A WITH LOVE, ALWAYS RESOURCE

Grief and Bereavement

A gentle place to start

Welcome to the With Love, Always library. This is the guide to begin with: what grief is, why it takes the shape it takes, and where to go next when you are ready. There is no order you have to read these guides in, and no schedule you have to keep. Start here, and let this page point you to the rest.

BEFORE WE BEGIN

A Letter From With Love, Always

Dear friend,

I lost my mom when I was twenty-nine and my dad when I was thirty-five. In the weeks after each of them died, I remember searching for help in the middle of the night and finding plenty of information, but very little of it in one place, and almost none of it written in a voice that sounded like a person. I wanted someone to explain what was happening to me, to tell me honestly whether what I felt was normal, and to show me what to do with the practical pieces that do not wait for grief to finish. I could not find that in one place, so eventually I built it.

That is what this library is. It is a small collection of guides, each one written for a different moment in this season: the first days, the first year, the holidays, the days when someone you love is dying, the days when you are the one sitting beside them. This guide is the welcome. It will give you the plain words for what you are living through, it will tell you the truth about timelines, which is that there is not one, and it will walk you through the rest of the library so you can find the guide that fits the day you are actually having. You do not need to read all of them. You only need the one that helps today.

With Love, Always offers peer support shaped by lived experience. This is companionship, not clinical counseling, and nothing here is a rule. I am not writing to you as a clinician. I am writing as someone who has been the daughter at the bedside and the daughter at the graveside, twice, and who learned most of what follows the slow way. Take what helps, leave what does not, and come back whenever you need to. This library will be here.

PART ONE

The Words We Use, in Plain Language

Grief the response on the inside

Grief is the name for everything that happens inside you after someone you love dies. It is not one feeling. It is a whole weather system of feelings that can include sadness, anger, numbness, relief, guilt, longing, confusion, and sometimes, strangely, peace, often several of them in the same hour. Grief also lives in the body and in the mind, not only in the heart. It can show up as exhaustion, forgetfulness, a short temper, trouble sleeping, or a feeling of walking through the day at a distance from it. If you have ever thought, "I do not even recognize myself right now," that is grief too. The word is big on purpose, because what it describes is big.

Bereavement the season you are in

Bereavement is the name for the state of having lost someone, and for the period of life that follows that loss. If grief is what you feel, bereavement is where you are. It is the word on the forms, the word in the workplace policy that gives you a few days away, the word that quietly explains why this year of your life is different from every year before it. Naming it matters more than it might seem. A season has a name because it is a real condition of life, not a personal failure to cope. You are not simply sad. You are bereaved, which means a significant person is gone from your daily life, and your daily life is being rebuilt around that absence whether you chose it or not.

Mourning grief, expressed out loud

Mourning is grief turned outward. It is the part other people can see: the service you plan, the clothes you choose, the stories you tell, the candle you light, the visit to the cemetery, the post you write on their birthday. Every family and every culture has its own ways of mourning, and within a family, every person will do it a little differently. There is no single correct way to mourn. Some people need ceremony and gathering. Some people mourn quietly, in private acts nobody witnesses. Both are real mourning. What matters is not the size of the expression. What matters is that your grief gets some honest way out of you, at least some of the time, in whatever form fits the person you are.

Why Having the Words Helps

These three words will not make any of this hurt less, but they can make it easier to talk about, and that is not a small thing. When you can say, "I am in bereavement, and my grief is loud today," you have told the truth in one sentence instead of apologizing for an hour. The words also help you ask for what you need. You can tell an employer you are bereaved. You can tell a friend you are grieving and need company, or quiet. You can tell yourself, on a day when you accomplish almost nothing, that this is what this season does to a person, and that the season has a name because millions of people have lived in it before you. You are not the first person to stand here, even on the days when it feels that lonely.

PART TWO

You Are Not Doing This Wrong

Grief Is Not an Illness

Grief can feel like being unwell. It can flatten your energy, scatter your focus, and change your appetite and your sleep. It is still not an illness, and you are not a problem to be solved. Grief is the natural response of a person who loved someone and lost them. It is, in a hard and honest sense, love with nowhere to go, and the ache of it is proportionate to the love, not to any weakness in you. This matters because people who believe they are doing grief wrong tend to hide it, and hidden grief gets heavier. You do not need to be fixed. You need time, rest, honest company, and room to feel what you actually feel. That is a different prescription entirely, and a much kinder one.

