

Teen Grief



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What's Special About this Book?

Most books about grief are written by adults. This one was written with the help of teenagers.

When we put this book together, we talked to a lot of teens. As they shared their stories, they learned they had more in common with their grieving peers than they realized. After a loss, you may feel that no one understands what you're going through. You may wonder if it will ever get better. The teens we spoke to felt the same way. We hope that seeing how they felt, and reading what they thought, might help you deal with the pain you're feeling now.

We've included the activities these teens found useful. Maybe they'll help you, too.



Someone You Love Has Died

You may have lots of different memories of that person. Some might be happy, others might be painful. Or you may not have many memories at all. Either way, sharing what you remember can be a powerful way to honor or acknowledge the person you've lost.

How would you complete the following sentences about the person you've lost?

What I will always remember about you is (or, what I would like to have known about you):

What I've learned from knowing you is (or, what I wish you had a chance to teach me):

What I wish I had told you is (or, what I wish I had a chance to tell you):

How Other Teens Responded

What I will always remember about you is:



Your boundless enthusiasm and optimism. You always strived for perfection and because of that you made me who I am.

The fun we had together. The things you showed me or taught me.

You were strict but you loved me. You were my father.

How brave and fun you were.... how you persevered even when you were sick. I admire that.

Your smile and infectious laughter.

The laughs and stress we went through and how you taught me to never give up.

How athletic you were even though you had asthma, allergies, glasses, and bad knees. You never gave up and were always true to yourself. You were so open-minded and never one to judge. You liked lemons.

Your incessant nagging.... It took me 15 years and your death to understand why.

You had a beautiful smile. When you laughed, I laughed.

You tried.

What I've learned from knowing you is:

I have learned that even though you aren't alive you are still with us. Also I have learned to try and be kind even if I am mad or sad or even in pain.

I've learned the value of just about everything-doing good work, being honest, and not taking crap from other people, because I know I deserve it.

Being yourself is important, if you're not being true, you're not being real.

I learned that you were the heart of the family.

It's never too late to try. Also, it is possible to achieve great things — all you have to do is give it your all. I also learned that everyone deserves compassion.

To never give up on reaching your dreams. You always told me to keep going and to get back up no matter how hard it gets.

I learned how to cook.

To not give into bad things. If your life is hard don't abuse and bully other people because of it.

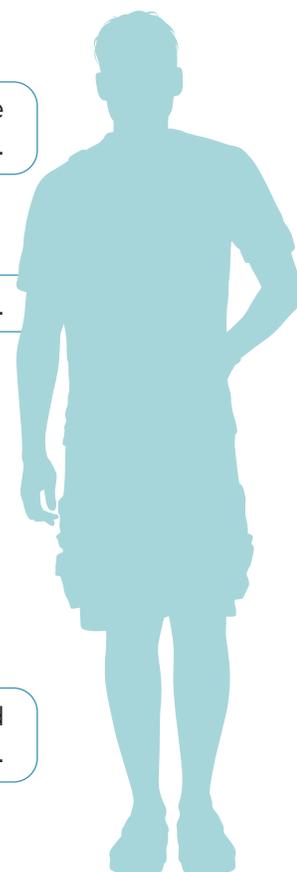
I can never replace you.

What I wish I had told you is:

That I love you and I regret my mistakes so much. I wish I had a chance to say goodbye ... I really miss you.

That I missed you and you weren't a screw up. I wish I told you how it's okay and that everyone has their faults.

No matter what I love you. Even when I'm angry.



I wish I had a chance to say goodbye. It was really fast, and just as I was gaining hope you were taken from my life. I really miss you.

I wish I told you I loved you when you were alive. I really didn't tell you how I felt or what I was doing.

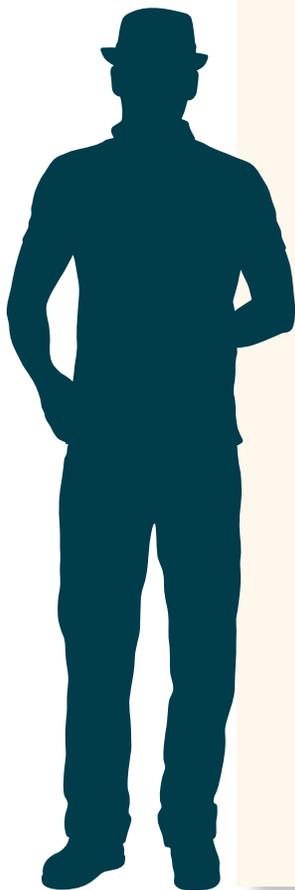
That I like the things you like.

I had time to tell you everything.

That I love you; that I value what you value and if there is a time when I don't exemplify that then I will change.

That I'm sorry I was embarrassed of you.

Use this page to write a letter to the person you've lost. You can share memories of the things you did together, or talk about the things you never got a chance to do. You can tell them what they meant to you, talk about the happy times, or recall the hard times. It's up to you. Add drawings, a poem, pictures — anything you want. It's your letter.



