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Sibling Grief 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 Shock of Loss

2 · Expressing Your Feelings About Your Sibling's Death

3 · Acknowledging the Impact of Your Sibling's Death

4 · Sharing Memories of Your Sibling

5 · Coping with Anger and Resentment

6 · Writing a Letter to Your Sibling

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16 · Understanding the Role of Faith in Healing

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 Shock of Loss

Losing a sibling can bring an overwhelming sense of shock, even if the loss was anticipated. This shock can leave you feeling numb, confused, or disconnected from reality.

1. How did you feel when you first learned about your sibling's passing? (e.g., numb, disbelieving, overwhelmed, in denial)

2. What physical or emotional symptoms have you experienced as part of the shock? (e.g., fatigue, headaches, numbness, disorientation)

3. Have you started to process the shock of your sibling's death? If so, how? (e.g., talking to others, journaling, attending memorials)

4. What are some ways you can continue to process the shock of your sibling's loss? (e.g., seeking therapy, creating a memory book)

5. What strategies can you use to manage the ongoing effects of shock? (e.g., regular self-care practices, seeking professional help, maintaining a routine)

6. How can you practice patience with yourself as you continue to cope with the shock of your sibling's loss? (e.g., allowing yourself time to heal, being gentle with your emotions, not rushing the grieving process)

Expressing Your Feelings About Your Sibling's Death

The death of a sibling can bring a complex mix of emotions, including sadness, anger, confusion, and even relief in some cases.

1. What emotions are you currently experiencing related to your sibling's death? (e.g., loneliness, guilt, anger, confusion, relief)

2. How have your emotions about your sibling's death changed since they first passed away? (e.g., from numbness to sorrow, from anger to acceptance)

3. Choose one emotion you're feeling strongly about your sibling's death. How does this emotion affect your daily life? (e.g., makes you feel heavy, affects your relationships, causes you to withdraw)

4. Do you have any feelings of guilt or regret related to your sibling's death? If so, what are they? (e.g., wishing you had spent more time together, regretting past arguments)

5. Are you feeling any anger related to your sibling's death? If so, what is the source of this anger? (e.g., anger at the circumstances, anger at yourself, anger at others)

6. How can you use writing as a tool to express your feelings about your sibling's death? (e.g., poetry, journaling, storytelling)

7. How might you use art to express your feelings about your sibling's death? (e.g., drawing, painting, sculpting, photography)

8. Who are the people in your life that you trust to share your feelings about your sibling's death? (e.g., family members, close friends, support groups)

9. How can you validate the wide range of emotions you're experiencing about your sibling's death? (e.g., by reminding yourself that all feelings are normal, by accepting emotions without judgment)

Acknowledging the Impact of Your Sibling's Death

1. How has your emotional state changed since your sibling's death? (e.g., experiencing deeper sadness, heightened anxiety, fluctuating moods)

2. How has your sibling's death altered the dynamics within your family? (e.g., shifts in roles, increased tension, stronger bonds)

3. How has your daily routine been affected by your sibling's death? (e.g., difficulty concentrating, changes in sleep patterns, loss of motivation)

4. What physical symptoms have you noticed since your sibling's death? (e.g., headaches, fatigue, appetite changes)

5. How has the loss of your sibling affected your sense of identity? (e.g., feeling less sure of yourself, questioning your role in the family, feeling lost)

6. Do you feel less secure or safe since your sibling's death? If so, how? (e.g., fear of further loss, anxiety about the future, feeling vulnerable)

Sharing Memories of Your Sibling

Sharing memories of your sibling can be a deeply healing and connecting experience. It allows you to keep their spirit alive, honor the bond you shared, and find comfort in the recollection of special moments.

1. What are some of your favorite memories with your sibling? (e.g., vacations, holidays, simple daily interactions)

2. What made these memories with your sibling special to you? (e.g., the emotions you felt, the significance of the event, the shared experience)

3. How do these cherished memories affect you now? (e.g., bring comfort, cause sadness, make you smile)

4. Who are the people you feel comfortable sharing memories of your sibling with? (e.g., family members, close friends, support groups)

5. Do you have any hesitations about sharing memories of your sibling? If so, what are they? (e.g., fear of upsetting others, not wanting to revisit painful memories)

6. What are some ways you can preserve the memories of your sibling for the future? (e.g., creating a memory book, recording stories, collecting photos)

7. What emotional impact does revisiting memories of your sibling have on you? (e.g., brings joy, causes tears, feels bittersweet)

8. What new traditions can you establish to honor your sibling's memory? (e.g., annual gatherings, special celebrations on their birthday, creating a memorial space)

Coping with Anger and Resentment

The loss of a sibling can stir up a complex range of emotions, including anger and resentment. These feelings might be directed at various sources, including the circumstances of your sibling's death, other people, or even yourself.

