A WITH LOVE, ALWAYS RESOURCE

When Grief Needs More Support

More help is not failure. It is love, continuing

A longer, gentler guide for the season of grief when carrying it alone starts to feel like too much: why asking for more support is not failing, how to recognize the signs that more help could steady you, what kinds of support actually exist, and words you can borrow for the first phone call.

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.

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, and for a while after each of those losses I told myself the same thing many grieving people tell themselves: that I should be able to handle this, that other people had it worse, that needing help would mean I was not coping the way I was supposed to. I want to tell you what actually happened, because it is the reason this guide exists. I went to see a bereavement counselor, and I kept going, on and off, for about two years. It helped me. Not in the way a cast helps a broken bone, all at once and then finished. It helped the way a steady hand on your back helps on a steep path. Someone who was not in my family, who did not need me to be okay, sat with me while I said the unsayable things out loud.

I am not telling you that because I think everyone must do what I did. I am telling you because I do not want to hand you advice I have not lived. Getting support was not a sign that my grief was too big or that I was doing it wrong. It was a sign that I loved two people very much, and that love needed somewhere to go and someone to witness it. If some part of you has been wondering whether more support might help, this guide will walk through what that can look like, honestly and without pressure: the signs people often recognize in themselves, the kinds of help that exist, what they can cost, and what a first visit is really like.

With Love, Always offers peer support shaped by lived experience. This is companionship, not clinical counseling, and nothing here is a rule. Take what helps, leave what does not, and know that the person writing this has sat in the counselor's chair as the grieving one, and is glad she did.

PART ONE

Grief Is Not a Disorder

Grief Is What Love Does Now

Start here, because everything else in this guide stands on it: grief is not an illness, a flaw, or a problem to be solved. Grief is the natural response of a heart that has lost someone it loves. It is love with nowhere familiar to go. A person can be grieving deeply, crying often, missing someone in every room of the house, and be entirely healthy in the way they are grieving. Sadness is not a symptom. Longing is not a malfunction. The tears that arrive in the car, in the shower, in the middle of an ordinary Tuesday are not evidence that something has gone wrong with you. They are evidence that someone mattered.

This matters because so much of the world treats grief like a task with a deadline, something to get through and get over so normal life can resume. When grief refuses to follow that schedule, people start to wonder if they are broken. You are not broken. You are bereaved, which is a different thing entirely, and it deserves care rather than correction.

Needing More Support Is Not Failing at Grief

Somewhere along the way, many of us absorb the idea that grief is a test we are supposed to pass on our own, quietly, without troubling anyone. By that logic, reaching for more help feels like an admission: I could not do it. Please set that logic down. Nobody says a person failed at carrying furniture because they asked someone to take the other end. Grief is heavy in exactly that way, and some seasons of it are heavier than one pair of hands can hold. Asking for support is not the opposite of coping. Very often, it is what coping actually looks like from the inside.

It also helps to know that support is not only for emergencies. People seek out a counselor or a group for ordinary, human reasons: because they want one hour a week where they do not have to be brave, because they are tired of being the only person in their life who says the name out loud, because they want to understand what is happening to them, or simply because carrying it alone has started to cost more than they have. You do not need to qualify for help by being desperate enough. Wanting company in it is reason enough.

There Is No Deadline After Which Hard Grief Becomes Shameful

One of the cruelest things a grieving person can hear, from others or from their own inner voice, is some version of: still? Still crying, still struggling, still not back to normal, after all this time? Underneath that word is a belief that grief has an expiration date, and that anyone grieving past it is doing something wrong. There is no such date. Grief does not run on the calendar, and it does not shrink in a straight line. It changes shape. It goes quiet and then returns at full volume on an anniversary, at a song, at the sight of an empty chair. A hard month in year three is not a setback and it is not shameful. It is grief being grief, on its own schedule rather than everyone else's.

So if you are reading this long after the loss, wondering whether it is too late to seek support, or whether needing help now means you failed to heal on time, hear this plainly: it is not too late, and there was no timetable to fail. People walk into grief groups and counselors' offices years after a death, and they are welcomed there, because the people in those rooms know what the rest of the world sometimes forgets. The love did not expire. Neither does the grief, and neither does your right to support for it.

Support Does Not Erase Grief, and It Is Not Supposed To

It is worth saying what support can and cannot do, so that nobody hands you a promise this guide will not make. A good counselor, group, or companion will not take your grief away, and you should be wary of anyone who offers to. What support can do is give grief a place to be spoken, make the days more bearable, help you understand your own reactions so they frighten you less, and keep you company while you learn how to carry what you carry. Think of it less as a cure and more as a lamp: the road is the same road, but you can see it better, and you are not walking it in the dark by yourself. For most people, that turns out to be a great deal.

