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Caring for Someone Who is Grieving Clinical Practice Workbook

A clinically branded, function-preserving edition retaining the original exercises, psychoeducation, checklists, logs, planning tools, and response space.

DSM-5-TR · ICD-11 CLINICAL ALIGNMENT

1 · Understanding the Grieving Process

2 · Offering Practical Support

3 · Listening Skills

4 · Validating Feelings

5 · Identify Triggers and Associations

6 · Exploring and Expressing Feelings

7 · Managing Guilt and Regret

8 · Developing Rituals

9 · Coping with Anniversaries

10 · Handling Holidays

11 · Storytelling and Reminiscing

12 · Compassion Fatigue

13 · Recognizing Complicated Grief

How to use this workbook

- Use this workbook selectively and collaboratively; it is educational and does not replace individualized assessment, diagnosis, treatment, medical care, or crisis services.
- Skip, pause, or modify any activity that increases distress, danger, shame, or loss of functioning. Adapt language for culture, disability, neurodivergence, health, resources, and lived context.
- Ratings in this workbook are reflection tools unless a named, validated measure and interpretation are explicitly provided.

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Understanding the Grieving Process

Grief can manifest in many ways and can vary greatly from person to person.

1. Stages of Grief:

Familiarize yourself with the stages of grief as proposed by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. Note that these stages are not linear and may not be experienced by everyone.

1. Denial: This is typically the first reaction to loss. People in this stage may have difficulty believing the loss has occurred, thinking there must be some mistake.

2. Anger: As the reality of the situation starts to take hold, it's common to feel frustration and anger. This can be directed at other people, oneself, or life in general.

3. Bargaining: In this stage, individuals often dwell on what could have been done to prevent the loss or hope that somehow the loss can be reversed. They may bargain with a higher power or with themselves, seeking a way out of the pain.

4. Depression: This stage involves the realization of the magnitude of the loss, which can lead to intense sadness, despair, and feelings of emptiness or hopelessness.

5. Acceptance: The final stage is coming to terms with the reality of the loss. Acceptance does not imply happiness about the situation, but rather a psychological/emotional resolution and understanding that the loss is a permanent part of life.

2. Observations of Grieving Patterns:

Note any observations of where your loved one might be in their grieving process.

3. Personal Expression of Grief:

Everyone grieves differently. Document specific ways your loved one expresses grief.

Offering Practical Support

During times of grief, managing everyday life can become overwhelming. Practical support can be especially significant during times when the grieving person might struggle with daily tasks or decision-making.

1. Immediate Needs:

- Can you assist with any urgent tasks? (e.g., funeral arrangements, notifying others, paperwork or other administrative tasks)

- What daily chores can you help with right now? (e.g., walking the dog, preparing meals)

2. Household Assistance:

- List household chores that you can take care of (e.g., cleaning, laundry, grocery shopping).

3. Long-Term Support Considerations:

- Looking ahead, what type of ongoing support may be beneficial?

Listening Skills

Here's a list of key listening skills and common pitfalls to avoid:

Listening Skills:

- **Maintain Eye Contact:** Shows attentiveness and interest.
- **Be Present:** Give them your full attention without distractions.
- **Non-Verbal Cues:** Nodding and appropriate facial expressions convey empathy.
- **Encourage Speaking:** Use open-ended questions to invite the person to share more.
- **Reflecting:** Paraphrase or summarize what they've said to ensure understanding.
- **Validating Feelings:** Acknowledge their emotions as valid and important.
- **Patience:** Allow pauses and silences so the speaker does not feel rushed.
- **Avoid Judgments:** Create a safe space for expression by withholding criticism.
- **Empathy:** Strive to understand their perspective and feelings deeply.
- **Clarification:** Ask for clarification when needed to better understand their point of view.

Pitfalls to Avoid:

- **Interrupting:** Cutting off the speaker can make them feel unheard and devalued.

- **Offering Unsolicited Advice:** This can come across as dismissive of the person's ability to cope.
- **Minimizing Feelings:** Making light of their experience invalidates their emotions.
- **Being Distracted:** Checking your phone or looking away indicates a lack of interest.
- **Imposing Your Own Experiences:** Over-identifying and hijacking the conversation with your own stories.
- **Showing Impatience:** Sighs, checking the time, or fidgeting can make the speaker feel hurried.
- **Judging:** Negative judgments can shame or silence the person sharing.
- **Jumping to Conclusions:** Making assumptions fails to honor the speaker's unique experience.
- **Overreacting:** Extreme emotional reactions from the listener can burden the speaker.