1. What are the primary sources of your anger related to your sibling's death? (e.g., the cause of death, unfulfilled plans, unresolved conflicts)

2. Do you feel any resentment toward others in relation to your sibling's death? If so, who and why? (e.g., healthcare providers, family members, friends)

3. Are you directing any anger or resentment toward yourself? If so, why? (e.g., for things left unsaid, not spending enough time together, past conflicts)

4. What are some safe ways you can express the anger you're feeling? (e.g., physical activity, journaling, talking to a trusted friend)

5. How can writing an unsent letter to the person or situation you're angry with help you express your feelings? (e.g., getting thoughts out, saying what you couldn't before)

6. What is your anger trying to communicate to you about your grief and loss? (e.g., a need for justice, unresolved feelings, unmet expectations)

7. What other emotions might be underlying your anger? (e.g., sadness, fear, guilt)

8. How can mindfulness and relaxation techniques help you manage your anger? (e.g., deep breathing, grounding exercises)

9. What boundaries can you set to manage your anger in interactions with others? (e.g., taking time to cool off, avoiding triggering conversations)

Writing a Letter to Your Sibling

Writing a letter to your sibling can be a powerful way to express your thoughts, feelings, and memories after their passing.

Write a letter to your sibling to communicate what might have been left unsaid, share your grief, and honor the bond you shared. Use the following prompts or write your own:

I'm so angry that...

I'm really sad that we never got to...

There are so many times I think about calling you, like when...

One of my best memories with you is when we...

I still remember the way you used to...

I wish for you to forgive me for...

I regret that I didn't tell you enough that...

I've been holding onto the lessons you taught me, especially...

Dealing with Guilt and Self-Blame

The loss of a sibling can bring a heavy burden of guilt and self-blame. You may find yourself questioning your actions, wishing you had done things differently, or blaming yourself for not preventing their death.

1. Are there specific instances or actions that you feel guilty about in relation to your sibling's death? (e.g., not being there for them, past arguments, things left unsaid)

2. How is your guilt affecting your daily life and relationships? (e.g., causing you to withdraw, affecting your self-esteem, leading to anxiety)

3. What negative beliefs about yourself are fueling your guilt and self-blame? (e.g., believing you're a bad sibling, thinking you failed them, feeling unworthy)

4. What evidence can you find that contradicts the negative beliefs you hold about yourself? (e.g., times you were supportive, positive memories, ways you showed love)

5. If a friend were in your position, how would you view their actions and feelings of guilt? (e.g., with understanding, empathy, forgiveness)

6. What steps can you take to start forgiving yourself for the guilt and self-blame you feel? (e.g., acknowledging your feelings, seeking support, practicing self-compassion)

Who can you turn to for support as you work through your guilt and self-blame? (e.g., a therapist, family members, friends)

Navigating Special Dates and Anniversaries Without Your Sibling

Special dates and anniversaries, such as your sibling's birthday, the anniversary of their passing, or holidays you celebrated together, can be particularly challenging after their death.

1. What are the specific dates and anniversaries that are particularly significant to you in relation to your sibling? (e.g., their birthday, the anniversary of their death, holidays you celebrated together)

2. What emotions do these special dates and anniversaries bring up for you? (e.g., sadness, longing, anger, a sense of connection)

3. What memories come to mind when you think about these special dates? (e.g., celebrations you shared, significant moments, traditions)

4. How do you want to spend these special dates and anniversaries? (e.g., being alone, spending time with family, engaging in a meaningful activity)

5. What are some meaningful ways you can honor your sibling's memory on these special dates? (e.g., visiting their grave, doing something they loved)

6. How can you prepare for the emotional impact of these special dates? (e.g., acknowledging your feelings, planning self-care, setting realistic expectations)

7. What coping strategies have helped you in the past on difficult days? (e.g., talking to a friend, engaging in a hobby, practicing mindfulness)

8. How can you create new traditions on these special dates that honor your sibling while helping you heal? (e.g., starting a charity event, hosting a memorial gathering, creating something in their memory)

Exploring Your Changing Identity After Losing a Sibling

Losing a sibling can profoundly impact your sense of identity. You may find yourself questioning who you are without them, how your role in the family has shifted, or how this loss has changed you.

