

**Grief**

Exercise



n/a



Client



No

Journaling Through Grief in 40 Days

The loss of someone special is one of the most distressing experiences we go through as humans. Unsurprisingly, in the throes of grief, the confusion of thoughts, feelings, and emotions can be overwhelming. Our natural tendency might be to avoid or suppress these painful and sometimes conflicting thoughts. However, chronicling this pain can be a powerful tool for the bereaved [1]. Indeed, journaling through grief promotes self-reflection and yields insights that facilitate adjustment to an irrevocably changed life [2].

While grief is a complex and deeply personal process, the benefits of putting grief into words are extensive. For those grieving, it can be difficult to understand and communicate the painful emotions that go hand-in-hand with unspeakable loss. Journaling through grief encourages the exploration of these difficult emotions and provides a space for the bereaved to clarify and express themselves without inhibition or fear of judgment [3]. Moreover, writing about intense emotions and difficult experiences has been shown to facilitate meaning-making [4], promote immune function, overall health, and well-being [5], and improve resilience [6].

Journaling through grief also allows individuals to take a step back and reflect on their experiences from different perspectives. In doing so, over time, the bereaved become less focused on the painful events that have been weighing them down [7]. As the adage goes, the trouble with making mental notes is that the ink fades quickly. However, through journaling, clients can create a lasting record of their journey so that they may reflect upon their progress and explore the loss of a loved one in a safe, non-judgmental way.



Author

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Goal

This exercise aims to help clients through the process of grief journaling so that they may connect with, express, and explore thoughts and feelings surrounding the loss of a loved one in a safe, non-judgmental environment.



Advice

- When journaling, clients are advised to choose a time each day when they would not be disturbed and could complete entries at their own pace and without pressure. Committing to a regular practice of grief journaling can be difficult. However, clients should aim to write for at least 15-20 minutes, but no longer than 45 minutes. If clients feel they have run out of things to write, they may use the remaining time to summarize what they have just written.
- Clients should remain honest and open throughout the journaling process. They are the sole owner of the text, and no one else will have access to their innermost thoughts and feelings. The key is to be as genuine and authentic as possible. If clients feel overwhelmed at any point in the writing process, they can step back from writing and take a break until they are ready to continue.
- Ensure clients that grammar, spelling, structure, and punctuation are not important. Entries will likely become more structured over time; however, since this journal belongs to them, they do not have to conform to any particular style. There is no wrong way to journal.
- When writing about grief and loss, clients will undoubtedly feel some strong and perhaps overwhelming emotions. They may cry, become angry, or feel deeply upset, particularly in the early stages of journaling. Remind clients that this is understandable and completely normal for this kind of exercise.
- It may be comforting for clients to reflect on previous entries and see just how far they have come. With a tangible record to look back on, clients may more easily notice their progress and better understand how their feelings about loss changed.
- Clients must establish a ritual for journaling based on what works best for them. They should determine the time of the day that is best suited to this type of journaling. Additionally, clients should create a safe space that is comfortable and free of disturbances. Clients may also wish to establish self-care rituals in conjunction with their writing time to encourage self-compassion.



References

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Journaling Through Grief in 40 Days

The death of a loved one and the pain that follows are among the most difficult experiences we can go through. Amid grief, feelings can be overwhelming. However, putting our most heartfelt thoughts and emotions into words can help us slow down and reflect upon the loss of someone special.

Writing can be a healing experience. After losing someone special, it may be difficult to understand your feelings until you write them down. Journaling can help you reflect on, and perhaps better understand, what you are going through. Journaling through grief also provides a safe place to explore these complicated emotions, remember your loved one and his/her impact on your life, and record your continuing journey. This exercise will guide you through the practice of journaling through grief over 40 days so that you may explore the thoughts and feelings surrounding the loss of your loved one.

