

# GRIEF BEFORE LOSS

A WORKBOOK FOR ADOLESCENTS FACING ANTICIPATORY GRIEF



CareFirst

*If you are reading this, you are probably in the process of losing someone you care about, someone you love. That person might be a sibling, parent, grandparent, other family member or a friend. It can be a difficult and confusing experience to lose someone who is such a big part of your life. You are probably feeling a flood of different emotions and experiencing conflicting thoughts. You might see adults, children and peers around you acting differently than you. You might feel like you are going crazy. You are not going crazy though. You are experiencing anticipatory grief, the grief a person experiences when they know a loved one will die soon.*

*It is important to learn to cope and find healthy ways to express your thoughts and feelings about grief, loss and your loved one who is dying. This booklet will explore grief and loss and give you opportunities to explore healthy grieving activities through reflection, music, writing, drawing and more. You may connect well with some activities more than others, and you may think of similar ways to complete the same task. While it is sometimes helpful to explore new ways of doing things, you may not connect with an activity. Make it yours. Do what you think will help you best. Through this journey, you will find ways to create and maintain a healthy connection with your loved one to help yourself cope with the feelings you have now and the feelings that may crop up again later.*



# GRIEF IS

a reaction to the impact of loss. Loss happens, it impacts you, and you react internally and externally. That reaction is called grief. Mourning is the process of coping with loss and grief. There are phases to the grief and mourning we endure after a loss. Some people go through these stages quickly, others more slowly. There is no particular order to the stages, and it is very common that people go back through the stages numerous times. One way to look at these stages is to see them as tasks, actions to be taken on your part so that you can learn to cope with your loss.



## Four Tasks of Grief

1. Accept the reality of the loss
2. Experience the pain of grief
3. Adjust to the environment without your loved one
4. Emotionally relocate your loved one and move on with your life

Worden, 1996



***Like drops of water in a stream, no two paths are exactly the same. Each person dealing with grief will address the tasks above in different ways and may go back and forth among them many times.***

"Grief is not a disorder, a disease, or a sign of weakness. It is an emotional, physical, and spiritual necessity, the price you pay for love. The only cure for grief is to grieve."

~Earl Grollman

When you first heard that your loved one was going to die, you may have been in shock or disbelief. These are common feelings many people experience when they hear this kind of news. During this initial stage, you may feel a sense of foginess, that your world is not real in some way. As the illness progresses, these feelings may return as you realize your loved one is not able to do as much.

**What did you feel when you first found out about your loved one's illness?**

**Make a list of words or phrases that describe your thoughts at that time.  
Circle those that return to your thoughts now.**

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Awareness that your loved one is dying will bring you emotional feelings and may even bring on physical pain. To experience the pain of grief, one must face these feelings and cope with them. Feelings you may experience include guilt, fear, discomfort, anger, illness, and more.

### **What are some feelings you have now?**

**Choose one feeling to write down and write down the next word you think of. Continue writing words, one right after the other to form a chain of words until you have at least ten words.**

**Choose another feeling and create a chain of words again.**

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You may also feel your friends do not understand you or what you are going through or experience poor concentration, sleep disturbances, or lower self-esteem. If these feelings are not dealt with and you do not learn how to confront and cope with these feelings, you could also experience depression.

**Write a letter to your friends to explain what you are going through and feeling right now. Explain to your friends how they can help support you.**

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# Support for Your Grief Journey

You are defining yourself as a young adult and it can be difficult to accept help from others, especially from adults. Support during this time is important and allowing adults to help you in constructive ways might be very helpful for you at this time and throughout this journey of loss and grief.

It can be difficult to talk with adults, even parents with whom you have a close relationship. It might be helpful to practice your communication skills, and make them practice theirs too. If there is something important you need to talk about, try to phrase it with a statement about what you need from the person. For example, "I have a problem but I don't want advice. I just need you to listen and hear what I am going through right now." This is the part where they have to practice listening and not giving advice. Don't be surprised if they need more practice. Communication is an art and takes practice. Try to repeat yourself that you do not want advice or further conversation at this time. You might even let them know that you will come to them for advice if you need to, and you will let them know when the problem is resolved. This will give them the chance to trust you and practice their patience.