It's Your Grief

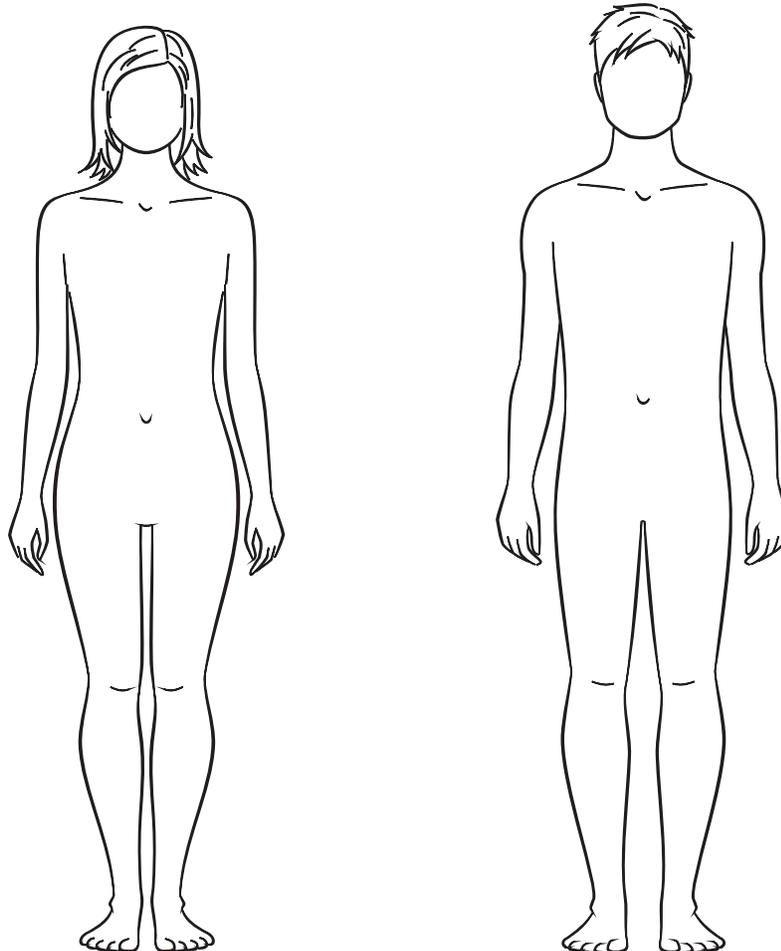
When someone dies, you may feel shock, numbness, disbelief, or a whole lot of other things. Later, you may feel sadness, loneliness, depression, anger, relief, guilt, or anxiety. And it can be confusing to feel so many things at once. But it's normal. And things do get better. Just not right away. It takes time.

Besides all the emotions, you may also have physical reactions. You might be tired all the time. You might have trouble falling asleep. There might be nightmares. Or maybe you can't sleep at all. Some people eat nonstop. Some don't eat at all. Some of us get stomachaches or headaches.

All this can be part of grieving. (It's a good idea to see a doctor if the physical stuff doesn't get better).