The Myth of the Correct Timeline

Somewhere along the way, many of us absorbed a schedule we never agreed to: that the first weeks are the worst, that by a few months we should be steadier, that a year is the outer limit of reasonable sadness. You may have heard of stages of grief, presented as if they were stations on a line you travel in order. Real grief does not follow them in order. It circles back. It skips. It quiets down for weeks and then knocks you flat in a grocery store parking lot because of a song. That is not a sign that you are behind. There is no behind, because there is no schedule. A timeline can describe what some people feel, some of the time. The moment it is used to measure you, it has stopped being information and started being pressure, and you are allowed to set it down.

Why Well-Meaning Finish Lines Hurt

The people around you will sometimes offer finish lines, almost always out of love: that the first year is the hardest, as if the second year comes with a certificate; that your loved one would want you to be happy by now; that you are so strong, said in a tone that makes crying feel like letting them down. These sentences hurt because they quietly turn your grief into a performance with an audience and an end date. When the date passes and you are still grieving, it can feel as though you have failed at something everyone else managed. You have not. Their sentences were never a map of your life. They were their discomfort, dressed up as encouragement. You can receive the love underneath them without accepting the deadline on top.

Words You Can Borrow: Answering a Finish Line

When someone hands you a deadline for your own heart, you do not have to argue, and you do not have to agree. A short, kind sentence is enough, and you are allowed to use the same one every time. Here are two that work in most rooms:

When someone suggests you should be further along:

> *"I know you mean that kindly, and I am still grieving. I do not think there is a date when this is supposed to be finished. I am getting through it the way it comes, and your patience means more to me than advice."*

When someone calls you strong and you do not feel strong:

> *"Thank you for saying that. The truth is I do not feel strong. I feel sad, and I am doing ordinary things while sad, which is less impressive and more honest. What helps me most is just hearing that you remember them too."*

PART THREE

The Long Arc: How Grief Changes Shape

It Does Not End. It Changes.

Here is the truth this guide will not soften: grief does not end, in the sense of a day when the loss no longer matters. What happens instead is slower and, in its own way, better. The sharpest pain takes up less of the day. The waves come further apart. You build a life that has the loss inside it rather than a life that is only the loss. Many people describe it as growing around their grief: the grief stays the size it was, and they become larger, with more room for work, laughter, new people, and ordinary Tuesdays. If you are early in this and that sounds impossible, you do not have to believe it yet. You only have to get through today. The changing happens quietly, over time, while you are busy surviving.

Waves, Not a Straight Line

Expect the shape of this to be uneven. A good week does not guarantee the next one, and a terrible day after several good ones is not a relapse or a failure. Anniversaries, songs, smells, places, and sometimes nothing identifiable at all will bring the loss close again, sometimes years later, at full strength for an hour or a day. People often panic at these moments, afraid they are back at the beginning. You are not at the beginning. The beginning did not have the months or years of living you have done since. A wave is weather passing through a landscape that has already changed. It will pass the way the earlier ones did, and each time it does, you will have a little more evidence that you can be knocked down by this and still get back up.

Love in a Different Form

The relationship does not end when a life does. It changes form. You may find yourself talking to them in the car, asking what they would have said, cooking their recipes, keeping their advice in your head like a compass, or becoming, in some small way, the keeper of who they were. This is not holding on too tightly, and it is not a refusal to accept reality. It is what love does when the person is gone: it finds new ways to be carried. Some people keep this bond quietly and privately. Some build rituals around it. Some write letters, tend graves, fund scholarships, or tell the same stories every year on purpose. There is no expiration date on loving someone who has died, and nobody gets to set one for you.

Milestones Will Feel Different Over Time

The first birthday, the first holiday, the first anniversary: these tend to arrive with dread attached, and the dread is often worse than the day. As years pass, the hard dates usually change character. Some stay tender forever, and that is allowed. Others soften into days of remembering that you would not trade away, days when the sadness and the gratitude sit down together and neither one has to leave. You may also find that unexpected dates become the hard ones: the day they would have retired, a grandchild they never met reaching an age they would have loved. There is no predicting all of it, and you do not have to. You only have to meet each date as it comes, with the same gentleness you are learning to give the ordinary days.

Grief Touches Every Part of Life

Your Body Keeps the Score of the Season

Bereavement is physical. Exhaustion that sleep does not quite fix, headaches, a heavy or restless feeling, appetite that vanishes or will not quiet down, aches with no clear cause: grieving bodies do all of this. You may get sick more easily for a while. You may find that your usual capacity, for exercise, for work, for noise, for people, is simply smaller, and that pushing through at full speed costs you twice what it used to. Treat your body the way you would treat it after any enormous strain: water, food you can manage, rest without earning it first, short walks when you can, and medical care when something worries you. If a physical symptom frightens you or does not ease, please have it checked. Caring for your body is not separate from grieving well. It is part of it.