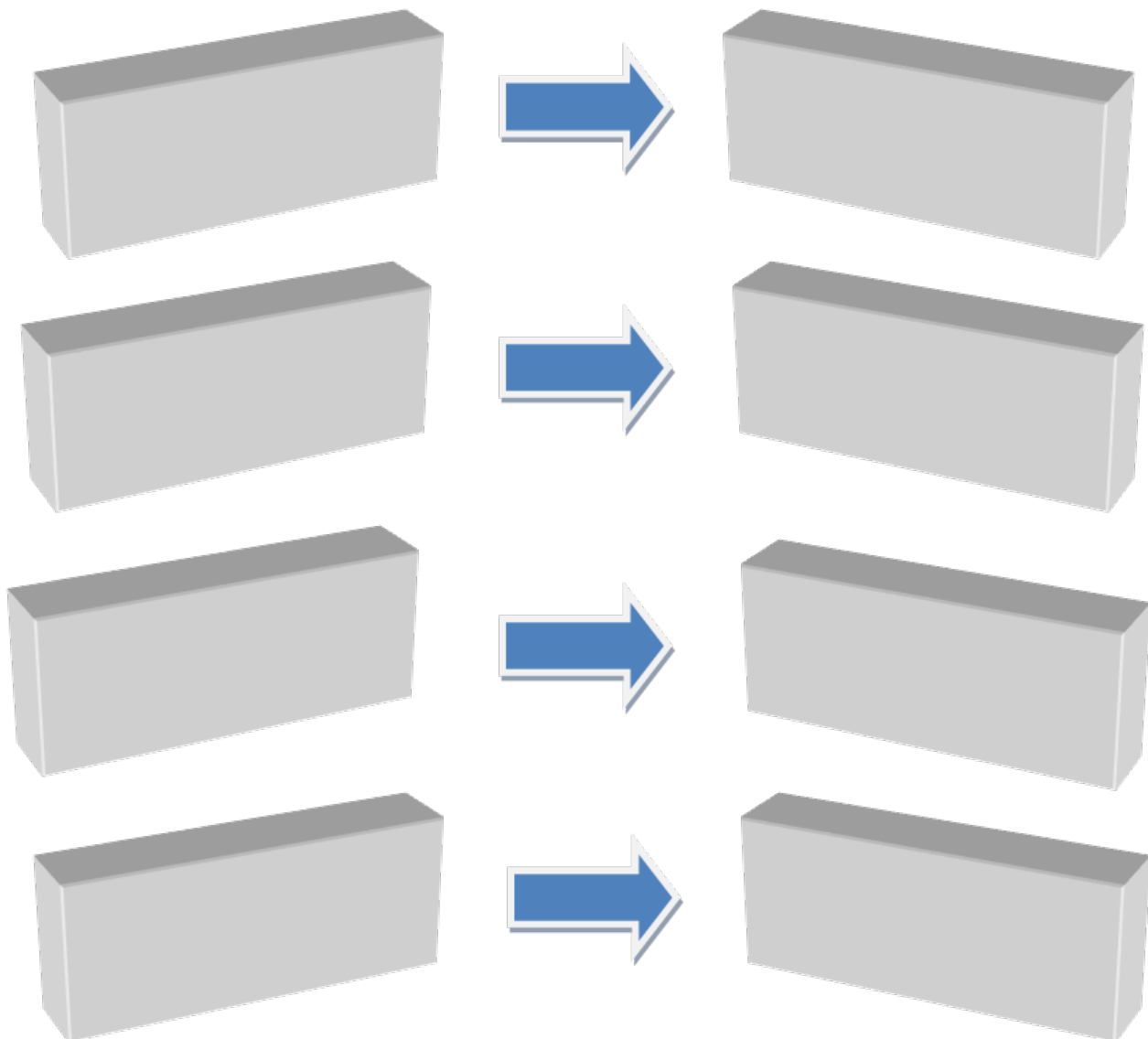




Eventually, you will need to adjust to your environment without your loved one. Right now you are adjusting to your environment with your loved one's declining health and abilities. You are also adjusting to living with others who are experiencing the loss with you. Your loved one played a role in your family or circle of friends, and now that role is changing. It is also a time for you to change your role. You may have to do more chores or help with younger siblings. You may have to get rides from friends to get to school events. You may miss out on some of things you wanted to do or that you had been looking forward to for a long time. These are only some examples of external changes you may have to make while on this journey.

### What external changes have happened since you found out your loved one is dying?

Use the diagram to show how things used to be and how they are now.



Internally, you may experience a difference in your self-perception. This means you might be questioning how your dreams will come true without the person who is dying by your side. You might also wonder who you will turn to when you have questions about becoming an adult and making life's many decisions.

**Imagine one of your dreams and that you have reached that dream in your future.**

**What was your dream?  
How did you make it happen?  
Who helped you along the way?**

**Write a newspaper article that celebrates your success, and be sure to quote yourself thanking the people who helped you along the way.**

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Finally, the impending death of your loved one may provoke thoughts and ideas that challenge your spiritual beliefs. You may find yourself exploring, questioning, confirming, or changing your spiritual beliefs. This is a natural part of facing death.

