who do not shy away from your grief or expect you to "get over it." You may also have begun to explore new things that bring you peace or joy.

These people, places, and things are your foundation as you move forward. Use these support systems and invest time and energy in them as often as you can. Having social connections and activities to lean on can help get you through the worst waves of grief.

### Maintain your connection to the person.

After many months, you might be ready to start exploring the next task of grief: "**Finding ways to honor your loved one and maintain an enduring connection.**" (If you're not ready for this task yet, that's okay! You can work on it in your own time.) This task is about exploring your current relationship

with the person who died. *But how?* The person may not be here physically, but you can still think about how they live on in your memories and their impact on your life. You can also try some ideas to keep your connection alive every day, such as:

- Telling their stories
- Doing things they loved
- Looking at photos
- Lighting a candle or other sir
- Carrying
- Picking a symbol that reminds you of the person (an object, animal, color, number, or thinking you come

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## IDENTITY REFLECTION

At the half-year mark after loss, the way you see yourself, others, or the world may start to change. Reflecting on this can help you decide what would be most helpful for you at this point—maybe reaching out for more support or trying new ways to cope.

Think about your answers to these questions, write them in a journal, or share them with someone you trust. Prompts are below to help you get started.

### 1. How has this loss affected how I see myself?

- "I used to think of myself as \_\_\_\_\_. Now I think of myself as \_\_\_\_\_."
- "My role as a (parent, partner, friend, coworker) has changed in these ways..."
- "I feel different about my purpose or direction in life because..."

### 2. How has this loss affected my daily life?

- "My morning or evening routines have changed by..."
- "I struggle with (sleep, eating, focusing at work/school) because..."
- "I avoid certain places or activities such as..."

### 3. Has this loss changed my values or beliefs?

- "Before the loss, I believed \_\_\_\_\_. Now I feel differently because..."
- "I find myself questioning my faith/spiritual views in these ways..."
- "What matters most to me now is..."

If you still feel like you're in the thick of grief, remind yourself you've made it this far. You've gotten through every single day, even if you once thought that wasn't possible. Keep taking it one day, one step at a time. Contact us for support.

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## We're here for you.

We provide grief support services to families up to 13 months after a loss, but you don't have to receive hospice services to receive grief support. Our programs are available to *all* members of our community. Contact us for more information.

1-800-123-4567 | [info@domain.com](mailto:info@domain.com)

## Your custom content here.

Add a message from administration or the bereavement team, upcoming events, support group schedules, photos, and more. Or submit artwork for the full back page ad: 8" x 10.5" print area. Graphic design services are available for \$60/hour.

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## THE BENEFITS OF JOURNALING

Journaling can be a powerful tool during grief. Writing is a healthy outlet to process emotions and express what's hard to say out loud. It can also help you track how your grief changes. Use these prompts to help get you started.

- **Write a letter to the person** sharing what you miss, what's changed, or what you wish you could say. Things you might write about:
  - Updates about your life and who you are today
  - Ways they still influence your decisions or values
  - The parts of them that live on in you
  - How your relationship with them changed since their death
  - Express how you're feeling in the moment
- **"Then and now" journal entry.** Write two short reflections:
  - **Then:** What was your relationship with the person like before they died?
  - **Now:** How does that relationship live on? You can write about memories, lessons you learned, or traits and habits you carry on.
- **Gratitude list.** List things they passed down, and things you are grateful for. **Text area: 5.5x8.25"** This is also a good entry for a person (traditions they passed down, etc.). This is a good size for a list, big or small. Practicing daily gratitude is a path to healing. Come back to this list when you need comfort and hope.
- **Unfinished conversations.** Journal about unresolved issues or words left unsaid to help process guilt, anger, frustration, regret, etc. Ways you could start the entry:
  - "I wish I had told you..."
  - "The last thing we said was..."
  - "I've been struggling with..."
  - "Since you've been gone, I've..."
  - "I want you to know..."
  - "I forgive you for.../forgive me for..."

Whether you write daily or only when you feel the need, journaling can help lighten the emotional load. Writing can also deepen your sense of connection to the person who died—as well as your connection to yourself.

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## REMEMBERING WITH SADNESS & JOY

Grief can color even our happiest memories with sadness and pain. That doesn't mean we have to shut them out. It's possible—and healing—to let yourself feel both joy and sadness *together*.

The movie *Inside Out* illustrates this idea. In the story, 11-year-old Riley's emotions are colorful characters in her mind (Joy, Sadness, Anger, Disgust, and Fear) who color spheres that hold her memories. When Riley struggles after a big move, Sadness touches a lot of the golden, joyful memories, making them blue and sad.