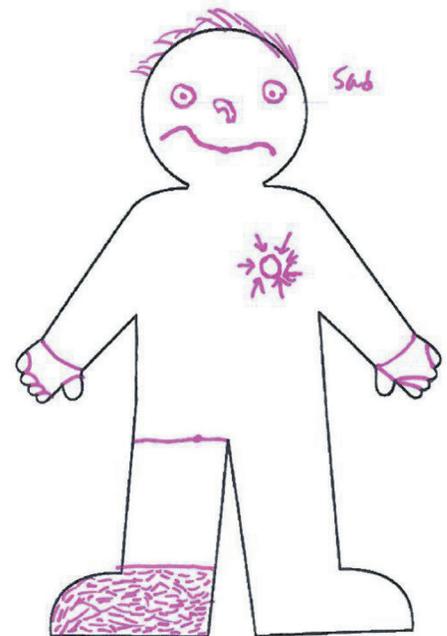
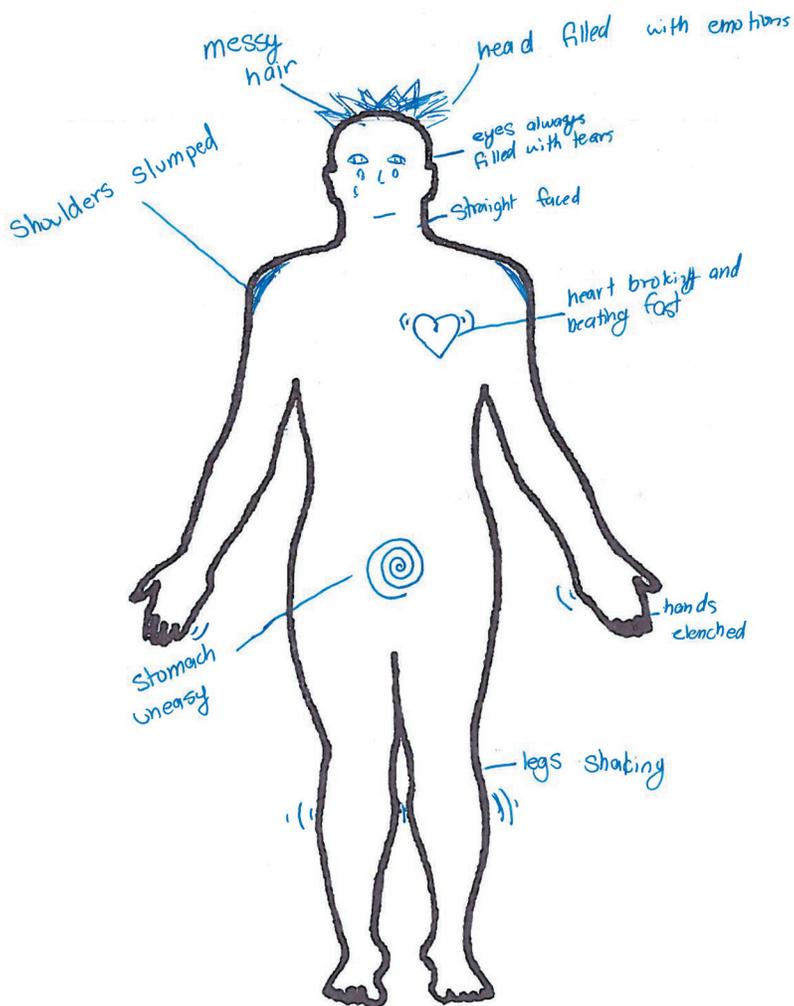
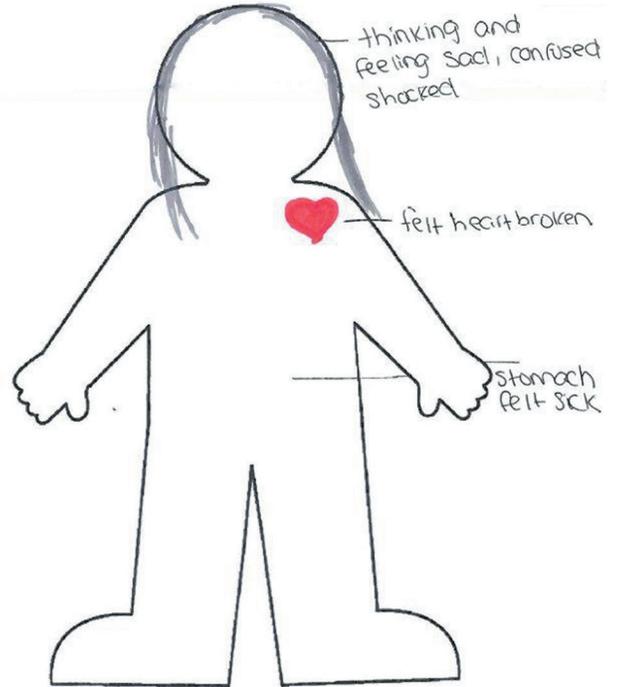
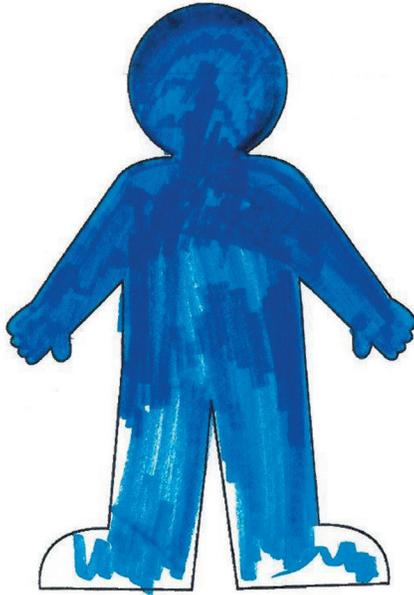
Everyone is unique, and so is your grief. No one can tell you how you "should" or "shouldn't" feel. But it's also important to take care of yourself while you grieve. And, if you need it, or you think it will help, ask for support. There's nothing "wrong" or "bad" or "weak" about that. We all need a little help from time to time.

Strong emotions can have a physical side. Like when you feel so bad about something that your stomach gets weird. Or when you're so worried that you feel shaky or short of breath. So, yes, grief can affect your body as well as your mind. The drawing below can help you identify the physical parts of your grief. You can use it to express what your body is feeling because of your loss.





How Other Teens Responded



Thinking about both the emotional and physical parts of your grief, how would you complete the following sentence? Remember, there's no "right" or "wrong" answer.

When you died I felt:

How Other Teens Responded

When you died I felt:

Can you relate to any of these feelings?



Change, Change and More Change

Loss brings change. Sometimes a lot of small changes, and sometimes huge changes. And you might think things will never be the same again. If you're feeling that way, try the next activity. Afterwards, if you want to, you can share it with someone you love and trust. Maybe they can help you deal with some of the changes you are experiencing.

In **“The Way It Used To Be”** section, write or draw what your life was like when the person you've lost was alive. You can write something about yourself – perhaps what you were like and what was important to you before this person died. You can also write about what your family was like.

In **“The Way It Is Now”** section, write about what your life and/or family is like now.

In **“The Way I Want It To Be”** section, write or draw your hopes and wishes for yourself, your life, and/or your family.

THE WAY IT USED TO BE	THE WAY IT IS NOW	THE WAY I WANT IT TO BE



How Other Teens Responded

The Way It Used To Be:



Easy, simple, happy. People dying only happens to other families.

I was always going back and forth to the hospital.

Safe. Strong. Stable. Not as tense or stressful.

Not many cares. Didn't take things seriously.

Funny. Always busy. Hurt. Anger.

For the most part, I didn't know what was going on and didn't care all that much until I realized he was actually sick.

Things were better then.

Sometimes we would take walks and buy ice cream.

If I was bored ever, it was never a huge problem for me.

My family was complete. Everyone had more fun.

Less awkward.

He was strict but in a good way.

I was at school the day he died and my grandpa picked me up and told me. We drove to the hospital and I didn't know what to say or do, I was lost.



The Way It Is Now:

Hasn't quite sunken in yet. It's weird to think about.

I have the best friends I've ever had...and with them I can forget for a moment.