1. How did you perceive your identity before your sibling passed away? (e.g., as part of a duo, the younger/older sibling, a protector, a competitor)

2. How has your identity changed since your sibling passed away? (e.g., feeling lost, taking on new roles, feeling a void)

3. What roles did you play in your relationship with your sibling? (e.g., caregiver, confidant, rival, partner in crime)

4. How has your family's dynamics shifted since your sibling's passing? (e.g., new responsibilities, changes in communication, shifts in emotional support)

5. How has the loss of your sibling influenced your personal values and beliefs? (e.g., reevaluating what's important, questioning life's fairness, finding new priorities)

6. What new roles or identities do you see yourself stepping into after your sibling's passing? (e.g., becoming more independent, taking on leadership roles, exploring new interests)

7. How have you grown personally since your sibling's passing? (e.g., becoming more resilient, gaining new perspectives, developing deeper empathy)

8. What newfound strengths have you discovered in yourself since your sibling's death? (e.g., emotional resilience, leadership, creativity)

Balancing Grief and Daily Life

1. How did your daily life look before your sibling passed away? (e.g., routines, responsibilities, energy levels, emotional state)

2. How does your grief impact your ability to complete daily tasks? (e.g., difficulty concentrating, lack of motivation, physical exhaustion)

3. What are your current priorities in daily life? (e.g., work, self-care, family responsibilities, maintaining connections)

4. What specific challenges do you encounter when trying to balance your grief with daily responsibilities? (e.g., feeling overwhelmed, avoiding certain tasks, difficulty finding joy)

5. What self-care activities can you incorporate into your daily routine to help manage grief? (e.g., exercise, meditation, journaling, spending time in nature)

6. How can you set realistic expectations for yourself during this grieving period? (e.g., adjusting goals, allowing for flexibility, being patient with your progress)

7. How can you stay connected to your sibling's memory while continuing to live your daily life? (e.g., creating small rituals, keeping a memento close, talking about them with others)

8. What triggers might disrupt your daily routine and bring up intense feelings of grief? (e.g., certain dates, places, activities, interactions)

9. What strategies can you use to manage grief during daily activities? (e.g., deep breathing, taking breaks, seeking support, allowing yourself to feel emotions)

Identifying and Managing Triggers

Grief can be an unpredictable journey, especially when dealing with the loss of a sibling. Triggers, which can be anything that reminds you of your sibling or your loss, may bring up intense emotions unexpectedly.

1. Have you experienced triggers related to your sibling's loss? If so, what were they? (e.g., specific dates, places, smells, sounds, activities)

2. What specific memories of your sibling might act as triggers for you? (e.g., holidays spent together, shared hobbies, significant life events)

3. Are there daily activities that trigger grief for you? (e.g., hearing a certain phrase, seeing a sibling's belongings, engaging in activities you used to do together)

4. How do you typically react emotionally when triggered? (e.g., sadness, anger, anxiety)

5. In what ways can triggers serve as opportunities for healing? (e.g., allowing you to process unresolved feelings, helping you stay connected to your sibling's memory, encouraging self-reflection)

6. What strategies can you use to cope with triggers in the moment? (e.g., deep breathing, grounding exercises, stepping away, talking to someone)

Coping with Loneliness After Losing a Sibling

Losing a sibling can create a profound sense of loneliness, as you navigate life without the person who shared your history, experiences, and family dynamics.