Joy tries to keep Sadness away from the memories. But eventually, Joy realizes that some of the most meaningful memories can be a mix of emotions. It's only when Joy and Sadness work together that Riley can face her feelings and start to heal from the loss of her life before the move.

**Bittersweet memories are a sign of our enduring love.** Below is an exercise that can help you embrace them and feel more connected to the person's memory.

1. **Think of a happy memory**, like when the person was doing something they loved, making you laugh, supporting you, or making you proud. Look at pictures or watch videos of the person. Think about their voice and smells. Where were you? What were you doing?
2. **Reflect on the joy** you felt in that memory. Think about the positive emotions you felt in that memory. What made you so happy?
3. **Acknowledge your emotions.** Now think about how this memory makes you feel today. Do you still feel some warmth, happiness, or joy? Sadness? Anger? Gratitude? Emptiness? Let yourself feel *all* your feelings.
4. **Bring it together.** Create a journal entry, artwork, a video, music, or use any creative outlet you like that combines both the joy of the memory and the sadness of the loss.
5. **Consider sharing.** If you'd like, share what you've created with loved ones, a support group, a therapist, or on social media. Sharing your grief story and hearing others can help you normalize and process your feelings.

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## THE “WHAT-IFS” OF REGRET & GUILT

After loss, you might replay events and wonder, “*What if I’d said something different?*” or “*Why didn’t I do more?*” These thoughts don’t mean you did something wrong—they mean you cared deeply. Gently remind yourself:

- **You did the best you could with what you knew.** Not knowing how that day would unfold doesn’t mean you failed—it means you’re human.
- **Grief sharpens hindsight.** While we can’t change the past, we *can* make choices in the present that honor what we’ve learned.
- **You are not alone.** Regret is a normal part of grief for many people. Having regrets doesn’t mean you need to carry the extra weight of guilt.

**You are more than the things you wish you had done differently.** Acknowledge regret without letting it define your whole grief story by trying these exercises.

**Write a self-compassion letter:** Write to yourself as if you were a friend going through the same thing. This can help you speak more kindly to yourself.

1. Name your regrets
2. Acknowledge what you did
3. End with words of love
4. Re-read this letter

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**Example:** Dear [Your Name], I know that [things you couldn’t control] were outside your control and you did the best you could. That doesn’t lessen your love for [Name of Person]. Take it easy on yourself. Love, [Your Name]

**“Two truths” reflection:** Acknowledge the regret without letting it define your whole grief story by trying this exercise.

1. Fold a piece of paper in half
2. Label one side, “What I regret...” and the other, “What I know to be true...”
3. Write one or two thoughts on each side

**Example:**

- What I regret...*I wasn’t there for them when they died. I left them alone.*
- What I know to be true...*I loved them with all of my heart, showed them I cared in so many ways, and they knew I loved them.*

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# GRIEF ASSESSMENT

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

Use this assessment to reflect on how you are doing and where you may need support. Answer without fear of judgment—from yourself or others. Complete it privately or share with a counselor, care team member, or trusted support person. Save your responses to track your progress over time.

Contact us anytime you have questions or need support.

**1. EMOTIONAL SYMPTOMS**—Check any you struggle with/feel regularly:

<input type="checkbox"/> Persistent tears	<input type="checkbox"/> Loneliness
<input type="checkbox"/> Anger/irritability	<input type="checkbox"/> Hopelessness
<input type="checkbox"/> Anxiety/worry	<input type="checkbox"/> Mood swings
<input type="checkbox"/> Guilt/regret	<input type="checkbox"/> Unfocused/forgetful
<input type="checkbox"/> Numb/detached	<input type="checkbox"/> Constant overwhelm

List any other emotional symptoms below:

**3. WHERE YOU ARE NOW**—Rate how true each statement feels right now:  
0 = Not at all true | 1 = A little true | 2 = Somewhat true | 3 = Very true

I feel overwhelmed by my grief.	0	1	2	3
I avoid thinking and talking about my grief or the person.	0	1	2	3
I'm engaging in unusually risky or impulsive behavior.	0	1	2	3
I feel disconnected and am withdrawing socially.	0	1	2	3
I have trouble finding motivation to do everyday tasks.	0	1	2	3
I often feel like I'm stuck or not moving forward.	0	1	2	3
I feel like I've lost a part of my identity since the loss.	0	1	2	3
	0	1	2	3
	0	1	2	3
died.	0	1	2	3
	0	1	2	3
	0	1	2	3
	0	1	2	3
	0	1	2	3

Edit any content to suit your organization's needs or replace this assessment with your own