Work, Focus, and the Fog

Many bereaved people describe a fog: reading the same paragraph three times, walking into a room and forgetting why, missing details they would normally catch. Work does not pause for bereavement beyond a few days in most workplaces, and returning while foggy can feel humiliating for a capable person. A few honest strategies help. Write everything down, because your memory is carrying extra weight right now. Shrink your commitments where you can, and tell one trusted person at work the simple truth, that you are bereaved and your focus is not at full strength yet. And when you make a mistake that fog caused, correct it and move on without turning it into a verdict on who you are now. The fog lifts gradually. Almost everyone who has been through this says the same thing: it lifted for them too, just more slowly than they wanted.

Faith, and the Loss of It

Loss presses on belief in both directions. Some people find their faith becomes the strongest support they have, a frame that holds when nothing else does. Others find that the beliefs they held their whole lives suddenly feel thin, or that anger at God, or at the universe, arrives uninvited and will not leave. Some lose a faith community along with the person, because the community was shared, or because the comfort offered there stopped fitting. All of these responses are common, and none of them makes you a bad believer or a bad skeptic. If faith is a support for you, lean on it without apology. If it has cracked, you are allowed to grieve that too, as its own loss, and to take your time deciding what you believe now. Questions are not betrayal. They are what an honest mind does at a graveside.

Friendships Change Shape

One of the quieter shocks of bereavement is what happens to friendships. Some people will astonish you with their steadiness: the ones who keep calling in month six, who say the name, who show up with food and no agenda. Others will disappear, sometimes because they do not know what to say, sometimes because your loss frightens them about their own. It hurts, and it is rarely a measure of how much they loved you at the start. It is a measure of their capacity, which grief has a way of revealing. You may also find new closeness in unexpected places, often with people who have lost someone themselves and need no explanations. Let the circle change without chasing the ones who drift. Spend your limited energy on the people who can sit with the truth of your life as it is now.

Home, Money, and the Practical Weight

Grief is not only emotional. It arrives with paperwork, accounts, belongings, a home that may feel too quiet or too full of reminders, and decisions that cannot always wait. It is normal to feel resentment that loss comes with administration, and normal to cry over a closet or a toolbox or a kitchen drawer that nobody warned you would be the hardest task of the month. Go slowly where slowness is allowed. Almost nothing has to be decided in the first weeks, and the belongings will keep. Ask for help with the practical weight the way you would ask for help carrying anything heavy, because that is what it is. And on the days when the paperwork is all you accomplish, that counts. Bereavement includes the forms. It is not a distraction from grieving. It is one of the places grief lives.

PART FIVE

Permission Slips for the Whole Journey

Consider this part a small stack of permission slips, written out in case nobody has handed them to you in person. You do not have to earn any of these, and you do not have to use them all. They are here for the days when guilt shows up dressed as good manners.

Permission to Rest

You have permission to rest in the middle of the day, to cancel the plan, to leave the gathering early, to let the house be imperfect and the inbox wait. Rest is not a reward for grieving correctly. It is fuel for a body and mind doing the heaviest work they have ever done. If you need words for stepping back, borrow these:

> *"I am going to have to pass this time. I am more tired than I look, and I am learning to listen to that sooner instead of later. Thank you for understanding, and please keep asking me. A no this time is not a no forever."*

Permission to Laugh

You have permission to laugh, including at the service, including in the first week, including at a story about them that is funnier for being slightly irreverent. Laughter is not the opposite of grief and it is not evidence that you are over anything. It is one of the ways love sounds when it remembers the good parts out loud. If guilt follows a laugh, let it pass without obeying it. The person you lost knew your laugh. In most cases, it was one of their favorite sounds in the world. You are not betraying them by making it. You are, in a way they would recognize instantly, still yourself.

Permission to Not Be Over It

You have permission to still be grieving at six months, at two years, at ten. You have permission to cry at a wedding, to need a minute in the car, to say their name at gatherings long after other people have stopped. There is no point at which continued love becomes a problem to explain. If someone in your life needs you to be finished, that is information about their comfort, not about your health. Your grief gets to take the time it takes. On the hardest anniversaries of your life, you will not be asking whether you are allowed to feel it. We are telling you now, in writing, so you can remember later: you are allowed.