**Write to describe your spiritual beliefs and explain whether they have supported you, changed or if you have questioned them in some way.**

**What are your beliefs?**

**Do you use your beliefs to help you through this loss?**

**Have you changed your beliefs or questioned your beliefs since you found out your loved one is dying?**

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It may feel like your loved one is not with you already, or you might have fears about moving on without that person. There are ways to move on though, while carrying this person with you. It may help to remember the person in healthier times or to talk to others about their happy memories of your loved one. You might create a place to write down or draw pictures of your memories that you can look at now and later. You might remember certain sayings and hear your loved one's voice saying them when you need to hear that message most. It is important to find a way to move on with your life, but it is also possible to carry your loved one with you through good times and bad.

**What is something you want to remember about your loved one?**

**What is something your loved one said often?**

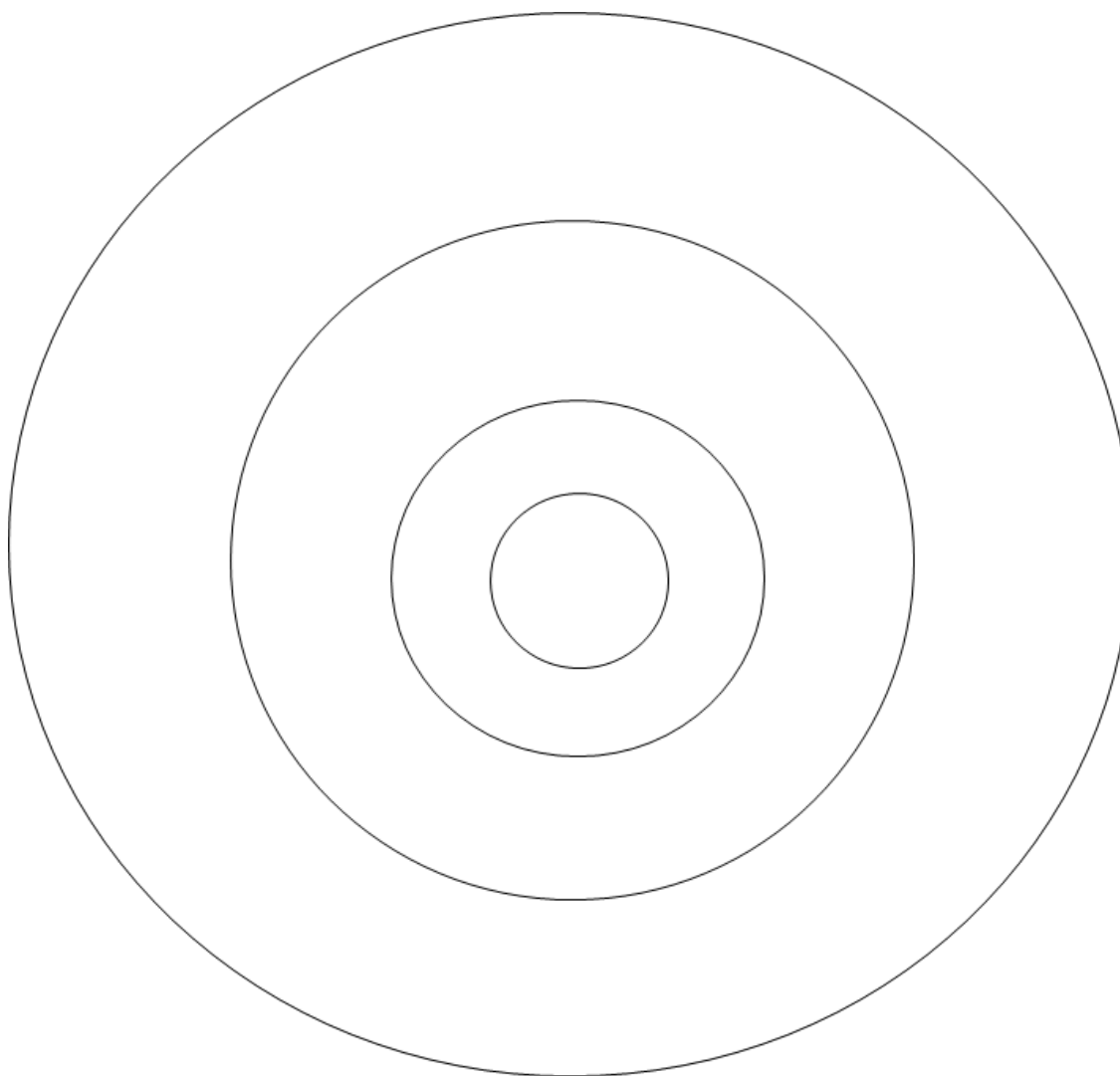
**What would your loved one say if you were having a hard time?**

**What would your loved one say if you were experiencing success?**

**Write down a funny story about your loved one based on a memory.**

People go through the stages of grief, or complete the tasks of grief, in different ways for different losses. For example, losing an item you love like an iPod or cell phone is very different from losing a pet. Losing a pet is much different from losing a distant relative or a friend of a friend. In turn, that loss is very different from losing someone to whom you are very close, such as a parent, sibling, grandparent, cousin, or close friend. You might find it much more difficult to go through this loss than any other loss you might have experienced, depending on the intensity of the relationship you have with the person who is dying.