Step 1: Before you begin

Before you begin writing, take a few moments to relax and pay attention to your breath. Breathe in slowly through your nose and hold for 3-5 seconds. Now, gently exhale through your mouth and hold again for 3-5 seconds. With each inhale and exhale, notice the air as it flows in and out of your lungs. Notice your chest as it gently expands and contracts.

As you write in your journal, remember to:

- Create a safe space for your journaling that is comfortable and where you are unlikely to be disturbed by others. Turn off your phone.
- Do not censor yourself. Be honest - you are writing only for yourself. No one else will have access to your journal unless you want them to.
- Be kind to yourself. If you begin to feel overwhelmed at any point, take a break and resume writing when you feel you are ready to do so.
- There is no wrong way to journal, and you can write however it feels right to you. You might prefer to write in complete sentences, short paragraphs, or a continuous flow of thoughts, for example.

Step 2: Journaling prompts

A blank page can be intimidating, particularly when you first begin to write about the loss you have experienced. The following prompts, questions, and quotes about grief and loss can guide your writing and help you overcome this potential barrier. Work your way through these prompts, in the order in which they are listed, every day for 40 days, and spend around 15-20 minutes writing each entry.

Remember, you do not need to worry about spelling, grammar, or even writing full sentences. This journal is for *you*, and you can write however feels right to you.



■ DAY ONE: A WOUNDED HEART WILL HEAL IN TIME

"A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step."

- Lao Tzu

You have lost someone you love dearly, and that is one of the most difficult things you will ever go through. You should be proud of yourself for starting this journey. Your heart is aching, and yet, here you are, willing to face the pain and sorrow. This journal is a private space for you to let those thoughts and feelings out, and you *do* need to let them out. Your journey will not be easy, but in time, you will find glimmers of hope in the darkness. Slowly, the good days will begin to outnumber the bad, and you will laugh again. Wherever you are in your journey through grief today, just write. Let it all out. Write whatever you are feeling in your heart and let your thoughts spill out onto the page. What are you feeling here in this moment?

■ DAY TWO: YOUR SACRED LOVE

"Love doesn't die with death. Love is like liquid; when it pours out, it seeps into others' lives. Love changes form and shape. Love gets into everything. Death doesn't conquer all; love does. Love wins every single time. Love wins by lasting through death."

- Kate O'Neill

Your love is a powerful force and one that is not forgotten in death. Yes, grief is unspeakably painful, but the bond you share is stronger than the grip of death. Those we love deeply become part of us forever - your love is unique and everlasting. And that is what grief is: love. It is the sign that you loved someone deeply. Grief is love with nowhere to go, but this love persists and endures. Today, take some time to think about this everlasting love and to bask in its beauty. How has this unique love enriched your life? How has this love forged an enduring connection? How can you continue to show your love for this special person when he or she no longer here with you? What can you do to let this love live on in the lives of those who are still around?

■ DAY THREE: IT'S OK TO BE ANGRY

"I sat with my anger long enough until she told me her real name was grief."

- Issac Rowe

Anger and grief often reside together. You might feel anger towards your loved one for leaving, anger for things left unsaid, anger at the injustice of it all, and sometimes for no apparent reason. Hiding your anger is not helpful. You must allow yourself to feel and acknowledge your anger so that you may work through it. If your anger could speak, what would it be saying right now? When you experience anger, wherein the body do you feel it? If you were to be completely honest, what are you angry about? How can you allow yourself to feel and express this anger today safely?



■ DAY FOUR: DESCRIBING GRIEF

"To lose someone you love is to alter your life forever. You don't get over it because 'it' is the person you loved. The pain stops, there are new people, but the gap never closes. How could it? This hole in my heart is in the shape of you, and no one else can fit it. Why would I want them to?"

- Jeanette Winterson

Your life has been changed forever, and sometimes it feels like people do not quite understand the true nature of grief. Today, write about the things you wish other people understood about grief and about the pain you have suffered since your loss.

■ DAY FIVE: YOUR GRIEF IS LEGITIMATE

"It hurts because it mattered."