1. Self-Assessment of Listening Skills:

Reflect on how you listen and note down your strengths and areas for improvement.

Strengths:

- *Example: I maintain good eye contact when listening.*

Areas for Improvement:

- *Example: I sometimes interrupt because I want to help quickly.*

2. Listening Practice:

Write down scenarios where you can practice listening skills and what you will focus on.

Scenario:

- *Example: During mealtime conversations.*

Focus Technique:

- *Example: Avoid interrupting and give my full attention.*

3. Reflection on Listening Experience:

After practicing active listening, reflect on how it went and what you learned.

What Went Well:

What Could Be Improved:

Validating Feelings

The following are examples of validating statements that can convey empathy, understanding, and support. Check off the ones you find relevant or add more to the list:

- ☐ "Your feelings are completely normal and understandable."
- ☐ "It's okay to feel sad, angry, or however you're feeling right now."
- ☐ "I'm here for you, no matter what you need."
- ☐ "You don't have to go through this alone; I'm here to listen."
- ☐ "It's okay to cry or not to cry; there's no right way to grieve."
- ☐ "Take all the time you need; there's no rush to feel 'better'."
- ☐ "I'm so sorry you're going through this pain."
- ☐ "It's natural to feel a lot of different emotions during this time."
- ☐ "It's okay if you don't feel like talking about it now; I'll be here when you're ready."
- ☐ "I can't imagine how hard this is for you, but I want to support you in any way I can."
- ☐ "Your relationship with the person you lost was unique, and so will be your journey of grief."
- ☐ "Your feelings might be overwhelming at times, and that's to be expected."
- ☐ "I'm here to support you in the way that's most helpful to you; let me know what you need, even if it's just space."
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

Identify Triggers and Associations

Ask your loved one to reflect on any triggers or associations that bring up strong feelings. The following are some common ones. Check off the ones that apply or add more to the list:

- ☐ **Anniversaries:** Dates marking significant events in the life of the deceased, such as weddings or engagements.
- ☐ **Birthdays:** The birthday of the loved one or the griever can bring back intense emotions.
- ☐ **Holidays:** Major holidays, especially ones that were particularly meaningful to the deceased and their family.
- ☐ **Photographs:** Seeing images of happier times with the lost loved one.
- ☐ **Personal Belongings:** Coming across items that belonged to or were used by the deceased.
- ☐ **Clothing:** The sight or smell of the deceased's clothing can be very evocative.
- ☐ **Music:** Songs or pieces that were favorites of the deceased or played during significant moments.
- ☐ **Smells:** Scents associated with the loved one, such as their perfume or favorite foods.
- ☐ **Locations:** Places visited with the deceased or related to key life events.
- ☐ **Sounds:** A voice recording, familiar laugh, or sound associated with the loved one.
- ☐ **Seasons:** Changing seasons, especially if a particular season was meaningful.

- ☐ **Special Occasions:** Weddings, graduations, or other celebrations where the loved one's absence is felt.
- ☐ **Movies/TV Shows:** Media that was enjoyed together or features themes of loss.
- ☐ **Mealtimes:** Shared meals or missing the presence of the loved one at the table.
- ☐ **Jokes/Inside References:** Phrases or words that had special meaning between the deceased and the griever.
- ☐ **Social Gatherings:** Events where the loved one's absence is noticeable.
- ☐ **Children/Family Members:** Seeing characteristics or mannerisms of the deceased in relatives.
- ☐ **Cooking/Food:** Preparing or eating dishes that were favorites of the deceased.
- ☐ **Dreams:** Vivid dreams involving the loved one can reignite grief upon waking.
- ☐ **Driving/Travel:** Routes taken together or planned trips that never happened.
- ☐ **Workplace:** If the deceased was a coworker or connected to one's job.
- ☐ **Words or Phrases:** Specific language the deceased used or that was used during the grieving process.
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

Exploring and Expressing Feelings

1. Identifying Feelings:

- Have your loved one list out different feelings they've experienced recently, without judgment.

- *Example: Sadness, anger, confusion, loneliness, guilt, etc.*

2. Describing Feelings:

- Encourage them to describe what each feeling is like for them. They may use metaphors or simply describe where in their body they feel it.

- *Example: Sadness might feel like a heavy weight on their chest.*

3. Coping Strategies:

- Discuss healthy coping strategies that they've used in the past or could try now.

- *Example: Going for walks, writing in a journal, speaking with friends.*

4. Expressing Feelings:

- Provide opportunities for them to express their feelings, whether through conversation, art, music, or other creative outlets.