My dad has to work a lot so we really don't get to see him until late at night. My dad doesn't know how to cook and doesn't usually get home in time for dinner so I make it.

I'm like a rubber band who has been pulled over and over again.

We're mostly happy but we have those sad days when we think of him.

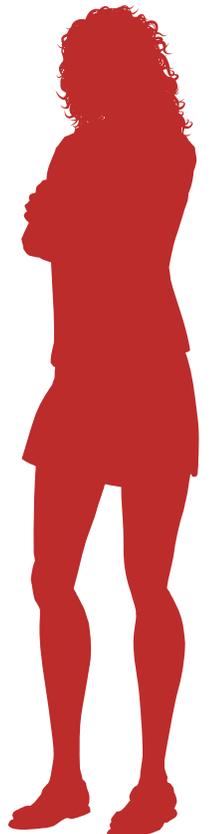
We have lots of fun but I still miss my older brother.

My mom has a new boyfriend that's super nice but I don't want him to replace my dad.

Peaceful. Sad. Something's missing. Empty space. Broken hearts.

I'm too hard on myself.

We had to sell his dream house after he died.





It's boring now.

I don't feel a deep sadness, or any sadness really. To be honest, I feel like a horrible person because I don't miss him.

A huge piece of me is gone.

I take things too seriously.

Don't know what to say when people ask.

Nervous. Hard. We all get pissed off really easily now.

My family barely even talks about my mom because it just hurts too much to accept the fact that she is really gone.

No one is around to go anywhere with me.

The way it is now is having a stepdad. Now I am getting more into cycling because he is a cyclist.

Things are okay-ish.

I have strong ideals now.

Everyone is having fun still but something isn't right.

Now it is sad but when I think of him I think of happy things.

The Way I Want It To Be:

I want someone to give me really good advice when I need it.

To miss him and be sad but not devastated...accept the whole circle of life thing.

It would be nice to stop feeling so lost and confused.

I just want people to remember him, the fun things and his accomplishments.

I want my mom to stay with us more often. Ugh.

I'm fine with how it is. I miss him but everything happens for a reason and obviously he didn't want to be here anymore.

I want to be stronger and even kinder.

I would like for my dad to be here.... I have more confidence.

I want to be happy.

I want my dad to be alive and off drugs.

I wish I could smile more and talk to new people easier.

I want my mom back, but I know that can't happen. I also just want my family to be close like we used to be.

I just want to feel like I used to.

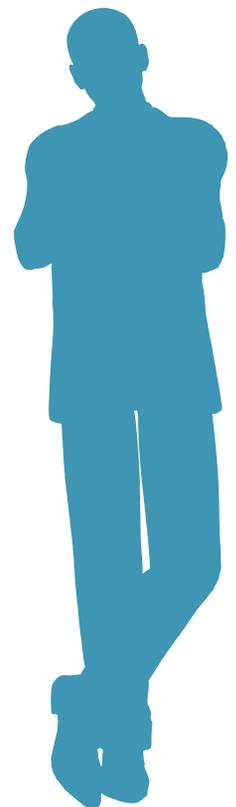
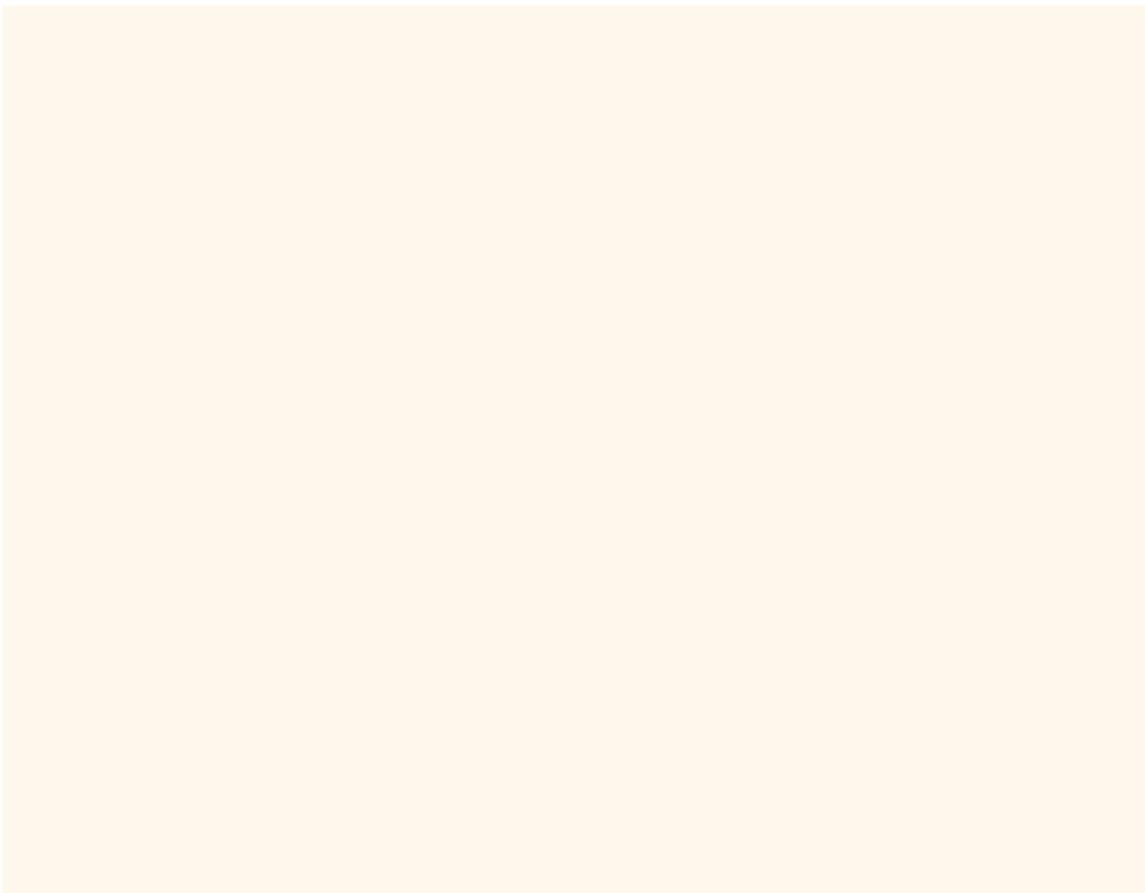
I want someone to stay with me when I need it most.