- John Green

Grief can be a difficult and lengthy process. While the passage through grief is different for everyone, it is important to recognize that the loss you have experienced is valid. Your grief is understandable and legitimate - it hurts so much because you have lost someone that meant a great deal to you.

Today, you will write a letter to yourself that will focus on validating your grief, the love you still hold in your heart, and your future journey without this person. Today, write about your experience and efforts so far. Have you felt anger, hate, blame, or resentment? Do others around you feel discomfort when you express these feelings? Think about the ways your feelings are worthy, reasonable, and completely normal.

■ DAY SIX: THE PAIN OF GRIEF

"We must embrace pain and burn it as fuel for our journey."

- Kenji Miyazawa

You might not think of grief as a full-body experience, but the heartache, pain, and suffering felt after losing a loved one is more than just emotional. It can also feel like an intensely physical condition. If you were asked to explain how grief feels in your body, what would you say? How would you describe the pain you felt when you first lost your loved one? How would you describe the way grief makes your heart feel?

■ DAY SEVEN: LOST HOPES AND DREAMS

"All connections are infused with dreams of what is possible in the future. When we lose someone important to us, we aren't just grieving the loss; we are grieving the shattered dream."

- Bill Crawford

You are not hurt just because you lost someone special, but also because you lost the hopes and dreams you shared for the future, the plans that will never come to fruition, and the experiences that will never be shared. Life as you know it will never be the same, and it is not fair that your future has been snatched away.



It is only natural that you ache for a future that has been cruelly taken from you. Your heart is broken, and you do not deserve to be here in this pain. However, you must allow yourself to sit with your sorrow, feel your pain, and grieve for all that you have lost. Today, write about the hopes and dreams that will never be and the heartache of losing the future you had imagined.

■ DAY EIGHT: HOPE SPRINGS ETERNAL

"A rainbow is a prism that sends shards of multicolored light in various directions. It lifts our spirits and makes us think of what is possible. Hope is the same - a personal rainbow of the mind."

- Charles Snyder

Like a flower that roots in darkness, you too can grow through these darkest of days, but you must look for the shards of light - a glimmer of hope. When grief seems unbearable, hope helps us face a difficult present and an uncertain future. You might not realize it, but by writing in this journal, you are already looking for a ray of light in the darkness. You are open to finding hope. Today, write about your search for light in the dark. Where do you notice flashes of hope? What are your shards of light? What gives you even the smallest glimmer of hope? What helps you see that there is light despite the darkness?

■ DAY NINE: SEARCHING FOR ANSWERS

"It is not the answer that enlightens, but the question."

- Eugene Ionesco

Why did you have to leave? Why us? Why me? Why you and not another? Why now? What could I have done differently? How do I go on? You might never know all the answers; in fact, sometimes there simply isn't an answer - and that is okay. For real healing to begin, you must acknowledge that you have questions. Even with no answers, the questions you have are valid. They matter. Today, write about the questions you have. What questions occur to you most often? What can you do - if anything - to find the answers you seek? Who can help you find these answers? How might you bring a sense of peace to your troubled thoughts?

■ DAY TEN: WHEN THINGS DON'T FEEL REAL

"Shock is a merciful condition. It allows you to get through a disaster with a necessary distance between you and your feelings."

- Lisa Kleypas

Grief is overwhelming. When we lose someone special, shock is a normal and natural defense mechanism. It is our way of coping with intense and profound pain, particularly in the early days of our passage through grief. Your loss seems unreal; you feel numb from the shock. At some point, however, you must lift the veil and reveal what is behind it. The emotions might be lurking under the surface, but they are still there. Today, let's lift the veil - if only for a moment. What are you feeling today? Shock? Numbness? Anger? Pain? How do you feel in your heart? What lies behind the veil of shock and numbness?



■ DAY ELEVEN: THE VALUE OF A MOMENT

"What is there to do when people die, people so dear and rare, but bring them back by remembering."