- *Example: Painting or drawing to express emotion without words.*

5. Reflecting on Support:

- Reflect on what kind of support they find most helpful when they're having a tough time.

- *Example: Simply wanting someone to sit with them silently.*

7. Planning for Difficult Moments:

- Help them plan for future moments when difficult feelings might arise.

Managing Guilt and Regret

1. Identifying Guilt and Regret:

- Ask them to write down specific instances where they feel guilt or regret.

- *Example: "I regret not spending more time with them."*

2. Examining the Source:

- Explore the roots of these feelings. Are they based on personal actions, missed opportunities, or external circumstances?

- *Example: "I feel guilty because I think I could have been a better support."*

3. Rational vs. Irrational Guilt:

- Distinguish between rational guilt (based on actions you could control) and irrational guilt (based on things out of your control).

4. Challenging Unhelpful Thoughts:

- Challenge unhelpful thoughts by asking if there is evidence that supports or contradicts the guilt or regret.

- *Example: "Is it true that I wasn't there for them, or did I do the best I could under the circumstances?"*

5. Self-compassion Exercise:

- Encourage self-compassion by reflecting on what they would say to a friend who had similar feelings. Prompt them to write a compassionate letter to themselves.

Developing Rituals

1. Recollecting Memories:

- Ask them to recall and note down memories or defining attributes of their loved one. What did they cherish or admire about them?

- *Example: Their laughter, wisdom, passion for gardening, etc.*

2. Incorporating Elements:

- Identify elements that could form part of the ritual, drawing from the memories and attributes listed.

- *Example: Playing their loved one's favorite music, planting flowers, preparing a meal they loved, etc.*

3. Setting a Time and Place:

- Discuss and choose an appropriate time and place for the ritual. Will it be a one-time event or a recurring activity?

- *Example: Annually on their birthday, weekly, or during special holidays.*

4. Inviting Participation:

- Determine whether this ritual will be private or if others will be invited to participate, such as family members or friends.

- *Example: A solo evening walk, a gathering of close relatives, etc.*

5. Creating Structure:

- Outline a structure for the ritual. What steps will it involve?

- *Example: Begin with a moment of silence, read a poem, share stories, light candles, etc.*

6. Planning for Challenging Emotions:

- Prepare for intense emotions that might arise during the ritual. How will they be acknowledged and managed?

- *Example: Having supportive people present, allowing space for expression of emotions, etc.*

7. Reflecting on Impact:

- After performing the ritual, reflect on its impact. Did it bring the expected comfort or closure? Would they like to make any changes?

- *Example: Adjusting the ritual timing, adding/removing elements, etc.*

Coping with Anniversaries

1. Identifying Significant Dates:

- List out dates that are likely to be challenging, such as the deceased's birthday, date of passing, or other significant milestones.

- *Example: May 25th (birthday), December 1st (anniversary of passing), etc.*

2. Expecting and Accepting Emotions:

- Normalize the anticipation of heightened emotions during these times and discuss ways to accept and process these feelings.

- *Example: Journaling, speaking with a friend, allowing time for reflection, etc.*

3. Planning Ahead:

- Create a plan for the day that includes activities that are comforting or meaningful.

- *Example: Visiting a favorite place of the loved one, volunteering, spending time with family, etc.*

4. Establishing Rituals:

- Discuss whether establishing a ritual would be helpful and plan it out if so.

- *Example: Lighting a candle, sharing stories, making a charitable donation in their name, etc.*

5. Creating a Contingency Plan:

- Recognize that emotions can be unpredictable and have a backup plan for unexpected feelings or needs that arise.

- *Example: Having a trusted therapist or counselor's number on hand, knowing a quiet space to retreat to, etc.*

8. Reflecting on Past Experiences:

- Look back at previous anniversaries and identify what has been helpful or unhelpful to inform this year's planning.

- *Example: Last year, being alone was hard; plan to be with friends this year, etc.*

Handling Holidays

1. Anticipating Holiday Challenges:

- Identify which aspects of the holiday may be challenging (e.g., particular traditions, absence of the loved one, memories associated with past holidays).

- *Example: Setting an empty place at the dinner table, missing the loved one's participation in lighting the menorah, etc.*

2. Adjusting Traditions:

- Discuss which holiday traditions the individual wants to keep, modify, or skip altogether.

- *Example: Continuing to bake the loved one's favorite cookies, creating a new tradition in their honor, deciding not to decorate this year, etc.*

3. Planning for Triggers:

- Consider potential emotional triggers and plan coping strategies in advance.