I would like to still have him here and make me feel better when I'm sad. And for him to pick me up when I need it.

I want warm love and knowledge that helps not only me but also my future.

I need to find something to fill the hole and sadness.

Do you relate to these thoughts and feelings? You can use this space to write your reactions to what you've just read.



What Helps?

When someone dies, people may say things they think will make you feel better. Sometimes, they actually make you feel worse.

A lot of people just don't know what to say when someone dies. They may avoid talking about the person. They may say things they think are helpful but are really no help at all.

It would be great if people knew what to say or do, without us telling them. But usually they don't. And it can be hard or frustrating to tell them what helps and what doesn't. But it can also be worth the effort.

Answer these questions as honestly as you can. There are no “right” or “wrong” answers.

Imagine you're spending time with another teen who's just experienced the loss of someone they love. They're struggling, and they ask you for advice. What would you say?

Imagine you're telling a parent or other adult how they can help you deal with your loss. What would you say about what helps or doesn't? What do you really want them to know?



How Other Teens Responded

If you could tell another teen who just lost someone one thing that might help them, what would it be?



I would tell that teen to remember that you are not alone and that the grieving process takes time. I think that I would also tell them that eventually it does get better. Not to say that the pain of missing our loved one will ever go away but it will get easier as time goes by. Even though your loved one isn't physically with you, they will always be in your heart.

Accept the fact that you lost your loved ones, but don't lose sight of them.

You will see who is truly there for you. Some of your friends will want you to just get better right away but you won't. You will always be sad some times more than others but that's okay. You need to grieve however you want. No one is forcing you into magically being happy.

Think about the fun things.

You should really talk to someone about your problems.
TAKE IT ONE DAY AT A TIME.

It's o.k. to cry. Seriously. Everyone says that, but it's true ... This is what I do anyway: sometimes I'll play music my brother used to listen to, and just cry myself to sleep. Just get it out of my system. Everyone's different, so this might be too extreme, triggering, just warning you. Also, I love to hang out with my brother's friends. I loved my brother, I love his friends. It can be difficult, sad, you know, but I feel that my brother lives on through us, and that is a great way to feel. For me anyway. Also, keep pictures. That way you won't forget. Not that you ever would completely. Tell stories, too! With whomever and whenever you would like to. This is you and what you're feeling, don't let other people tell you when and how to grieve.

I would leave them alone.

Being in an early stage of grief, you feel like something is wrong with you because you don't feel much at all. Don't. It is totally normal.

I know you've lost the body version of your loved one, but you haven't lost them in your heart.

Stay strong.

Live your new life and always remember that you're not alone.

Even if everything feels bad now it always gets better even if you don't realize it at first. It. Always. Gets. Better.

They make sure they have someone they trust to talk to about it because their friends probably won't understand.

Keep moving forward and reach out to people like a sports team because they will help you and become your family.

Find a glimmer of goodness every day. Try to learn how to accept that there is no going back but it is possible to make the best of your new life.

If you could tell your parent(s) or another adult one thing they could do to help you, what would it be?

Give me space when I ask for it. Don't pressure me to do things I am not ready for. I will come to you if I need you, but I need space sometimes.



To just understand. Not really to try so hard to fix things but to just understand how I feel and be okay. I would tell them that sometimes I do not want to talk and sometimes I do. I feel like nobody can truly make someone's pain go away, but that in trying they can make it worse. I think the focus of help should be helping kids come to terms with sadness.

Get a better mindset and become a role model.

To talk about him more. Tell more people about him and everything he has done.

To let me talk.... I want to talk and I want someone to listen.

They could talk to me about it in a serious manner. Leave me alone when feeling sad if I want, or ask me to talk about it if I wish to.

Let us grieve however we need. If it means sitting in our rooms and crying, or going out with friends — we have to do whatever helps us.

To try to understand and not make my grieving feel so one-sided.

It might help you to share your answers to these questions with someone you love and trust, so they understand what you're going through. Consider showing them what you've written. Or what other teens have written. They may be relieved to know how to help. You can use the space below to write down some ideas about how you could start the conversation.

Here are some examples:

"I've been reading this book about grief, and writing in it, and was wondering if you'd like to take a look at it."

"Can you read these pages in this book so we can talk about it later?"

"I just read something in this book that I thought was interesting [helpful / cool... whatever words you want to use], and I thought you might want to check it out. I'd like to talk about some of this."

"There's something I've been wanting to talk with you about — how I've been doing since _____ died."

