

Grief - Adaptive Writing Prompts

These prompts are designed around the principles of adaptive grief: keep attention on **bond, qualities, influence, sensory-emotional recognition, values, and ongoing meaning**, while avoiding prompts that emphasize where they are not, when they were last here, or what could have been different.

Choose **one prompt per session**, write for **no more than 20 minutes**, and end by naming one thing in the present that helps you feel grounded.

If writing starts pulling you toward “if only,” “why didn’t,” “where should they be,” or detailed replay of the loss event, try to return to the person’s qualities and your bond, or stop, take a walk, and come back to it tomorrow.

STEP 1: Begin by **melting your shoulders** and taking **3 or 4 deep, slow breaths**. Do NOT skip this step.

STEP 2: Start a **timer for 20 minutes**, and select **one of the following prompts** to write about. Pay attention and stop if your emotions become overwhelming; that isn’t failure. That’s learning.

1. **The feel of them**

Write about what it felt like to be in their presence. Focus on atmosphere, emotional tone, and the kind of steadiness, warmth, humor, energy, or attention they brought with them.

2. **Their unmistakable qualities**

Describe the traits that made them uniquely themselves. Be concrete: not just “kind,” but how their kindness moved, sounded, or showed up.

3. **How they shaped you**

Write about who you are when you are most connected to what they gave you. What ways of speaking, loving, noticing, deciding, or caring in you feel touched by them?

4. **Their emotional signature**

If they had an emotional signature, what was it? Gentle confidence, playful mischief, quiet devotion, fierce loyalty, deep curiosity, calm strength? Describe it fully.

5. **The language of them**

Write down phrases, sayings, repeated jokes, values, or bits of wisdom that feel inseparable from them. Then write what each one means to you.

6. **What they noticed**

Describe the things they paid attention to—beauty, fairness, small details, people at the margins, food, music, order, laughter, discipline, tenderness. What did their attention teach you about living?

7. What was safe or alive with them

Write about the part of you that felt most safe, most seen, most known, most creative, most calm, or most accepted in relationship with them.

8. Their way of loving

Without telling the story of specific loss events, describe how they expressed care. Through words, acts, reliability, humor, touch, protection, teaching, celebration, listening, or quiet presence.

9. What you want to keep

Name three to five things from them that you want to carry forward in your own life. For each, write how you can practice it in a living way.

10. Their gifts to others

Write about what other people received from them. What did rooms, relationships, or families become because they were in them?

11. A character sketch of their strengths

Describe their strengths as if you were introducing them to someone who never met them, but who needed to understand why they mattered so much.

12. What remains true

Write sentences that begin with: "What remains true of my bond with them is..." Keep going until you feel the bond becoming clear without needing to describe the separation.

13. The values-based bond

Choose one value they embodied—courage, generosity, precision, delight, dignity, perseverance, faithfulness—and write about how that value still has a place in your life.

14. A living legacy paragraph

Finish this stem several times: "Because of who they are to me, I now..." Let the answers be about identity, love, action, ethics, tenderness, humor, or strength.

STEP 3: Put your writing away, then **immediately** start a [regulating activity](#): take a walk, ride a bike, practice deep breaths, **connect with people** - even being around people at a store can be regulating.

STEP 4: Prepare and plan for a [good night's sleep](#). If you're unable to get good sleep, practice the [Non-Sleep Deep Rest Protocol](#) - once at night/bedtime, and again during the day.