- May Sarton

Sometimes it is only in grief that we truly understand the value of what we have lost. When the moments we share become memories, their true importance becomes crystal clear. Today's entry is an opportunity to look back at the time you shared and the memories you made together. These moments may not have held much meaning at the time, but, on reflection, they will stay with you forever. Today, write about a moment you will always hold close to your heart.

■ DAY TWELVE: A BRAVE FACE

"Grief is like living two lives. One is where you pretend everything is alright, and the other is where your heart silently screams in pain."

- Anonymous

The harsh truth is that your loss will make some people feel uncomfortable. Your loss makes them think about their loved ones. They want you to grieve quickly, perhaps hinting that you should be 'over it' by now. This pressure to get over the pain and suffering can make you feel like you are grieving in the wrong way or taking too long. However, there is no right or wrong way to grieve, and you will begin to heal in your own time. You cannot simply 'feel better' to meet the expectations of others - this is your journey and no one else's. There is no schedule for grief. Have you felt pressure from others to put on a brave face? Do you put pressure on yourself to hide or downplay your grief? How does it feel to be pressured in this way? How have you hidden your grief from others? What would it look like to grieve honestly?

■ DAY THIRTEEN: THE GUILT IN GRIEF

"Guilt is perhaps the most painful companion to death."

- Elisabeth Kubler-Ross

Grief and guilt often go hand-in-hand: Why didn't I say 'I love you more? Why not me instead of you? Why did I start that pointless argument? Why didn't I insist he/she went to a doctor sooner? Now is not the time to put yourself on trial or torment yourself with 'what ifs.' If you let it, guilt will eat away at you - you must relieve yourself of its burden. Today, write about this guilt. Have you felt guilt or remorse? What guilt are you holding onto? How does this make you feel? Have you blamed yourself for something you could not have controlled?



■ DAY FOURTEEN: WHAT WE LEARN FROM GRIEF

"His grief he will not forget, but it will not darken his heart; it will teach him wisdom."

- J.R.R. Tolkien

Despite the pain and suffering that accompany grief, mourning the loss of a loved one can teach some valuable lessons that loss is inevitable, pain and joy can exist together, and we must be grateful for the love we have given and the love we have received. What lessons have you learned through your grief? What has this loss taught you about yourself and others?

■ DAY FIFTEEN: RISING UP

"Hope rises like a phoenix from the ashes of shattered dreams."

- S.A. Sachs

There is hope. There is always hope, if you look for it, even now in these darkest of days. What does it mean to have hope? When you think about hope, what does it look like? What gives you hope for the future? How can you embrace hope today?

■ DAY SIXTEEN: FINDING STRENGTH

"Temper us in fire, and we grow stronger. When we suffer, we survive."

- Cassandre Clare

Chances are, at some point in your journey, you have been told how strong you are or how brave you have been. You might not feel strong right now, but strength means something different to everyone. Strength is not about hiding your sorrow; it is about those little acts of bravery that help you move through it. Despite the pain, your heart is still beating. Despite the pain, you are here facing it. Despite the pain, you carry out small acts of strength every day. Today, write about the strength that has come from your suffering. What does strength look like to you? How does it feel? What small acts of strength do you perform each day?

■ DAY SEVENTEEN: BEING HUMAN

*"Sometimes the most healing thing to do is remind ourselves
over and over and over; other people feel this too."*

- Andrea Gibson

No matter how much you are hurting right now, you are not alone. Only the most fortunate among us make it through life without experiencing loss. While grief has no blueprint, the heartache you are feeling is part of being human. Today is the day you remind yourself that you are a part of the collective. Write about how you are not alone in your experience. How does your grief connect you with others? Who stands alongside you as you grieve? Who makes you feel connected? How does your grief connect you with others?



■ DAY EIGHTEEN: IF ONLY YOU WERE HERE

"Where you used to be, there is a hole in the world, which I find myself constantly walking around in the daytime and falling in at night. I miss you like hell."