"I've been reading this book about grief. I can really relate to some of the things it says and I'd like you to take a look at it, too. Maybe it'll help you understand where I'm coming from."



Finding Support

As we said earlier, it's important to take care of yourself and reach out for support if you need it. You might be surprised at how much it can help to talk about what you're going through.

Or maybe it'll help you to write, draw, paint, dance, or sing. Sports, sharing memories, reading a book, or watching a movie can also help you get through bad days.

Some people isolate themselves or use drugs or alcohol to numb the pain. The thing is, isolation, drugs, or alcohol delay healing and make things worse. Grieving is normal. And yes, it's painful. But there are healthy ways to deal with the pain. Figuring out what makes you feel better is a good first step in healing.

It probably doesn't feel like it now, but little by little, you will begin to feel better. Just ask anyone who's gone through it.

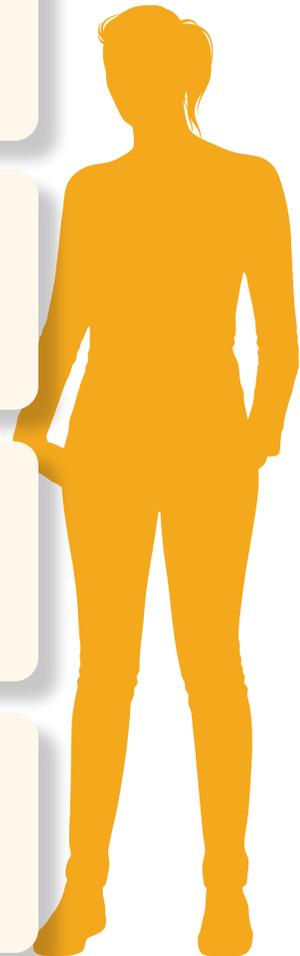
Completing these statements can help you figure out how to take care of yourself and begin healing.

If I feel sad or lonely, it helps me feel better when

What makes me feel happy these days is

I feel loved and supported when

The things that have helped me when I feel the pain of grief are



Some days are harder than others. That's just the way it is. When you're having a particularly rough day and aren't sure how to feel better, think about what's helped you before. It might work again.

If you come up with new ideas, write them down here. They might help later.

More Art ...

Here are some suggestions for art activities that can help you express your feelings, remember your loved one, and adjust to the changes in your life.

HEARTFELT MEMORIES

Cut a large colored heart from poster board or construction paper and glue photo(s) of your loved one in the center of the heart. On the back of the heart, write or draw memories or write what you've learned from him or her. Hang the completed heart where you can see it and review the things you'll always remember.

OUTER FACE/INNER FACE

On a piece of colored construction paper, cut out a large oval shape to represent your face. (You can also use a paper plate.) On one side of the oval, draw or paint what your "outer face" looks like. This is the face people see when they look at you.

On the other side of the oval, draw, paint or glue different shapes cut from construction paper that represent your "inner face" — What you look like, or what you feel, on the inside. Your "inner face" is the "you" people don't see just by looking at you.

Do you have feelings that others might be surprised by? Would your friends and family be surprised by your "inner" face? Use these "Inner" and "Outer" faces to help others understand what you're feeling.

MEMORY BOX

Find a box of any size that you'd like to decorate in honor of your loved one. You can paint the box if you'd like. After it's dry, you can glue things to it, such as pictures or words from magazines, photos, glitter, stickers, hearts, beads, flowers, feathers, or anything else.

If you have a photograph or copy of your loved one's obituary, you might want to glue these onto the box. Write memories on strips of paper and place them in box, along with any special objects belonging to your loved one.

FIVE WISHES

Place your outstretched hand on top of a sheet of colored construction paper. Trace around edges of hand and fingers with felt tipped pen until you have drawn the outline of your hand. Cut out your hand and write the following things on the fingers:

On the thumb: Write a wish that you have for yourself.

On the index finger: Write a wish that you have for your loved one who died.

On the third finger: Write your wish for the family and friends of your loved one who died.

On the ring finger: Write your wish for people all around the world who have lost a loved one.

On the pinkie finger: Write a wish that you have for the earth.

