

## A LETTER TO FAMILY & FRIENDS

Dear loved ones,

Loss has far-reaching effects in life, and can have a lasting impact on relationships. Sometimes our deep fondness for those we care about can be frayed and even fractured by lack of understanding. Losing a loved one doesn't come with instructions, leaving many people confused about what to expect. Below is a list of things I want you to know about my grief journey.

Thank you for taking the time to read this.

### WHAT I WANT YOU TO KNOW

1. **You can't fix grief.** It's natural to want to fix things that appear broken, but grief is beyond your repair. Don't feel guilty about it. It's also helpful to remember that if a simple statement or gesture could fix it, I would have done it by now.
2. **Crying is normal.** Crying is a healthy response to emotional pain. Suppressed grief leads to complications. As talking and crying go hand in hand, the gift of listening without judgment can help.
3. **Grief is predictably unpredictable.** My emotions will be unpredictable for a few years; so will my reactions. My reactions will mirror the emotions I'm feeling in that moment. Just hold the space as I learn to work through it myself.
4. **Emotional overloads can lead to reactive meltdowns.** Please be patient with me. A good night's sleep or nap can help me cope better the next day. I'll do my best to get good rest.
5. **Grief is exhausting.** Exhaustion makes us all crabby. Avoid overloading me with distractions, and help me learn to reduce stressors.
6. **Don't take it personally.** Sometimes my emotional distress causes me to react in less than graceful ways. Already overwhelmed by our feelings, small issues can quickly feel insurmountable. I don't mean to take it out on you. Really, I don't.
7. **Don't be afraid.** It's okay to talk about it, my wound is already open. Also, it's okay for me to not be okay as I do the grief work needed to process my loss.
8. **Your cues count.** Expect me to give you guarded answers if your physical cues give away your hesitancy or discomfort.
9. **I don't have all the answers either.** Grief doesn't come with an instruction manual. I wish it did.
10. **Full of surprises.** Because I'm feeling emotionally raw, I might lose my filters sometimes. Prepare for offhanded comments or responses, and trust that eventually I'll regain my footing.

11. **Have compassion.** When you point out that I'm repeating myself or I can't remember details, it makes me feel worse. Help me to remember important details or tasks.
12. **Grief is a more than just an emotional wound.** Grief is a severe injury to one's heart and soul. For this reason, it is helpful to think of me as a patient in the intensive care unit of Grief United Hospital. Treat me as you would any other hospital patient: with tender loving care, compassion and kindness.
13. **Grief is a long rollercoaster ride.** It is often compared to a rollercoaster because it contains many emotional twists and blind turns at varying speeds. It is very unpredictable, and can feel quite scary. And, as much as I try, I simply cannot control the speed, put the brakes on, nor can I predict the twists and turns. Neither can you.
14. **Don't judge or dispute my progress.** This implies that you're domineering and lack compassion. If you insist you know better, I might respond with resentment that can severely damage our relationship.
15. **Your timeline isn't my timeline.** The grief process and timeline is unique to every individual, and I might grieve in subtle ways for the rest of my life. Applying your timeline to my journey can lead to disappointment.
16. **Isolation is common.** Like a wounded animal in the wild, I'll sometimes want to hibernate away from social interaction. If it is safe to leave me alone, then please honor my wishes.
17. **Ignoring grief is dangerous.** My grief won't go away any faster when you ignore it, and doing so can actually prolong it. Ignoring grief can also cause further complications such as health issues and suicidal ideation. Please don't ignore my grief work. It's important to my future.
18. **There are many grief stages.** In 1969, Dr. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross theorized that there are five stages of grief experienced by the terminally ill, not the loved ones left behind. The truth is that grief is messy, and my journey isn't always linear. Just help me take it one day at a time.
19. **Grief creates fear.** Sometimes my fears might seem irrational yet I can't help myself. Simple and loving reassurance really helps. So does engaging me in conversation.
20. **Eventually I will find my way.** Learning to live without my loved one is a long, hard journey. Eventually, the rawness will soften and my coping skill will strengthen. I just need you to walk beside me until I can feel joy again.

HOW WE THINK GRIEF WORKS



HOW GRIEF ACTUALLY WORKS