**Use the bulls-eye diagram below to show how close you are to your loved one who is dying. Draw each person you count on in your life placing those you are closest to nearest to the center of the bulls-eye.**



Other factors that impact how you grieve include the way in which this person is dying, how this person is reacting to his or her own loss of life, whether you perceive your relationship with this person as positive or negative, how much support you have, and what kind of coping mechanisms you have for stressful situations.

What is your relationship with this person...(expand on this)

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# Stressful Situations

Stress is a natural reaction and helps keep you aware and alert in situations so you can react appropriately. Imagine you are crossing the street and realize a car is not stopping for you. If you were not stressed out by that situation, your body would not be able to jump quickly out of the way.

Stress can help you be more mindful for a test or help you concentrate on a swing in baseball or softball. Unfortunately, stress is not always helpful. Sometimes stress takes over, or will not shut off, and you need to do something about it. This is where coping mechanisms come in.

**Coping mechanisms** are the behaviors we use to help us deal with stress. Some coping mechanisms are healthy, others are unhealthy. Healthy coping mechanisms give you a break from stress but do not allow you to avoid the stress. They also do not create more stress or cost you more time and money than you can afford. Healthy coping mechanisms do not put your health and safety at risk and lead to long-term positive effects. You already have some coping mechanisms, and you will learn many more throughout your lifetime. This is good because coping mechanisms do not all work for all situations.

What coping mechanisms have you used in the past?

Circle those you have used or use now and write in ones that are not in the list:

Exercise	Music	_____
Reading	Punching	_____
Writing	Cutting	_____
Drawing	_____	_____
Screaming	_____	_____
Eating	_____	_____
Talking	_____	_____

Put a star by the healthy coping mechanisms you use. For those that are unhealthy, think about what you can do to change those or keep from doing them. Will you need help making these changes? Who can help support you?





There is no right or wrong way to grieve. There is no set time to grieve. You may have a sibling who moves through the stages more quickly or slowly than you. You may look around at others and find they are not acting like you expect them to through the grief. You may feel like you are crazy for feeling the way you do about your loved one's illness and impending death. You are not crazy and your other loved ones are not crazy either. You are just different people grieving in different ways.

**How do you grieve?**

**What do you think others are doing that is odd?**

**What do people tell you is odd about how you are grieving?**

**Are there some things you do to grieve that are the same as others around you?**

**For each way that you cope with grief, decide if it is healthy or not healthy.**

**What can you do to change the unhealthy things you are doing?**

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You are all dealing with this loss in your own ways and you can all work to be supportive of each other through this difficult time. The best way to do this is by communicating. You need your own space to work on your feelings, but you can also let others know what you need and what you are feeling. Let people help you. It can be a teacher, coach, parent, counselor, friend or friend's parent. Sometimes you might just listen to someone talk to you, other times you might need to verbalize your thoughts and feelings. Sometimes, you might just need to sit or do something without talking at all or with talking about nothing related to your loss. There are also support groups and events for teens going through similar experiences that can be helpful.

*Make a list of people below who you can turn to for help when you need it. Put a check mark in the boxes to show whether you can talk with that person, if that person is a good listener, and whether you can just hang out with that person.*

PERSON	TALK	LISTEN	HANG OUT

You are in a particularly unique situation right now. Your loved one is dying, but is still here. Your role in the relationship you have with that person is changing while memories of your previous role are fresh in your mind. Some of these memories are good ones, some might not be good. Regardless, it is all changing now. Draw or write to show how your role is changing. Try to include your loved one's changing roles as well. Use these questions as a guide.

What was your role in the family before your loved one was ill?

What is your role now?

How have each of those changes impacted you?

How do you feel about those changes?

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# References

Worden, J. (2009). Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy: A Handbook for the Mental Health Practitioner (4th ed., pp. 39-53). New York, NY: Springer Publishing Company.

# Notes

SUPPORTING YOU  
EMBRACING FAMILY  
STRENGTHENING  
COMMUNITY

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*CareFirst is a not-for-profit community-based program providing residents of Chemung, Schuyler, and Steuben counties of New York State with complete hospice, palliative care, and grief services.*

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