1. How would you describe the loneliness you feel after losing your sibling? (e.g., emptiness, isolation, missing shared experiences)

2. What situations or events tend to trigger feelings of loneliness related to your sibling's loss? (e.g., family gatherings, certain conversations, holidays)

3. What are some ways you can stay connected with your sibling's memory that might help alleviate loneliness? (e.g., creating a memory box, writing letters to them, talking about them with others)

4. What activities can you engage in to combat loneliness? (e.g., taking up a new hobby, exercising, spending time in nature, attending social events)

5. Who in your life can offer support when you're feeling lonely? (e.g., family members, close friends, counselors, support groups)

6. How can you communicate your needs for connection to others? (e.g., expressing your feelings, asking for specific types of support)

7. What are some ways you can be kind to yourself when feelings of loneliness arise? (e.g., engaging in self-care, giving yourself permission to take a break, seeking comfort in familiar routines)

Balancing Work and Grief

Grieving the loss of a sibling while managing work responsibilities can be incredibly challenging. It's common to feel torn between the need to honor your grief and the demands of your professional life.

1. How has your grief impacted your ability to perform at work? (e.g., difficulty concentrating, decreased motivation, emotional exhaustion)

2. How does your work environment support or hinder your ability to grieve? (e.g., supportive colleagues, high-stress atmosphere, flexibility in tasks)

3. What emotional challenges have you faced in trying to balance work with your grief? (e.g., feelings of guilt, frustration, isolation, pressure to perform)

4. Have you communicated your grief to your employer or colleagues? If so, how? (e.g., sharing your situation, requesting time off, asking for adjustments)

5. What types of support do you think you might need from your employer or colleagues as you navigate your grief? (e.g., flexible hours, reduced workload, emotional support)

6. How can you effectively communicate your needs to your employer or colleagues? (e.g., setting up a meeting, being clear and honest, offering solutions)

7. What does your current workload look like, and how is it impacting your ability to grieve? (e.g., too many tasks, high-pressure projects, overwhelming responsibilities)

8. How can you prioritize your tasks to manage your workload while allowing time for grief? (e.g., focusing on essential tasks, postponing non-urgent projects, breaking down tasks)

9. What strategies can you use to manage stress at work while grieving?
(e.g., taking regular breaks, practicing mindfulness, setting boundaries)

10. What boundaries do you need to set at work to protect your well-being while grieving? (e.g., limiting overtime, saying no to additional tasks, taking time off when needed)

11. What challenges have you faced or do you anticipate facing in balancing work and grief? (e.g., unsupportive colleagues, high expectations, personal guilt)

12. What strategies can you use to overcome the challenges of balancing work and grief? (e.g., seeking support, adjusting expectations, practicing self-compassion)

Understanding and Coping with Survivor's Guilt

Survivor's guilt is a common and complex emotion that can arise after the loss of a sibling. It's the feeling of guilt that you survived while your sibling did not, and it can be accompanied by a range of other emotions, including sadness, anger, and confusion.

1. How would you describe your experience of survivor's guilt since your sibling's passing? (e.g., feelings of responsibility, questioning why you survived, struggling with self-worth)

2. What do you believe is at the root of your survivor's guilt? (e.g., specific events, your relationship with your sibling, societal expectations)

3. What emotions are most strongly linked to your survivor's guilt? (e.g., sadness, anger, shame, confusion)

4. How has survivor's guilt impacted your daily life? (e.g., affecting your relationships, changing your behavior, influencing your self-perception)

5. What beliefs do you hold that contribute to your survivor's guilt? (e.g., "I should have been the one to die," "It's unfair that I survived," "I didn't do enough to save them")

6. How can you reframe the beliefs that contribute to your survivor's guilt? (e.g., focusing on what you did do for your sibling, recognizing the randomness of life and death, considering your sibling's perspective)

7. What strategies can you use to let go of or reduce your survivor's guilt? (e.g., practicing self-compassion, seeking forgiveness, engaging in healing rituals)

8. How can finding purpose and meaning in your life help you cope with survivor's guilt? (e.g., living in a way that honors your sibling, pursuing their passions, giving back to the community)

Dealing with Unhelpful Advice

Grieving the loss of a sibling is a deeply personal journey, and while others may mean well, not all advice is helpful like ‘At least they’re in a better place,’ or, ‘At least you still have other siblings,’ or, ‘Everything happens for a reason’. Unhelpful advice can leave you feeling misunderstood, frustrated, or even hurt.