PART TWO

Signs More Support Might Help

Nothing in this section is a test, and there is no score at the end of it. Think of what follows as a row of windows rather than a checklist: patterns that many grieving people recognize in themselves when they look honestly. One window, or several, or none. Recognizing yourself here does not label you. It simply suggests that more company and more care might make this season lighter to carry, the same way a friend noticing you limp might suggest sitting down. Read gently, and read as a friend would read about you.

Isolation That Keeps Deepening

Wanting time alone is a normal part of grief, and solitude can be restful. The pattern worth noticing is different: when the circle of your life keeps shrinking, week after week, and the shrinking does not feel restful anymore. Calls go unreturned not because you are resting but because answering feels impossible. Invitations stop feeling hard and start feeling unthinkable. The world narrows to the house, and even the house narrows. If you notice that you are not choosing quiet so much as disappearing, and that the disappearing is getting deeper rather than lifting, that is a kind and honest reason to let another person in. Support, at its simplest, is a thread back to the world, held by someone who will not be scared off by how quiet you have gone.

When Daily Life Does Not Come Back

In the first stretch after a loss, ordinary life often stops working altogether, and that is expected. Eating, sleeping, working, showering, paying the bill on the counter: grief can knock all of it flat, and for a while, flat is normal. The pattern people describe, when they look back, is when a long stretch passes and those basics do not begin to return at all. Meals are still mostly skipped. Sleep is still shattered or endless months later. Work is slipping in ways that frighten you. Caring for yourself feels as impossible in month eight as it did in week two. This is not about productivity, and it is not about bouncing back. It is about whether the floor of daily life is rising under you at all. If it is not, you deserve more than willpower. You deserve support, and asking for it is a practical act of care for yourself, like calling for help with a roof that will not stop leaking.

Leaning on Something to Get Through the Day

Grief is exhausting, and it is understandable to reach for whatever quiets it for an evening. A pattern worth noticing with compassion, not shame, is when alcohol, pills, or anything else stops being an occasional thing and becomes the load-bearing wall: the only way to get through the day, the only way to fall asleep, the thing you plan around and hide the size of. If that sounds familiar, you are not a bad person and you are not weak. You are a person in pain who found something that numbs it, which is one of the most human stories there is. It is also one of the clearest signs that you deserve support built for exactly this, offered without judgment. A counselor or your doctor can help with both the grief and the leaning at the same time, and telling them the truth about it is the beginning, not a confession.

Feeling Stuck in One Single Gear

Grief moves, even when it moves slowly. It has waves and lulls, bad days and surprisingly okay ones, moments of laughter that sneak up in the middle of the ache. The pattern people name, when support ends up helping most, is the absence of that movement over a very long time: the feeling of being frozen in one single gear, the same day repeating, the same scene replaying, nothing shifting even slightly while the seasons change around you. If you feel less like you are grieving and more like you are stuck inside the worst hour, repeating it, that stuckness itself is worth bringing to someone. Not because you are doing grief wrong, but because a skilled, kind person can sometimes see the small door in a room that has started to feel doorless.

When Grief Crowds Out Every Relationship

Loss changes relationships, and some distance in the early months is natural. The pattern to notice is when grief begins to take up the whole house: when every conversation with your loved ones turns into the same painful loop, when the people closest to you are burning out and you can see it, when your children, partner, or friends have started walking on eggshells, or when you have begun pushing away everyone who tries to come close because closeness itself hurts. Sometimes this is exactly where a counselor or group quietly saves the other relationships in your life. It gives grief its own room, with its own witness, so that it does not have to fill every room. Many people say the first gift of support was not what it did for them, but what it gave back to the people they love.

Thoughts of Harming Yourself Are a Right-Now Reason

This one is different from all the others, and it is written plainly on purpose. If you are having thoughts of harming yourself, or thoughts that the people you love would be better off without you, or moments when you do not trust yourself to stay safe, that is not a pattern to watch. That is a right-now reason to act today. Use the crisis lines at the front of this guide: call or text **988**, or text **HOME** to **741741**. And tell one person in your life today, out loud, in words. Not because you owe anyone an explanation, but because a thought carried alone grows heavier, and a thought spoken to another person becomes something two people can hold. Missing someone so much that you wish you could be with them is a feeling many grieving people know, and it deserves tenderness. Acting on harm toward yourself is the line where tenderness needs company, immediately. Please reach out. That is what those lines, and your loved ones, are for.

The Kinds of Support That Exist

Peer Support and Grief Groups

A grief group gathers people who have lost someone, led sometimes by a professional and sometimes by a trained volunteer, to talk, listen, and simply be in a room where nobody needs the backstory explained. Peer support is its close cousin: companionship from someone who has lived through loss themselves and walks beside you as a fellow traveler rather than an expert. The power of both is the same, and it is hard to understand until you feel it: the relief of saying the true thing and watching every head in the room nod. Groups are often free or low cost, they ask nothing of you on the days you can only sit and listen, and many people find that hearing how others carry it gives them both comfort and ideas. If the idea of speaking in a group makes you nervous, know that listening quietly is a completely accepted way to attend.