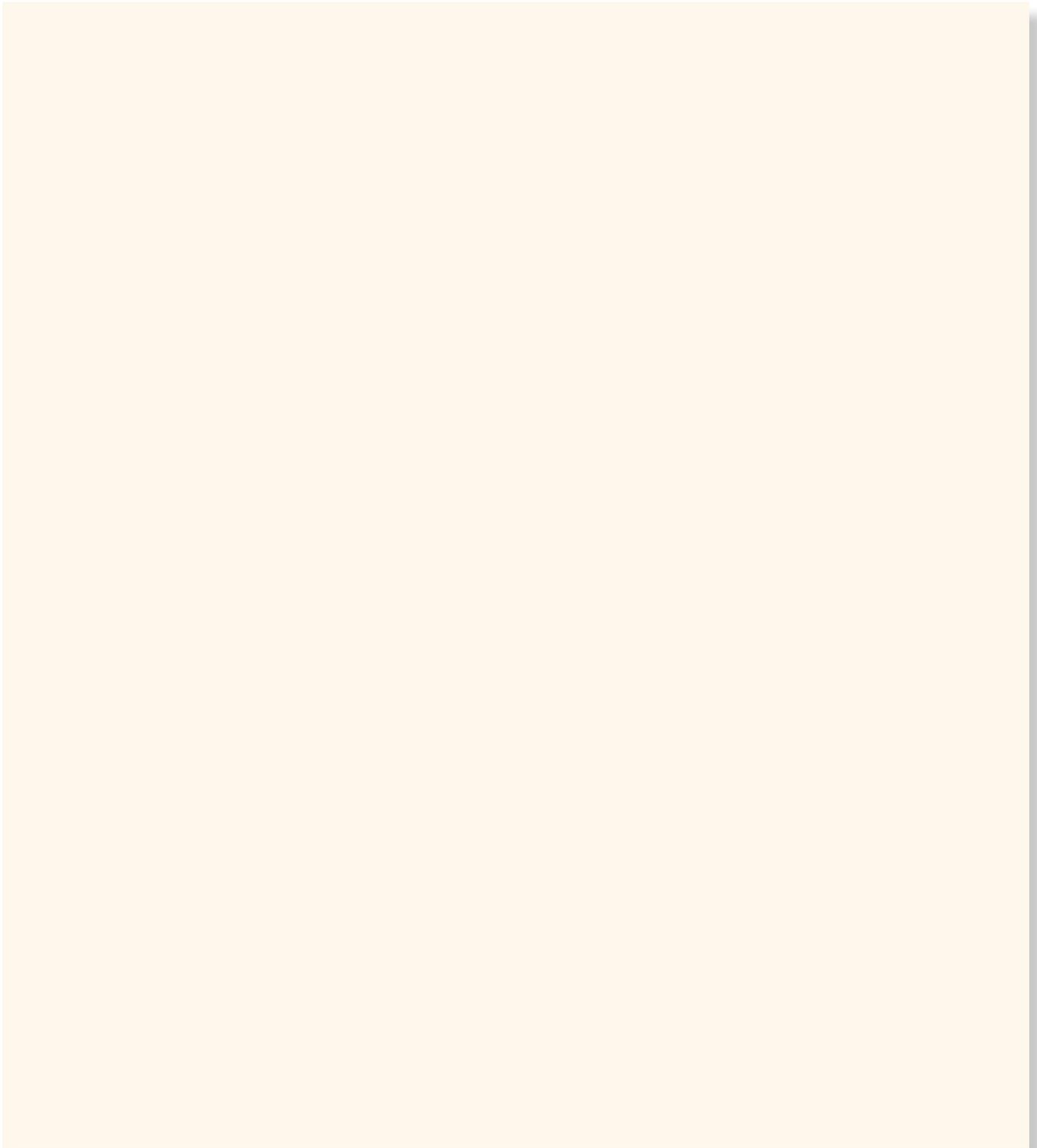
Now draw and decorate the center of your paper hand in any way that you wish. Hands can be glued onto Tibetan prayer flags, banners, fabric, or anything else you would like.

This activity can also be done with the entire family. Each member traces their hand and writes wishes inside fingers. A hand can also be drawn to represent the family member who died and all hands can then be glued onto pieces of cardboard, fabric, or flags and attached to each other.



Journaling Pages

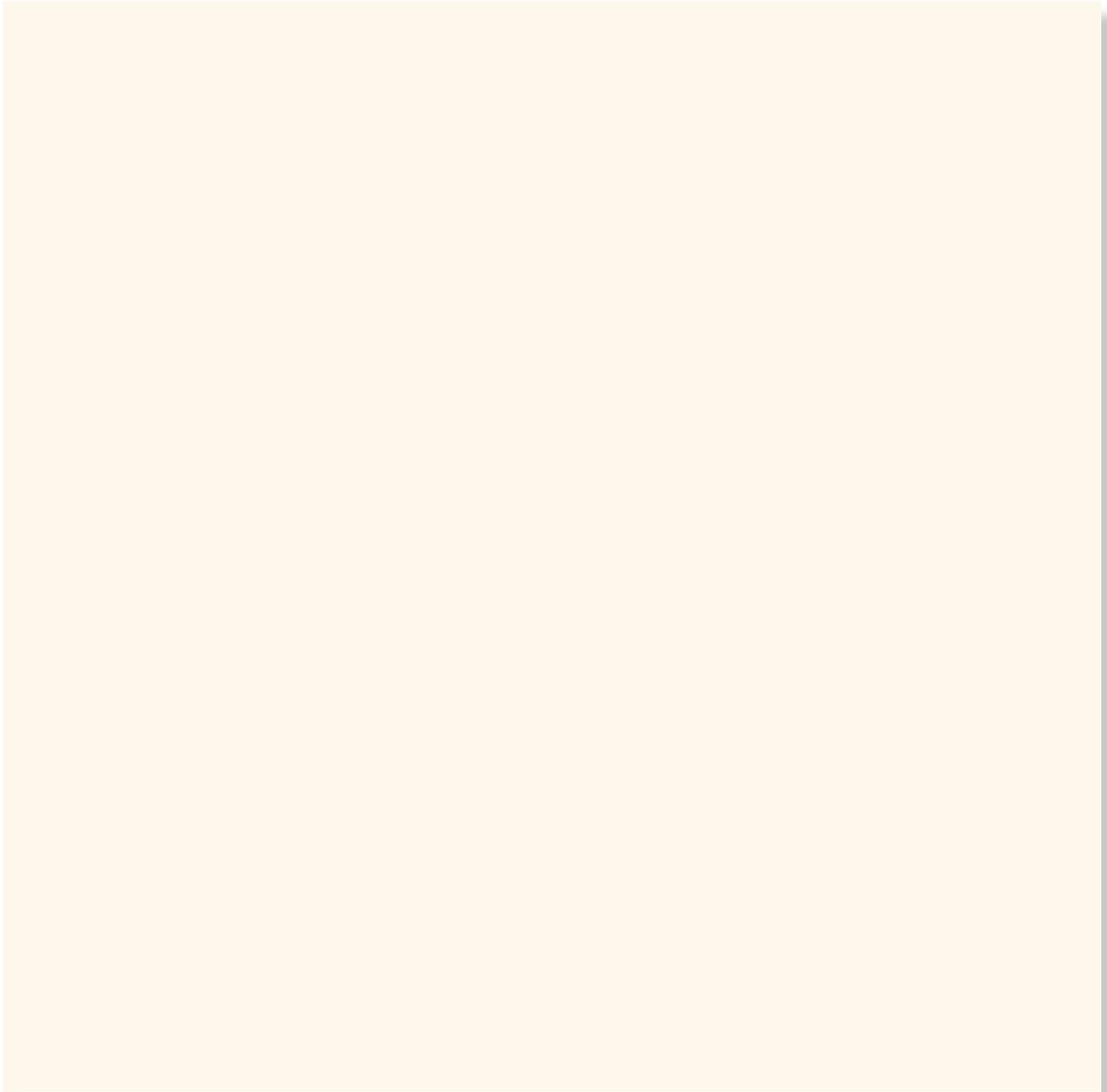
Use these pages to write anything that may be helpful to you as you grieve. You can continue activities begun earlier in this book, or use the space to write a letter, draw, or express your feelings. Whatever gets you through... It's your grief.