- Edna St. Vincent Millay

While grief and heartache go hand-in-hand, the intense yearning and sorrow you feel are a testament to the love you shared. If you had just one more moment together, what would you say to your loved one? What would you do?

■ DAY NINETEEN: GRIEF AND GRATITUDE

"How much sorrow can I hold? That's how much gratitude I can give."

- Francis Weller

It might seem hard to believe, but grief and gratitude sit side-by-side. Although they are just two words with no obvious connection, gratitude can help us heal. As long as we look for the good that remains, we can be grateful. Good still exists in the world, and there are many things for which you can feel grateful. Today, remind yourself that there is still happiness in the world and show gratitude for the good that remains. Write about all the good things you still have in life. What do you feel grateful for today? What joy can you see in the world around you?

■ DAY TWENTY: JUST WRITE

"Fill your paper with the breathings of your heart."

- William Wordsworth

Today, just write. Write about whatever you are feeling in your heart. Express yourself, share your truth, and let your words fill the page. What are you feeling right now, in this moment?

■ DAY TWENTY-ONE: A LOVE THAT ENDURES

"When we lose someone we love, we must learn not to live without them, but to live with the love they left behind."

- Unknown

It happens to us all; we forget the sound of their laughter, the details of their face, the warmth of their touch. Some days, memories are clearer than others, but inevitably the sharpness of those memories fade. And that is okay. It is completely normal. Although no one else can see it, your heart is still broken, and you still yearn for the person you lost. You might think that moving through your sorrow means letting go or moving on, but this trivializes the bond you shared. Your loved one is here with you right now because you love this person, and he/she will always be with you. Today, write about the ways your loved one is still here with you.



■ DAY TWENTY-TWO: FACING THE UNKNOWN

"The oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown."

- H.P. Lovecraft

Losing a loved one doesn't just strip us of the future we once imagined; it tears away the very foundations of life as we know it. Your sense of security has been lost - shaken to the core - and replaced with fear. Is there anything more frightening than the unknown? What if you lose someone else? Is no one safe? Today, let's face the unknown. Write about your fears; what frightens you today? What fears do you have about the future? How might you ease this fear?

■ DAY TWENTY-THREE: LIFE AFTER LOSS

"Death will paint everything a different shade of remorse. You'll feel guilty that you're still breathing. You'll feel guilty for just about everything at first."

- Tessa Shaffer

Carrying on after the loss of someone special is frightening. It might even feel like disloyalty or a betrayal of the plans you made together. It is not fair that you are here, and they are not, but here you are, and you *will* get through this. You may not see it right now, but the life you knew is not the only life worth living.

You can never replace what has been taken from you, but you can explore the possibilities that lie ahead. Today, write about how you can live a little more. What is stopping you from really *living*? What would help you move through these barriers? How can you make peace with living a new chapter of your life after loss?

■ DAY TWENTY-FOUR: THE BONDS THAT REMAIN

"When someone is mourning, there is nothing you could say to alleviate their pain. Just sit with them, hold their hands, and be present."

- Anoir Ou-Chad

A hug, a squeeze of the hand, or a meal prepared with love may not seem like much to some, but *you* know how important these small acts are as you move through your grief. The people who are just *there* for you, who open their arms and heart to you in your darkest hour. Sometimes grief - and friendship - are not that simple. You might be surprised by the people who step up to the plate in ways you never imagined. You might also expect some people to be there for you no matter what, but grief can erode rather than reinforce the connections we have with others. You must remember, however, that this is not your fault - your sorrow is just too much for them to bear.

Today, write about friendship. What has your loss uncovered about your friendships? Have some people pulled away or been unable to offer the support you need? Have you felt able to ask for support? Who are the people who have been there for you when you needed them? How have these people supported you? Who allows you to grieve in your way and at your own pace?