1. How do you typically react when you receive unhelpful advice about your grief? (e.g., frustration, sadness, anger, confusion)

2. What makes certain advice feel unhelpful or hurtful to you? (e.g., oversimplification of your grief, lack of empathy, dismissal of your emotions)

3. How does unhelpful advice impact your emotional state? (e.g., increasing feelings of isolation, intensifying sadness, triggering anger)

4. What do you believe is the intent behind the unhelpful advice you receive? (e.g., wanting to help, not knowing what to say, projecting their own grief)

5. How would you like to respond when you receive unhelpful advice? (e.g., setting boundaries, politely declining the advice, expressing your feelings)

6. When might it be helpful to simply ignore or emotionally detach from unhelpful advice? (e.g., when the advice is not worth addressing, when the relationship isn't close, when you're too drained to respond)

7. What challenges do you face when receiving unhelpful advice? (e.g., feeling pressured to follow the advice, struggling to articulate your needs, dealing with repeated advice from the same person)

8. What strategies can you use to overcome the challenges of receiving unhelpful advice? (e.g., practicing assertiveness, seeking support from understanding friends, reminding yourself of your own needs)

9. Who in your life understands your grief and can offer support without giving unhelpful advice? (e.g., a trusted friend, a therapist, a support group)

Understanding the Role of Faith in Healing

Whether you practice a specific religion or hold spiritual beliefs, faith can be a source of strength, comfort, and guidance during the grieving process, particularly after the loss of a sibling.

1. What role did faith or spirituality play in your life before the loss of your sibling? (e.g., a source of comfort, a way to make sense of the world, part of your daily routine)

2. How has the loss of your sibling affected your faith or spiritual beliefs? (e.g., strengthened your faith, caused doubts, made you seek answers)

3. What spiritual practices do you currently engage in that support your healing? (e.g., prayer, meditation, attending services, reading sacred texts)

4. Are there any new spiritual practices you might explore to support your grief? (e.g., joining a faith-based support group, practicing gratitude)

5. Have you experienced any challenges to your faith since your sibling's passing? (e.g., doubts, anger, questioning beliefs)

6. What strategies can you use to strengthen your faith during grief? (e.g., regular prayer, studying sacred texts, engaging in faith-based discussions)

2026 Clinical Alignment

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

Classification status

- DSM-5-TR: Prolonged grief disorder, when full criteria are met · recognized trauma- and stressor-related diagnosis; ordinary grief is not a disorder
- ICD-11 CDDR: 6B42 Prolonged grief disorder · recognized disorder specifically associated with stress
- A title, checklist, or completed activity never establishes a diagnosis.

Pages requiring the updated interpretation

- Superseded source pages: 2, 4, 8, 10-11, 13-15, 17, 22-23, 25, 30-32, and 35-36. These notes replace incompatible diagnostic, scoring, safety, or prescriptive wording on those pages.

Diagnostic and differential limits

- Assess time since death, cultural/religious norms, persistent impairment, depression, PTSD, suicidality, substance use, psychosis, and medical effects; avoid pathologizing expected grief.

Document-specific corrections

- State clearly that sibling bereavement is not itself a disorder and that cultural/religious grief variation must be respected.
- Use prolonged grief disorder terminology only after the applicable time threshold, persistent impairment, and full differential assessment; DSM-5-TR and ICD-11 timing/details are not identical.
- Add suicide, depression, PTSD, substance-use, and anniversary-reaction screening without implying that intense grief is pathological.
- Make faith, continuing-bond, letter, forgiveness, and memory exercises optional.

Measures, scoring, and permissions

- No assessment or scoring content was detected; retain exercises as unscored reflection and do not add diagnostic interpretation.

Intervention scope and contraindications

- Pages [2]: require topic-qualified clinical review for consent, readiness, contraindications, escalation thresholds, and whether clinician-guided use is necessary.
- Bereavement is not inherently a disorder. Consider prolonged grief disorder only when system-specific requirements, impairment, time course, and cultural, social, and religious context are met.

Crisis and current resources

- APA prolonged grief information; 988 for suicidal crisis in the United States.

Authoritative references

- <https://www.psychiatry.org/psychiatrists/practice/dsm>
- <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240077263>
- <https://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/prolonged-grief-disorder>
- <https://www.psychiatry.org/psychiatrists/practice/dsm/updates-to-dsm/updates-to-dsm-5-tr-criteria-text>
- <https://icd.who.int/browse/2026-01/mms/en>
- <https://988lifeline.org/>

NON-DIAGNOSTIC WORKBOOK: Sibling grief is not itself a DSM-5-TR or ICD-11 disorder. Assess prolonged grief disorder only when all applicable system requirements and context are established.