- *Example: Taking a moment for oneself when a particular song plays, having a plan to leave a gathering if it becomes too overwhelming, etc.*

4. Creating New Memories:

- Encourage creating new holiday memories that can coexist with honoring the memory of the loved one.

- *Example: Starting a community service project, making a new ornament, discovering a different festive event, etc.*

5. Embracing Support:

- Determine who in the individual's support network can provide emotional comfort or practical assistance during the holidays.

- *Example: A friend who understands the situation, a bereavement group, family members open to changing traditions, etc.*

6. Self-Care and Relaxation:

- Plan specific self-care activities that promote relaxation and provide respite from holiday stress.

- *Example: Practicing daily meditation, scheduling a spa day, ensuring time for regular exercise, etc.*

7. Limiting Obligations:

- Discuss setting boundaries around holiday commitments and how to communicate these to others.

- *Example: Politely declining certain invitations, choosing smaller gatherings, being honest about one's emotional capacity, etc.*

Storytelling and Reminiscing

Storytelling and reminiscing can be powerful tools in the grieving process, as they allow for a continued connection with the deceased while also helping to integrate the loss into one's life narrative.

1. Preparation:

- Set aside a quiet, comfortable space where you won't be interrupted. Ensure that the individual is willing and ready to engage in storytelling and reminiscing.

2. Choosing a Format:

- Decide together if you will record the session (audio or video) or keep it informal. Consider whether the individual would like to write things down in a journal or create a scrapbook.

3. Picking a Starting Point:

- Choose a specific memory or story about the deceased to begin the conversation. It could involve:

- ☐ A favorite holiday or family tradition
- ☐ A particular moment that stands out for its humor, warmth, or significance
- ☐ An achievement or life milestone of the deceased

- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

4. Encouraging Details:

- Ask open-ended questions to encourage detailed descriptions, which can help bring memories to life:

- What sights, sounds, or smells do you associate with this story?
- How did you feel at the moment?
- What was most meaningful to you about this experience?

5. Validating Emotions:

- Be present and listen empathetically.
- Validate all feelings, whether they are sadness, joy, anger, or a mix of emotions.

6. Connecting Through Objects:

- If appropriate, incorporate objects that hold significance, such as photos, letters, clothing, or music.

7. Respecting Boundaries:

- Pay attention to signs of emotional fatigue.
- Remind the person that it's okay to take breaks or stop altogether if they feel overwhelmed.

8. Reflecting on Stories:

- After sharing stories, reflect together on the experience.
- Discuss any new insights or emotions that arose during the session.

9. Ongoing Storytelling:

- Suggest making storytelling and reminiscing a regular activity, if it seems helpful.
- Discuss other ways they might want to continue connecting with their memories, such as writing a memoir or creating a digital album.

Compassion Fatigue

Compassion fatigue can occur when someone is in a caregiving role for an extended period, especially when caring for someone who is grieving. It is characterized by emotional and physical exhaustion leading to a diminished ability to empathize or feel compassion for others.

1. Signs of Compassion Fatigue:

- Reflect on any symptoms of compassion fatigue you may be experiencing. The following are some common examples. Check off the ones you relate to or add more to the list:

- ☐ Feeling overwhelmed or hopeless.
- ☐ Reduced empathy or sympathy for others.
- ☐ Increased feelings of irritability, anger, or annoyance.
- ☐ Anxiety or excessive worry.
- ☐ Depression or feelings of sadness.
- ☐ Detachment or disinterest in relationships.
- ☐ Feeling burdened by grieving person's needs.
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

2. Personal Assessment:

- Rate your current level of emotional, physical, and spiritual well-being. What areas need the most attention right now?

3. Self-Care Inventory:

- Take stock of your current self-care practices.

- Which self-care activities do you find most effective?

- Are there new self-care strategies you can incorporate?

5. Boundaries:

- Assess the boundaries you have set in your caregiving role.

- Are there boundaries that need to be strengthened or established?

Recognizing Complicated Grief

Complicated grief (also referred to as prolonged grief disorder) is characterized by an intense longing and preoccupation with the deceased that persists long after the loss and disrupts daily functioning.

Complicated grief is often diagnosed when symptoms persist for an extended period, usually **longer than six months** after the loss.