■ DAY TWENTY-FIVE: ONCE MORE UNTO THE BREACH

*"Sad and terrible things often happen, though I wish I could tell you otherwise.
But wonderful things also occur, and this is the truth that makes life worth living."*

- John Mark Green

When all seems lost, we must look for a reason to keep going; the reason to keep living despite the heartache that comes with each breath we take; a reason to keep moving forward. Today, think about the things in your life that help you go on - one step at a time - despite your loss. What brings you a glimmer of joy in your suffering? What helps you feel content? Who or what drives you forward?

■ DAY TWENTY-SIX: REMOVING THE MASK

*"This was a new skill she'd acquired, the ability to look, to the outside world,
utterly serene and even cheerful, while, in her skull, all was chaos."*

- Dave Eggers

Sometimes, we wear a mask to conceal our heartache, but hiding from grief does nothing. Your mask might help you project the image you want others to see, but it also hides the true pain behind your sorrow. Your mask is what stops you from telling others how you really feel. While it can be hard to remove the mask and reveal what lies beneath, in doing so, you will strengthen the connections you have with others.

Wearing the mask is exhausting, and only when you toss it aside can you begin to move through your sorrow. Since the loss of your loved one, have you felt like you needed to hide behind a mask? What does this mask look like? What is lurking underneath? What does the mask protect you from? Who can help you lift the mask? In the presence of whom would you feel comfortable removing the mask?

■ DAY TWENTY-SEVEN: PERMISSION GRANTED

*"Permission is the key that unlocks the door that's been holding us trapped, muzzled,
and stifled in our grief. Permission is the opposite of rejection. Permission is the opposite
of abandonment. Permission lifts the weight, eases the pressure, and loosens the reins."*

- Shelby Forsythia

You have permission to feel your pain, to be okay, to be not okay, to cry, to laugh, to love, to scream at the top of your lungs. You have permission to grieve in ways that feel right to you. You can unlock the door to your pain and sorrow and allow yourself to experience it. When you are hurting, allow yourself to hurt. When you laugh, let yourself do so without judgment. Recognize that you need to grieve. Permission granted.

Today, write about giving yourself permission. Have you denied yourself permission to live fully? What do you need to give yourself permission for? If you gave yourself permission to fully feel and express your grief, what would that look like? How does it feel to deny yourself permission? How would it feel to give yourself permission?



■ DAY TWENTY-EIGHT: ACCEPTING NOT FORGETTING

"You will not 'get over the loss of a loved one; you will learn to live with it. You will heal, and you will rebuild yourself around the loss you have suffered. You will be whole again, but you will never be the same. Nor should you be the same nor would you want to."

- Elisabeth Kubler-Ross

Acceptance is not about 'getting over' your loss, and it has nothing to do with forgetting your loved one. It is about coming to terms with your new reality. Acceptance is not a betrayal; it is having more good days than bad. It is allowing pain and joy to coexist. It is an understanding that you have suffered an unspeakable loss, but you will be okay. Today, write about the things that grief has made you accept after losing your loved one.

■ DAY TWENTY-NINE: FORGET ME NOT

"Those we love never truly leave us. There are things that death cannot touch."

- Jack Thorne

Our loved ones live on through us. We create a space for them inside of us that keeps them close. We carry them with us every day, always. One day, the memories that once caused heartache and pain will provide great comfort. Today, write about how you continue to carry your loved one with you. How does it feel to hold them close? What parts of their legacy do you treasure the most? What parts of them live on through you? In what ways do they provide some comfort?

■ DAY THIRTY: EMBRACING SORROW

"I will not say: do not weep; for not all tears are an evil."

- J.R.R. Tolkien

When we try to avoid or suppress our heartache, we get stuck in it. You must allow yourself to feel your sorrow, greet it like an old friend, and embrace it. Your sorrow does not make you weak. It shows strength and willingness to cradle grief in your arms so that you can move through it. Have you allowed yourself to embrace the sorrow you feel? Have you been unwilling to face your sadness? What holds you back from fully accepting and expressing your sorrow? How might you embrace and express your sorrow today?

