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GRIEF *Matters*

Compassionate support through the first year of grief

6 MONTHS AFTER LOSS

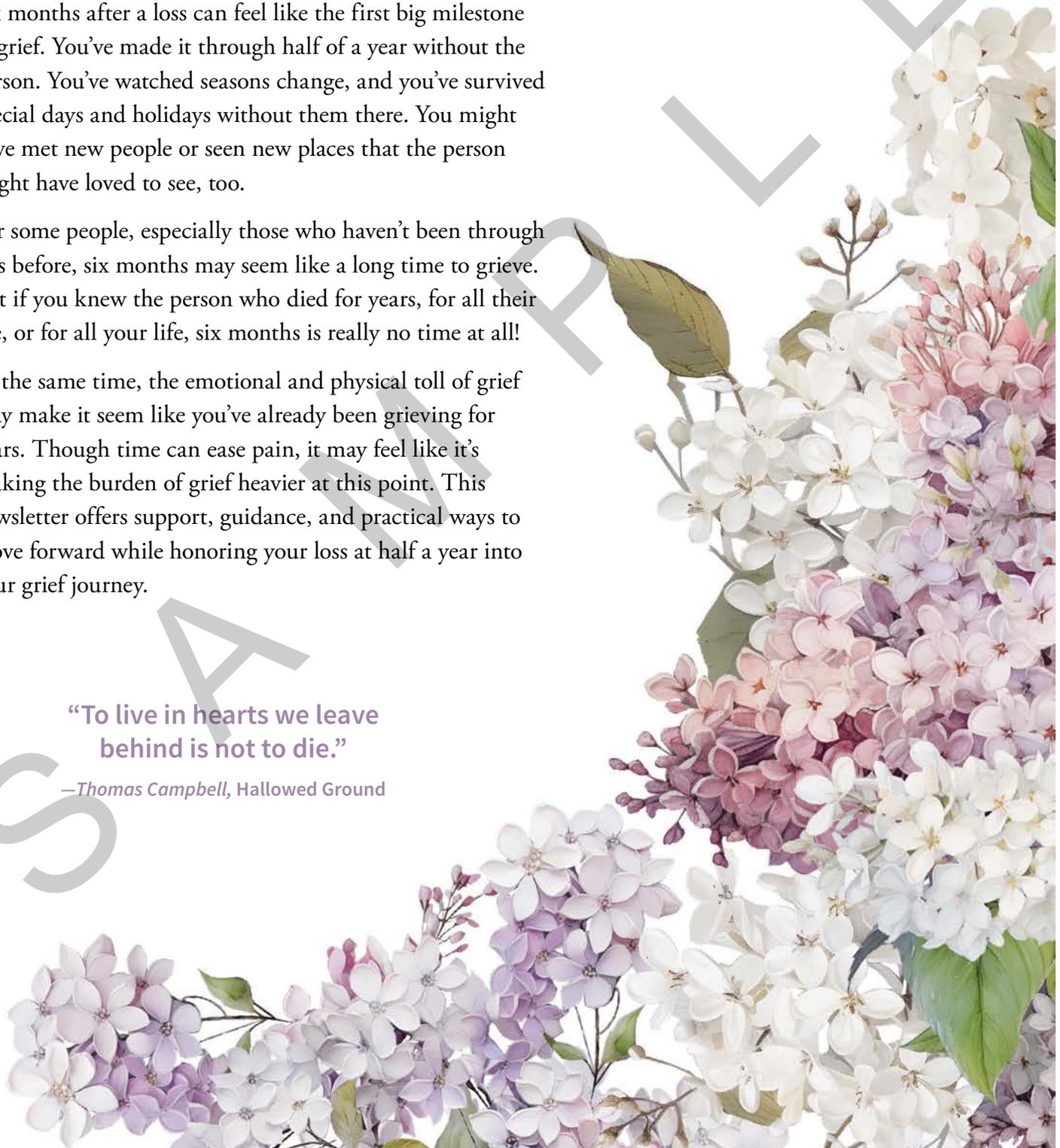
Six months after a loss can feel like the first big milestone of grief. You've made it through half of a year without the person. You've watched seasons change, and you've survived special days and holidays without them there. You might have met new people or seen new places that the person might have 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 emotional and physical toll of grief may make it seem like you've already been 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*



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 still applies. Even if you're not mourning the person, you may still 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.
- Instead of writing a letter to find a lasting connection to the person, write to release all your anger, pain, 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.

- **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 simple ritual
- Carrying a memento
- Picking a symbol that reminds you of the person (an object, animal, color, number, song, etc.) and thinking of them when you come across it

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 if you need it.



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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