1. Identifying Intensified Symptoms:

- List signs that may indicate the presence of complicated grief. The following are some examples:

- ☐ Persistent longing or yearning for the deceased
- ☐ Thoughts preoccupied with the deceased to the point of disrupting daily life
- ☐ Extreme difficulty moving on with life
- ☐ Numbness or detachment
- ☐ Bitterness about the loss
- ☐ Feeling that life is meaningless without the deceased
- ☐ Lack of trust in others since the death
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

- Note how long these symptoms have been present:

2. Effects on Functioning:

- Document any observed effects on social or occupational functioning:

- *Examples include withdrawing from friends and family, inability to return to work or school, neglecting personal health, etc.*

3. Physical Health Concerns:

- Record any physical symptoms that may have arisen or worsened since the bereavement began (e.g., sleep disturbances, changes in appetite, somatic complaints, etc.)

4. Evaluating Coping Strategies:

- Assess coping strategies currently being used and their effectiveness:

- **Healthy coping:** Exercise, talking to friends, participating in support groups

- **Unhealthy coping:** Substance abuse, isolation, self-harm

5. Observing Social/Environmental Factors:

- Consider social and environmental factors that might be influencing the grief process (e.g., available support systems, cultural practices surrounding grief and mourning, additional life stressors, etc.)

6. Deciding on Next Steps:

- Plan a course of action based on the observations noted above:
- Continue to provide support and monitor symptoms
- Suggest joining a bereavement group for additional support
- Recommend seeking professional help from a therapist specializing in grief counseling

2026 Clinical Alignment

DSM-5-TR (including Sept. 2025 update) · ICD-11 CDDR / 2026 MMS

Classification status

- DSM-5-TR: No standalone DSM-5-TR diagnosis under the workbook title · educational/contextual topic unless a separately assessed disorder applies
- ICD-11 CDDR: No dedicated ICD-11 CDDR mental-disorder code under the workbook title · educational/contextual topic unless another coded condition is established
- This workbook is non-diagnostic. A title, checklist, or completed activity never establishes a diagnosis.

Pages requiring the updated interpretation

- The audit identified source pages 2, 9, 29, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35. The statements below supersede incompatible diagnostic, scoring, safety, or resource wording on those pages.

Diagnostic and differential limits

- Use Caring for Someone Who is Grieving material to support assessment or intervention planning, not to assign a diagnosis. Evaluate duration, severity, clinically significant distress or impairment, developmental and cultural context, medical/substance causes, exclusions, and relevant differentials.

Document-specific corrections

- Keep Caring for Someone Who is Grieving explicitly non-diagnostic; its exercises organize experience and goals but do not establish a mental disorder or causal explanation.
- Supersede diagnostic-sounding scoring on pages [2, 9, 31, 32]: disclose whether each tool is validated or author-created, remove unsupported thresholds, and separate symptom monitoring from diagnosis.
- Replace crisis wording on pages [2, 34] with the current U.S. 988 call/text/chat pathway, 911 or nearest emergency department for immediate danger/medical emergency, and a direction to use verified local services outside the United States.

Measures, scoring, and permissions

- Pages [2, 9, 31, 32] contain named, implied, or author-created screening/rating content; extracted candidate names include: Care Inventory . These scores are not diagnostic unless the exact instrument, version, validation population, administration, and interpretation are established. Identify provenance for every item set and scoring rule. Obtain publisher permission/license when required; otherwise remove cutoffs and label it as a nonvalidated reflection checklist, or replace it with a properly licensed measure without altering its wording/scoring.

Intervention scope and contraindications

- Use Caring for Someone Who is Grieving activities as psychoeducation and structured reflection, not diagnosis or a stand-alone treatment plan. Adapt or stop any exercise that worsens distress, functioning, conflict, pain, or dissociation, and escalate care according to the actual presentation.

Crisis and current resources

- For Caring for Someone Who is Grieving, use: ·If there is immediate danger or a medical emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department. In the U.S., call or text 988 or use 988lifeline.org for 24/7 crisis support. Outside the U.S., use verified local emergency and crisis services. · Verify all topic-specific agencies and links at publication.

Authoritative references

- <https://www.psychiatry.org/psychiatrists/practice/dsm/updates-to-dsm/updates-to-dsm-5-tr-criteria-text>
- <https://www.psychiatry.org/getmedia/b68a5776-f88c-45c7-9535-fd219d7aa5cb/APA-DSM5TR-Update-September-2025.pdf>
- <https://icd.who.int/browse/2026-01/mms/en>
- <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240077263>
- <https://www.samhsa.gov/mental-health/988>
- <https://www.samhsa.gov/mental-health/national-behavioral-health-crisis-care>

2026 Clinical Alignment

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- <https://988lifeline.org/>