■ DAY THIRTY-ONE: THE PARADOX

"I see people, as they approach me, trying to make up their minds whether they'll 'say something about it or not. I hate if they do, and if they don't."

- C.S. Lewis

The paradox of grief is when loneliness and isolation feel unbearable, yet all you want is to be left alone with your pain. Anyone who has felt the heartache of grief understands the invisible blanket that separates you - and your suffering - from the rest of the world.



Grief is isolating; your world has come crashing down, yet life goes on. And it hurts. It hurts to see people getting on with things when you feel anything but normal. It hurts to be alone with your sorrow, but it also hurts when people ask about it. It hurts when others say they understand, but you know these are just words. Today, write about the paradox. Has your grief made you feel isolated? Have you felt like you want to be alone yet crave the company of others? Who are the people that support you but will also allow you to sit with your pain?

■ DAY THIRTY-TWO: STEPPING FORWARD WITH INTENTION

"Intentional days create a life on purpose."
- Adrienne Enns

Grief can place us firmly in autopilot mode. While this might shield you from the intensity of your grief, it is important to pull yourself into more intentional living. Living with intention is the difference between truly *living* life or simply being an observer. It means taking responsibility for yourself and your future. Intentional living takes a little planning; however, setting a few small goals will make all the difference to your passage through grief. When you think about living with intention, what does it look like? What small goal do you feel comfortable setting for yourself? What can you do today to move closer to this goal?

■ DAY THIRTY-THREE: FINDING MEANING IN LOSS

"The ultimate meaning we find is in everyone we have loved. I can only invite you to be curious about the rest of the story of your life."
- David Kessler

Your loss has created a hole that, at this moment, may seem impossible to fill. It will take time, and although it might not seem likely right now, finding meaning in your loss is possible. You have lost so much, and even though searching for meaning is a long and arduous journey, it makes life more worthwhile.

How can you begin your search when you cannot see an end to the pain? You can look for meaning in the way your loved one lived and the lasting impact he/she made on you. What did your loved one get out of life? What did he/she value? How did he/she positively affect your life? How did his/her love change you?

■ DAY THIRTY-FOUR: TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF

"You can search throughout the entire universe for someone who is more deserving of your love and affection than you are yourself, and that person is not to be found anywhere. You, yourself, as much as anybody in the entire universe, deserve your love and affection."
- Mahasi Sayadaw

What you need, right now, is to show yourself some kindness. Do not judge yourself or make apologies for the heartache you feel. You must allow yourself to grieve unapologetically and without judgment. Self-compassion will help you move through the pain with tenderness and warmth. Choose to love yourself. Choose to be kind to yourself. Choose self-compassion.



You must know that it is okay to care for yourself in the same ways you would care for a friend facing the same heartache. How have you been treating yourself since the loss of your loved one? Have you shown yourself the same kindness as you would to a friend? How can you show yourself a little kindness today? What kind and caring words can you say to yourself that would provide some comfort?

■ DAY THIRTY-FIVE: THE HEALING POWER OF VULNERABILITY

*"Being open to the wounds of life means also being open to the bounty and beauty.
Don't mask or deny your vulnerability; it is your greatest asset."*

- Stephen Russell

Allowing yourself to be open and vulnerable can be a great source of comfort in the throes of grief. It sounds simple enough but letting yourself be vulnerable takes strength. It means opening yourself up to the pain, heartache, and suffering and subsequently allowing others to witness it.

Yes, hiding the truth about your grief behind a smile or positive words might seem like an easier option, but this is no way to heal your pain. Today, write about vulnerability. What does being vulnerable mean to you? If you allowed yourself to be vulnerable with others, what would it look like? How willing are you to share your vulnerability with others? Who have you allowed to witness your true feelings?

■ DAY THIRTY-SIX: THE COURAGE TO LOVE

"It takes a great deal of courage to see the world in all its tainted glory and still love it."

