

GRIEF *Matters*

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Compassionate support through the first year of grief

9 MONTHS AFTER LOSS

Around nine months after loss, you've passed the halfway point of your first year of grief. You're a lot closer to the first anniversary of your loss than the start of your grief journey, but not quite at that big milestone just yet. By now, enough time has passed that most others have moved on—but grief may still be a frequent guest in your life.

Grief experts say that the six-month mark is the emotional peak for many people, like the highest point of a mountain hike. Now, you might be heading downhill, but there is still a long journey ahead. Your day-to-day might feel easier than before of hiking. And yet, you m **Text area: 4.75x6.25"**

Now is also a time when many people start looking ahead to the future more often than they think about the past. This newsletter invites you to reflect on how far you've come and prepare for what's ahead.

"Grief can be a burden, but also an anchor. You get used to the weight, how it holds you in place."

—Sarah Dessen, The Truth About Forever



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Looking ahead

Set new goals. Reflecting on how your loss has changed you—your sense of self, your values, and the way you see the world—can be an important part of healing. As the one-year mark approaches, notice how these changes might guide your next steps.

Use some of the prompts below to write in a journal, post on social media, create art, or do anything that helps you express your feelings. Thinking about these questions can help you set goals and define what healing looks like for you moving forward.

- **What brings me peace and purpose, or what do I want to focus on more in the future?**
- **What personal strengths have I discovered on this grief journey?**
- **How do I want to grow emotionally, spiritually, or creatively?**
- **What routines or practices have been helpful, and how can I keep them going?**
- **What relationships do I want to keep going or reconnect with?**
- **What new goals, big or small, do I feel ready to set?**
- **How can I honor my loved one as I move forward?**

Remember, this is not a to-do list that *must* be done. Think of your goals as gentle reminders of intentions you are setting for yourself. **Talk about this with your support network**—friends, family, therapists, or care teams—so they can give you help and support when you need it.

Plan for important dates. Ahead of the first anniversary of your loss, make a plan for how you want to spend the day. Planning for this big milestone by thinking through what might bring you calm, peace, or joy can give you a sense of control. This also applies to birthdays, holidays, other anniversaries, and any dates that were important to you or the person who died.

Above all, try to avoid drifting into the day without support or direction. Unstructured time on painful days can lead to more stress and unhealthy coping. Even a basic plan like setting time for rest, connection, or self-care can make a difference.

Questions to help you plan ahead:

- **Would you prefer to be alone**, have company, or a mix of both? (*Continued on next page*)

EMOTIONAL SCARS: COMPOUNDING TRAUMAS

You may have a more intense grief reaction to this loss if you've had past traumas such as other losses, a difficult childhood, existing mood or anxiety disorders, or being part of a traumatic event. This is especially true if the earlier traumas were never fully processed and healed.

Just like physical wounds, emotional scars. Some fade over time. Some remain. When a new wound appears, like the death of someone important to you, it can reopen or worsen the old wounds, causing more pain than expected.

Now, you might find yourself overwhelmed—grieving this new loss while also feeling the ache of past pain coming back. It's a lot to carry, and it can make your new grief journey very hard to handle.

If you have compounding traumas, the basics of the

grieving process are the same: Feel your feelings. Find healthy ways to express them. Don't hide from your feelings or numb your pain with unhealthy habits. Your emotions may be intense, but you *can* survive them.

Even good reasons you avoided past grief, like not wanting to open it today, with support, can open the door to healing. If it feels like too much to handle on your own, seeking help from a therapist—especially one trained in grief or trauma—can provide a safe space to unpack your feelings and help you find a way forward.

There is strength and bravery in taking that first step to reach out for help. **Contact us if you need a referral or extra support.**

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- **What rituals or traditions do you want to keep** or start in their honor?
- **What would feel most comforting that day?** Easy ideas include resting, taking a quiet walk, lighting a candle, or visiting a peaceful place.
- **Consider including other people** who were close to the person in the plans for extra support and connection. You could:
 - Share a meal together
 - Visit the person's resting place
 - Look through photos or tell stories
 - Do an activity that the person enjoyed
 - Share a social media post or text each other memories of the person

In some cases, you may be the only one who carries the memory closely—or maybe it was a difficult relationship, and you don't want to carry the memory at all. That doesn't make your grief less real. Create a plan that feels personally meaningful, whether you spend the day quietly reflecting, doing something symbolic, or connecting with loved ones.

Keep riding the waves. As your grief journey progresses, you may begin to have more good days again. But waves of grief can still appear, and some days may feel just as overwhelming as they did months ago. Be patient with yourself during the hard moments, and turn to the healthy coping outlets that work best for you.

On good days, lean into feelings like joy, peace, or happiness. Making the most of the good days can help you get through the hard ones. Try some of the following tips to support yourself:

- **Name your waves.** If a strong wave of grief hits, label what you're feeling: anger, guilt, joy, loneliness, etc. Naming the feeling can help you acknowledge and process it.

“Somewhere down the line, and it's different for everybody, you find that the waves are only 80 feet tall...And while they still come, they come further apart.

“You can see it coming, for the most part, and prepare yourself. And when it washes over you, you know that somehow you will, again, come out the other side. Soaking wet, sputtering, still hanging on to some tiny piece of the wreckage, but you'll come out.”