Journaling Pages

A large, blank, light beige rectangular area intended for journaling, occupying most of the page below the title. It has a subtle drop shadow on the right and bottom edges, giving it a slightly three-dimensional appearance as if it's a page floating above the background.

Journaling Pages



This book was underwritten by Rosemary Cozzo. Rosemary knew how important it was for children who were grieving to have a safe place to express their feelings. She embraced the idea of producing a book that would provide a means of expression for teens who were living with loss and letting their voices support other grieving children. By the Bay Health is grateful to Rosemary for making this project possible.

Grief Counseling and Education Resources

To help you access grief counseling support we would also like to offer contact information on the following local and national resources in your community.

Marin and the North Bay

By the Bay Health - Bereavement dept.:

Marin Office: Larkspur, CA	(415) 526-5699
Sonoma Office: Sonoma, CA	(707) 931-7299
Family Service Agency of Marin 24-Hour Grief Counseling	(415) 499-1195
Collabria Care, Napa, CA	(707) 258-9080
Sutter Care at Home, Santa Rosa, CA	(707) 535-5780

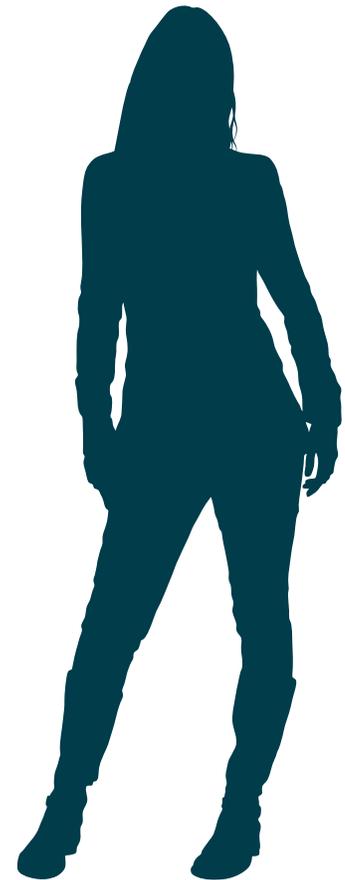
East Bay

Circle of Care: East Bay Agency For Children, Oakland, CA	(510) 531-7551
Hospice of the East Bay, Pleasant Hill, CA	(925) 887-5678
Pathways, Oakland, CA	(510) 613-2092

San Francisco, the Peninsula and South Bay

By the Bay Health - Bereavement dept.:

San Francisco/San Mateo Office: SF, CA	(415) 526-5699
Josie's Place, San Francisco, CA	(415) 513-6343
KARA, Palo Alto, CA	(650) 321-5272
Pathways, South San Francisco and Sunnyvale, CA	(888) 755-7855
Hospice of the Valley, San Jose, CA	(408) 559-5600



National Resources

To identify grief counseling resources outside of the Bay Area, we recommend consulting the following:

The National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization Helpline

(800) 658-8898 / www.nhpco.org

The Moyer Foundation

(206) 298-1217 / www.moyerfoundation.org

The Dougy Center: National Center for Grieving

(866) 775-5683 / www.dougy.org

Association for Death Education and Counseling

(612) 337-1808 / www.adec.org

Hospice Foundation of America

(800) 854-3402 / www.hospicefoundation.org

National Alliance for Grieving Children

(866) 432-1542 / www.childrengrieve.org

Healgrief.org

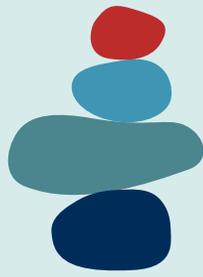
(888) 489-9654 / www.healgrief.org

Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors

(helping those grieving the death of a loved one serving in America's Armed Forces)
(202) 588-8277 / www.TAPS.org

American Association of Suicidology

(202) 237-2280 / www.suicidology.org



By the Bay

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