- Oscar Wilde

The thought of loving again might seem impossible to you right now. Opening yourself to love shows that you dare to be vulnerable. To love someone is to open yourself to the possibility of pain and sorrow, but the alternative is not to love at all. Would your loved one want you to close yourself off to love? Or would he/she, who knew the power of your affections, want you to love again? Today, write about opening yourself up to the possibility of loving again in the face of your loss. What might prevent you from loving? How would your loved one want you to keep on loving? What would they say if you closed yourself to the possibility of loving again? How can you use the love in your heart to make the world a better place?

■ DAY THIRTY-SEVEN: WHAT LIES BENEATH

*"Crisis is what suppressed pain looks like; it always comes to the surface.
It shakes you into reflection and healing."*

- Bryant McGill

Leaning into difficult emotions is an important part of your passage through grief. It may create discomfort, but it is a crucial part of healing. Ignoring the sadness does not work; you must lean into it. Today, lean into the pain and heartache by writing about the emotions that lie just beneath the surface - those feelings that threaten to bubble up and overwhelm you. What emotions are submerged just below the surface? How do you *truly* feel right now?



■ DAY THIRTY-EIGHT: STAYING AFLOAT

"In the beginning, the waves are 100 feet tall and crash over you without mercy. They come 10 seconds apart and don't even give you time to catch your breath. After a while, you'll find the waves are still 100 feet tall, but they come further apart. When they come, they still crash all over you and wipe you out. But in between, you can breathe, you can function."

- Unknown

Grief can feel like you have been left adrift in an endless ocean, never knowing what storm today will bring. Some days feel as though you are treading water, just managing to keep your head above the waves. On other days, those powerful tides swell like a tsunami, catching you off guard and knocking you off your feet.

Grief is frightening and unpredictable, but we must allow the waves to wash over us and do our best not to be swept away by them. What do the waves of grief feel like to you? What might help you face the next wave? What would it look like to surrender yourself to these waves of grief? What can you do to keep yourself from being swept away? Who can help you weather the storm?

■ DAY THIRTY-NINE: SMILE BECAUSE IT HAPPENED

"I cannot tell you how thankful I am for our little infinity. I wouldn't trade it for the world. You gave me a forever within the numbered days, and I'm grateful."

- John Green

Reminders of your loved one, and his/her absence, are everywhere - raw and unavoidable. When we lose someone special, the memories that once brought joy now bring heartache. But here's the thing, your loved one lives on in your memories - not in the sadness you are suffering right now. What if you could look back and feel grateful for the time you had together, rather than mourn over the time you lost? This is, of course, no mean feat. It will be painful and will not happen overnight, but what better way to honor a life than looking at those memories with gratitude in your heart? Today, try to lean into this pain and write about a memory you are grateful to have shared with your loved one.

■ DAY FORTY: RISING FROM THE ASHES

"We have such a long way to go, but look how far we've come."

- Charlie Mackesy

Look at how far you have come. When you started this journey, did you even think it was possible to empty the contents of your heart so honestly onto a page? You did it. You allowed yourself to be vulnerable, you leaned into the pain and heartache, and you opened yourself up to hope. Your loved one would be so proud of you.

There will be days you want to scream into the abyss, but there will also be days when hope makes it through, and these days of hope will happen more often. No matter where you are in your journey, sorrow and joy will, one day, coexist within you, and the shards of light will eventually become brighter. For this final



entry, write about where you are right now in your passage through grief. When you look back at your first entry, how have things changed? What is different now compared to when you began your journey? What would your loved one say about the progress you have made? How do you feel right now?

Step 3: Reflection

- How did writing about your grief make you feel?
- What insights have you gained from journaling through grief?
- Writing can help reduce the intensity of a thought or situation. What observations can you make about the intensity of your feelings before and after writing in your journal?
- When you reflect upon earlier journal entries, in what ways has your journey evolved?
- How was journaling through grief helpful to you?