—G. Snow

- **Do a** **Quote box: 3.625x3"** ay, try to stop *ht now?* *What ... day?*
- **Practice soothing rituals.** Calming activities such as a daily walk, a cup of tea, writing in a journal, or lighting a candle can bring peace and comfort.
- **Make room for joy without guilt.** Smiling, laughing, or feeling excitement is not dishonoring the person's memory. Quite the opposite—if they loved you, they would want you to be happy.
- **Keep a “memory touchpoint.”** Whether it's a photo, a piece of jewelry, a quote they loved written on a small paper, or any other memento, having a small item that keeps their memory close can be grounding on both good and bad days.
- **Connect with others.** When you're ready, talk about your grief with a trusted friend, a support group, or a therapist. Sharing can lighten the weight you're carrying.

Although you will never fully “get over” this loss, you may be learning how to grow around your grief. Over time, you might begin to see a future where your life and your loss can exist together.

Remember, our care team is here for you if you need a listening ear, resources, or guidance as you continue on your grief journey. Contact us anytime you need

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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

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 IMPORTANCE OF REFLECTION

Living with grief every day can make it hard to notice your progress over time. When old feelings resurface, it's easy to feel frustrated and stuck. Reflecting on your progress can help. Take a moment to think about your grief journey, then answer the questions below.

Progress reflection exercise

1. Do you have more good days now than you did early on?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
2. Do you feel less numb or more connected to life around you?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
3. Are you less tearful throughout the day?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
4. Can you do more day-to-day tasks than you could before?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
5. Are you sleeping or eating better now?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
6. Have any of your physical symptoms improved?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
7. Are you maintaining routines or setting new ones?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
8. Can you better recognize when a wave of grief is coming?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
9. Do you have more moments of joy, peace, or calm?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
10. Can you talk/think about your grief?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
11. Have you found meaning in your grief?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
12. Do you have a support system?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
13. Have you returned to any activities you used to enjoy?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
14. Is it easier to be around others, even if just for short periods?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
15. Can you see a future that includes joy, hope, or purpose?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No

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If you had even one or two **Yes** answers, consider it progress! Give yourself credit and acknowledge what you've accomplished.

If you said **No** to every question or you are still really struggling, contact us so we can provide support. You don't have to do this alone.

"Sometimes you have to look back in order to understand the things that lie ahead."

—Yvonne Woon



Contact us with questions or for more support.

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PROLONGED & COMPLICATED GRIEF

For most people, the hardest period of grief will last about one to two years. Intense symptoms begin to ease within six months to a year after loss. **Prolonged grief disorder (PGD, also known as complicated grief) is intense, persistent grief that disrupts daily life and lasts several months or more.** Though it's not really common, PGD affects about 7–10% of grieving adults.

Risk factors for PGD—You may be at higher risk of having PGD if you:

- Are under 60 years old
- Had a very close or dependent relationship with the person who died, such as the loss of a partner or child
- Have little or no support from others
- Have a history of depression or other mental health conditions
- Tend to have mostly negative or hopeless thoughts
- Have experienced other losses, trauma, or big stressors in life

Signs to watch for—While the usual grief journey has ups and downs, there are no good days with complicated grief. **Signs you may have complicated grief include:**

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- Severe symptoms that interfere with everyday tasks for a long period of time
- Emotional pain interferes with everyday tasks for a long period of time
- Intense longing for the person or separation distress
- Still having a lot of trouble accepting the loss
- Not able to make plans or set goals for the future

PGD must be diagnosed by a qualified mental health professional. If you are more than six months past your loss and any of the above applies, you may want to check in with a licensed therapist, psychologist, or psychiatrist.

Having complicated grief is not a personal failure. It is simply a sign you need extra support. If you think you might have PGD, let us know. We can provide a self-assessment or a referral if needed.

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REDEFINING IDENTITY & PURPOSE

The early months of grief were about surviving day to day. Now, as the anniversary of your loss approaches, your focus may shift from just getting through the day to finding new meaning in life.

You might start asking yourself, “*Who am I now? What is my purpose? What’s next?*” Even if the answers are not clear now, these questions are a good sign that you are moving forward in your grief journey.

Grief and identity

Loss can change how you see yourself, especially if you were really close with the person. It’s important to take small steps to reconnect with yourself. How you do this will be unique, but here are some ideas to get you started:

- **Return to a hobby or passion** you once enjoyed. It doesn’t have to be a big project. Taking just a few minutes a day to do something you like doing can remind you of who you are.
- **Try something new.** Learn a new skill, take a class, or explore a new topic to help you discover
- **Volunteer.** Help **Text area: 5.5x8.25”** compassion and give you shared pu
- **Nurture your spirituality or faith,** if you follow a practice, to help you feel connected. It’s also normal to question or change beliefs after loss. Some explore other spiritual paths, like being in nature, practicing mindfulness and gratitude, or creative expression.
- **Journaling** can reveal patterns in your feelings and how you’ve changed after loss. It is also a good outlet for reflection and to process emotions.
- **Talk to a trusted friend, support group, or counselor** to help you sort through your thoughts about your identity and future.

There’s no deadline for redefining your purpose. Identity after loss returns in small steps and quiet moments of self-discovery. Be patient with the process. You’ve always been—and still are—*you*, even as you find new meaning in life.

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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

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

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

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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