Permission to Do It Differently From Your Family

You have permission to grieve differently from everyone you share this loss with. One sibling may need the cemetery every week while another cannot go at all. One person may want the belongings sorted immediately while another needs the closet left exactly as it was. These differences cause real friction in families, and the friction usually comes from love wearing different clothes, each person quietly believing their way is the loyal way. It is not. There is no loyal way. There is only your way, theirs, and the grace to let those be different without keeping score. If a conversation about it is needed, this one tends to land gently:

> *"We are all grieving the same person, and we are not going to do it the same way. I need to handle this part differently than you do, and I am not asking you to do it my way. I am only asking you to trust that my way is not a measure of how much I loved them."*

Permission to Have Good Days

Finally, you have permission to have a good day without auditing it. A good day is not a betrayal, a turning away, or proof that the loss mattered less than you feared. It is your life, still happening, the way your loved one would have wanted it to happen. Let good days be good. Let them refill whatever the hard days empty. Over time there will be more of them, and that slow change is not you leaving your loved one behind. It is you carrying them into a life that is getting bigger again, which is exactly where they belong.

PART SIX

A Gentle Map of This Library

Every guide in this library was written for a particular moment, and none of them has to be read in order. Use this map the way you would use a hand on your back: find the sentence that sounds like your life right now, and start there. You can always come back for the others later.

What Grief Can Look Like

Read this when you want to understand the many shapes grief takes, in feelings, in the body, and in the mind. It helps most on the days when your grief does not look like sadness and you wonder what is happening to you.

The First Days After a Loss

Read this when a death has just happened and everything feels urgent and unreal at once. It walks through the first decisions, the first calls, and the first days, one step at a time, for the moments when thinking straight is hardest.

Supporting Someone Who Is Grieving

Read this when someone you love is the one who lost a person, and you want to help without saying the thing that lands wrong. It is also the guide to hand to your own friends and family when explaining feels like too much.

Grief and the Holidays

Read this when a holiday season is approaching and every tradition feels loaded. It helps you decide what to keep, change, or skip this year, and it gives you words for telling people, plus small ways to keep your loved one part of the season.

In the Last Days: What Dying Can Look Like

Read this when someone you love is near the end of life and you want to know, gently and honestly, what the last days can look like. Knowing what is common can make a frightening time feel less frightening, and it helped our own family when we needed it most.

Caring for Someone Who Is Dying

Read this when you are the one providing care at the end of life, in a home, a facility, or at a bedside. It covers the practical and emotional weight of caregiving, including how to care for yourself while you are caring for someone else.

The First Year: Firsts and Hard Dates

Read this when you are looking ahead at a year of firsts: the first birthday, the first anniversary, the first holiday, the first ordinary milestone they will miss. It helps you plan for hard dates gently instead of being ambushed by every one of them.

Helping Children Grieve

Read this when a child in your life has lost someone, or is about to, and you are searching for honest words at a child sized scale. It offers language for hard questions, ideas for remembering together, and reassurance that you do not have to do it perfectly.

Losing a Parent

Read this when the person who died is your mom or your dad, at any age, because losing a parent rearranges something foundational no matter how old you are. It speaks to the particular ache of it, including caring for the parent who remains and becoming the generation in front.

After a Sudden Loss

Read this when the death came without warning and there was no chance to prepare, to visit, or to say goodbye. Sudden loss carries its own questions and its own unfinished conversations, and this guide makes room for all of them.

When Grief Needs More Support

Read this when grief feels like more than you can carry with the support you have, or when someone you love is struggling in ways that worry you. It explains, without judgment, what additional support can look like and how to reach for it. Asking for more help is a strength, and this guide treats it that way.

YOUR TURN

Where I Am Right Now

There are no right answers on this page, and nobody will grade it. Write a few words or fill every line. Come back to it in a month or a year and write again in the margins. Watching your own answers change is one of the gentlest ways to see how grief changes shape.

Where I am right now, in my own words (a sentence is enough)

The name I keep saying, and one thing I want to remember about them

What feels hardest today (be as specific as you can)

The thing I most need today (rest, company, quiet, help, answers)

One permission slip I am taking from this guide

A person I can be honest with (and what I might say first)

The guide I will read next (from the map in Part Six)

One small kind thing I will do for myself this week

If you are ever in crisis, please reach out right away. You can call or text the **988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline** at **988** anywhere in the United States, or reach the **Crisis Text Line** by texting **HOME** to **741741**. Both are free, confidential, and answered by people who are there to listen, day or night.

Wherever you are in this season, whether the loss is days old or years old, whether today is a steady day or a day you are barely getting through, you belong in this library and you are welcome here. Start with the guide that fits today. Rest when you need to. Come back when you are ready for the next one. You do not have to carry this alone, and you do not have to carry it on a schedule.

With love, always