



Family and Caregiver Education

BEREAVEMENT

Gentle Journaling for Confronting Loss and Regaining Your Center

A journal is a safe, low-risk, gentle and ever-present resource available to all. Keeping a journal can produce many positive enhancements in your life:

- It can help you clarify your thoughts about everyday life.
- It can be a source of profound encouragement in times of trouble or grief.
- It can be a friend you can turn to with all of your deepest thoughts, emotions and feelings.
- It can provide you with a means of taking an active part in your own recovery and healing.
- It can help you to know more of the person you are now.

When you are grieving, it is your ability and willingness to honestly engage in grief work that will help you get through this terribly difficult time in your life. Journal writing is not intended to be therapy, but can be very therapeutic. It will enhance any counseling in which you are engaged. Research shows that opening up about difficult life experiences can improve your immune system and reduce anxiety, something that is very important to those in bereavement.

Self-expression—writing about your feelings—can't change the world, but self-expression does have the power to change you, and the way you see and experience the world.

Putting your feelings into words gives them shape and meaning, and allows you to put your thoughts and feelings into the world around you. By doing this, you can connect to your world in a new and enhanced way. This can make you feel more whole and centered.

Once out of your head, words give clarity and meaning to your feelings and thoughts and can allow you to be relieved of them. Expressing allows you a kind of freedom. Seeing your feelings on paper can help you:

1. Recognize and overcome what is troubling you.
2. Get to know all of the different parts of yourself.
3. Heal your relationships.
4. Access information stored in your subconscious and unconscious mind.
5. Track the cycles, patterns and trends of your life.
6. Recognize the significant symbols in your life and develop your intuition.
7. Explore your dreams and your creativity.

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Listed below are some of the “myths of journal writing.” Once you let go of any myths you have, you may find journaling as easy as breathing itself.

- I should spell all words correctly and use proper grammar and punctuation.
- I should write every day or at least at regular intervals.
- I should have large portions of uninterrupted time to journal.
- I should write until I get to the bottom of an issue. It’s not OK to quit until it is finished.
- My journal should be interesting for others to read.
- I shouldn’t let anyone else read my journal.
- I shouldn’t say angry, horrible things about people I love, use four-letter words, complain, or whine.

Remember that more than one step is recommended to achieve benefit from journaling. Writing about the event alone may trigger distress and/or profound feelings. Going on to focus on the meaning of the event is what is helpful for healing. Words like *because*, *realize* and *understand* are often associated with benefits gained.

- When I learned of the death, I felt _____ because _____.
- My reaction to the death was to _____ because _____.
- After the death, I realize _____.
- Since the death, I mostly feel _____, now that I understand _____.
- Since the death, my life has changed most in that _____ because _____.

Things to think about:

- Was it difficult to write about your loss, or was it easier than you thought it would be? Was writing a positive, negative or neutral experience?
- Did the writing prompt other thoughts, feelings or reactions? If it did, what will you do with these?

Dialogues are also a powerful technique for clarifying our feelings, practicing communication skills, resolving past hurts and conflicts and exploring aspects of ourselves. In journaling, a dialogue is a written conversation between you and another person or entity. You can write a dialogue between yourself and:

- A person living or dead.
- A concept like love or family.
- Different aspects of yourself like your “inner child” or “inner critic,” or yourself at different times in your life, younger or older.
- An event like your birthday or anniversary.
- Your body or any part of it.
- An object, memory or plan for the future.

We encourage you to perhaps stretch outside of your comfort zone and do something like journaling, which can be very nurturing and nourishing for you and your inner life. The journal has been called a “mirror of the soul,” so perhaps this is just the time to take a new peek at the person you are...and are becoming. Journaling is safe, rewarding and even fun. It can be done in as little as a “five minute sprint,” whenever and wherever you have the urge or feel the need. Journaling can create peacefulness, hope and a sense of control of our lives.

There are several journaling Web sites on the Internet. One in particular might be a good starting point:

<http://www.journalmagic.com>. Or just type “journaling” in your Web browser’s search feature.

The following books also are recommended:

- *The Understanding Your Grief Journal: Exploring the Ten Essential Touchstones* by Alan Wolfelt
- *The Healing Journey Through Grief: Your Journal for Recovery* by Phil Rich
- *A Journal of Love and Healing: Transcending Grief* by Nancy Dufresne
- *I Remember You: A Grief Journal* by Laynee Gilbert
- *Write From Your Heart: A Healing Grief Journal* by Peterson, Palmer, Smith

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