Individual Counselors

An individual counselor gives you something a group cannot: a whole hour that belongs to your story alone, with a person trained to help you sort what is heaviest, at your pace, in private. Counselors who work with grief understand its strange shapes, the anger, the guilt, the relief nobody wants to admit to, the numbness that feels worse than tears. You do not need to arrive with a plan or a tidy summary. People begin with "my person died, and I do not know how to do this" all the time, and that is enough. Sessions are usually weekly or every other week at first, and the length of the relationship is yours to shape. Some people go for a few months around a hard season. Some, like me, go much longer, because the support keeps earning its place. Both are normal.

Hospice Bereavement Programs

Here is one of the best kept secrets in grief support: hospices run bereavement programs, and they are often free, and they are often open to anyone in the community, not only families whose loved one was in that hospice's care. These programs may include grief groups, one to one support, workshops, remembrance events, and lending libraries, all run by people who spend their working lives alongside loss. Because hospice care is built around supporting families as well as patients, their bereavement staff tend to be especially gentle with new grievers and especially practical about things like anniversaries and holidays. If there is a hospice anywhere near you, its bereavement program is one of the first doors worth knocking on, and it will not matter to them if your loved one died somewhere else entirely.

Faith and Spiritual Communities

For those who want it, a faith or spiritual community can hold grief in a way few other places can: with ritual, with a language for mystery, and with people who will keep showing up long after the rest of the world has moved on. Many congregations offer grief ministries, prayer circles, memorial services, or simply a leader who will sit with you and listen. You do not have to have everything figured out spiritually for this door to be open, and honest doubt is welcome in more of these rooms than you might expect. And if faith is not part of your life, skip this section without a second thought. Support that does not fit who you are will not hold you, and there are many other doors in this guide.

Online Groups and Communities

For people in rural places, people with full work schedules, people whose hardest hours are at two in the morning, and people who simply cannot face a room of strangers yet, online support can be a genuine lifeline. Moderated grief groups, video support circles, and communities organized around a particular kind of loss meet around the clock and ask nothing of your commute. Quality varies, so look for groups with clear moderation and kind ground rules, and notice how a space makes you feel after you visit: steadier, or rawer? A good community leaves you feeling less alone. If one leaves you feeling worse each time, it is the wrong room, and leaving it is allowed. Online support can also be a bridge: many people start there, quietly, and find their way to in-person support when they are ready.

PART FOUR

Finding Support, and What It Can Cost

Where to Start Looking

The search itself can feel enormous when you are grieving, so here is the short version: you do not need to research the whole landscape. You need one name and one phone number to begin. Good places to get that first name include your local hospice, which usually knows every grief resource in the area, your own doctor, who makes these referrals constantly, and the community boards at hospitals and libraries, where groups post their meeting times. If you are employed, your workplace may offer an assistance program with free, confidential sessions and referrals; human resources can tell you the number without needing to know why you are asking. Online directories from counseling and psychology organizations let you search by location and by grief as a focus. Start with whichever of these feels least heavy. One door is enough.

Ask One Trusted Person to Make the First Call With You

Here is a piece of permission many people need: you do not have to make the first call alone, and you do not even have to be the one who dials. Ask one trusted person to sit with you while you call, or to make the first inquiry on your behalf, or to drive you to the first meeting and wait in the car. This is not weakness and it is not cheating. The first step of getting support is genuinely the hardest step, and borrowing someone's steadiness for it is just good sense. People are almost always honored to be asked, because the people who love you have usually been waiting, sometimes for a long time, for a concrete way to help. "Will you sit with me while I make this call on Tuesday?" is a gift you are giving them as much as yourself.

Cost-Conscious Routes That Are Real

Money is a real barrier for many people, and pretending otherwise helps no one. So it matters to know how much of this landscape is free or low cost. Hospice bereavement programs and many community grief groups charge nothing at all. Faith communities and hospital programs often run groups for free as well. Many counselors offer sliding scale fees, which means the cost adjusts to what you can pay, but you usually have to ask, because it is not always advertised. Group support generally costs much less than individual sessions, and sometimes the group turns out to be the better fit anyway. Workplace assistance programs commonly include several free sessions. If cost is the thing standing between you and support, say so out loud early, to the hospice, the counselor's office, or the group leader. The people in this work hear that sentence every day, and they usually know exactly which door to point you toward.