If you are struggling with intense symptoms, contact your counselor therapist. Contact us if you need a spiritual care team member. If you're struggling with questions a purpose, meaning, or why this happens, spiritual care can help. Spiritual care emotional support focused on spiritual well-being based on your background and beliefs, whether or not you follow a faith tradition. Would you like to meet with our spiritual care team?  YES  NO

**2. PHYSICAL SYMPTOMS**—Check any you struggle with/feel regularly:

<input type="checkbox"/> Low energy/fatigue	<input type="checkbox"/> Stomach issues
<input type="checkbox"/> Sleep issues	<input type="checkbox"/> Heart palpitations
<input type="checkbox"/> Appetite changes	<input type="checkbox"/> Tightness in chest
<input type="checkbox"/> Headaches	<input type="checkbox"/> Shortness of breath
<input type="checkbox"/> Muscle pain/tension	<input type="checkbox"/> Increased illnesses

List any other physical symptoms below:

**4. RISK & SUPPORT NEEDS**—Check all that apply.

<input type="checkbox"/> I live alone or feel like I have little emotional support.	<input type="checkbox"/> I've had trouble taking care of basic needs (sleep, eating, hygiene, etc.).
<input type="checkbox"/> I'm struggling to take care of my children/other dependents.	<input type="checkbox"/> I feel overwhelmed with responsibilities I didn't have before.
<input type="checkbox"/> I'm struggling with other losses or traumas I've experienced.	<input type="checkbox"/> I feel disconnected from my sense of purpose or spiritual beliefs.
<input type="checkbox"/> I'm dealing with major life changes (e.g., moving, health issues, caregiving).	<input type="checkbox"/> I am relying on alcohol or other substances to cope with my grief.
<input type="checkbox"/> I feel stuck or unable to move forward in my grief.	<input type="checkbox"/> I've had thoughts of hopelessness, self-harm, or suicide.

**5. COPING STRATEGIES & NOTES**—What has helped you cope so far? Also use this space (and the space on the back of this page) to share other thoughts.

If you are struggling with intense physical symptoms, contact your doctor/primary care team. Let them know you're grieving a loss.

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# You're not alone. We're here for you.

Whether your loss was recent or a while ago, we are here to walk with you as you navigate your grief. We serve all individuals and families in our community who are grieving, providing grief support and referrals to community resources. Contact us to connect with a member of our bereavement team.

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## PROLONGED GRIEF SELF-ASSESSMENT

It's normal to feel intense grief after loss, but some people can get "stuck" in these feelings for a long time. This is known as **prolonged grief disorder (PGD)**. PGD is not very common, but does affect about 7–10% of bereaved adults.

If it is less than 6 months after your loss, or you feel okay where you are with your grief, you don't need to fill this out. But if it's been 6 months or more and your grief still feels very intense, this assessment can help reveal possible signs of PGD. Even if you don't have PGD, your answers may show where you need more support. **This is a screening tool—not a diagnosis. Only a licensed mental health professional can determine if you have PGD.**

### OTHER THOUGHTS & QUESTIONS

**INSTRUCTIONS**—Think about your statement, rate how much it applies to you.  
0 = Not at all | 1 = A little | 2 = Somewhat | 3 = A great deal

**A. Intense yearning or longing:** I find myself having ongoing longing for the person who died.

**B. Preoccupation with the person:** Thoughts and memories of the person make it difficult to concentrate on other things.

<b>C. Difficulty accepting the loss:</b> I find it very hard to accept that the person's death is real.	0	1	2	3
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<b>D. Trouble moving on:</b> I can't move forward or plan for the future because of their death.	0	1	2	3
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<b>E. Emotional pain and distress:</b> Intense feelings (sadness, anger, bitterness, emptiness, etc.) over the loss interfere with daily life.	0	1	2	3
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<b>F. Functional impairment:</b> My grief interferes with my ability to function in work, relationships, or everyday life.	0	1	2	3
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<b>Add your ratings above and write the total here</b> <b>SCORE:</b>				
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<b>G. Duration:</b> It has been more than 12 months since my loved one died. If NO, how long has it been? _____	YES	NO
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<b>H. Support &amp; mental health history:</b> I have no/limited social support and/or a history of mental health challenges.	YES	NO
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<b>I. History of trauma:</b> I have experienced traumatic events in the past or other significant/unexpected/traumatic/stigmatized losses.	YES	NO
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**Edit any content to suit your organization's needs or replace this assessment with your own**

**Results:** A score of 12 or higher, frequent 2–3 responses, plus any "YES" answers, may indicate a need for a professional assessment. Contact us if you have questions about your results. We can either provide more support or refer you to a mental health professional who can help determine whether or not you have PGD.

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