Ask Directly What a First Conversation Costs

Uncertainty about money stops more people than money itself does. The fix is one plain question, asked before you book anything: "What does a first session cost, and do you offer a sliding scale?" You can also ask whether the first conversation is a shorter introductory call, whether there is a waiting list, and what happens if you need to cancel. These are ordinary business questions, and offices answer them all day without blinking. Knowing the number lets you plan, and planning makes the whole thing feel smaller. If the number is more than you can do, that is information, not a dead end: ask that same office who they would recommend for someone in your situation and budget. Referrals travel downhill toward affordability more often than you would expect.

PART FIVE

The First Visit, and Words to Borrow

What a First Session Is Actually Like

The first session with a counselor is mostly a conversation about you: what happened, who you lost, how life looks right now, and what you hope might feel different. There may be a little paperwork at the start, and a few questions about your health and safety, which are routine and asked of everyone. You will not be expected to tell your whole story perfectly, or in order, or without crying. Crying in that room is so ordinary that there is usually a box of tissues within reach, placed there because everyone needs it. You are also allowed to say very little. Some people talk for the full hour the first time. Some manage ten minutes and sit quietly for the rest, and a good counselor will meet you exactly there. Nothing you say in that room will shock the person across from you. They chose this work, and grief is their everyday language.

What a First Group Meeting Is Actually Like

A first grief group meeting is gentler than most people fear. You will usually find a small circle of ordinary people, a leader who opens with a few ground rules about confidentiality and kindness, and a simple invitation to introduce yourself as much or as little as you wish. "My name is, and my person died this year" is a complete introduction. Passing is always allowed. Nobody will make you speak, pray, hug, or share before you are ready, and many first timers mostly listen, which is a real and respected way to be there. You may hear stories that sound like yours and stories that do not, and both can help: the first kind says you are not alone, and the second kind says grief has many shapes and yours is allowed its own. Arrive a few minutes early, sit near the door if that helps you breathe, and remember that everyone in that circle was once the new person walking in.

Permission to Try a Different Counselor

This needs its own section, because it stops so many people: if the fit is wrong, you are allowed to leave. A counselor can be skilled, kind, and well recommended, and still not be the right person for you. Maybe their style feels too clinical or too casual. Maybe you cannot relax. Maybe you leave each session feeling smaller instead of steadier. None of that makes you difficult, and none of it means support is not for you. It means that particular chair was not yours. Counselors know this, expect it, and are not wounded by it; helping you find the right fit is part of their profession's ethics. You can say so simply, or you can quietly book elsewhere, and both are acceptable. Please do not let one wrong fit close the whole door. The second counselor, or the third, is very often the one people describe years later as the person who helped them through.

Words You Can Borrow

Most people know they want support long before they know how to start the conversations around it. Below are sentences written to be used exactly as they are, by phone, by text, or in the doctor's office. You do not need to improve them or rehearse them into something smoother. Plain and honest is the whole style.

Calling to book a first appointment:

> *"Hello, I am calling because someone I love died, and I think I could use some support with my grief. I have never done this before, so I do not really know what to ask for. Could you tell me what a first appointment looks like, what it costs, and whether you have anything open in the next few weeks?"*

Telling a friend you are getting support:

> *"I wanted you to hear this from me. I have decided to talk to a counselor about my grief. I am not falling apart, and you have done nothing wrong. I just need one place where this is the whole conversation. What helps me most is you treating it as normal, because I am trying to."*

Asking your doctor at a regular visit:

> *"Before we finish, there is something I want to mention. Since my loved one died, I have been struggling more than I expected, and it is not easing the way I hoped. I think some grief support might help. Do you know counselors or groups nearby that you trust, and could you point me to a good place to start?"*

Notice what none of those scripts contain: an apology. You do not need to apologize for grieving, for needing help, or for taking up a professional's time with exactly the thing their work exists for. Borrow the words as often as you need them. That is what they are here for.

YOUR TURN

My First Steps Toward More Support

Fill this in on a quiet day, a little at a time. There are no wrong answers and no deadline. This page is a beginning, not a test, and you are allowed to change any line of it as you learn more.

The signs I recognize in myself, in my own words (from Part Two, or in words of your own)

What I hope support could make easier (one honest sentence is plenty)

Three kinds of support I found near me (a hospice program, a group, a counselor, a community)

The one I will try first (and what a first conversation there costs)

The call I will make, and when (the number, the day, the time)

Who will sit with me while I make it (or who will drive me to the first meeting)

If the first fit is not right, my next try will be (because a wrong fit is not a closed door)

Reaching for more support is not the end of your strength. It is one of the bravest shapes your strength can take. You have carried this love, and this loss, with your own two hands for a long time. Letting other hands help hold it does not make it any less yours. It makes it possible to keep carrying it, for all the years it deserves. We are rooting for you, and we will be here.

With love, always