

# Coping Strategies for Grief & Loss

*By AnneMoss Rogers, Karla Helbert LPC  
and Charlotte Moyler*

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If you are experiencing thoughts of suicide as a result of your grief whether it's loss of a child, spouse, or someone else close to you, please reach out for help. Like my friend Gray said after the death of her son, "I felt obligated to live until I had the will to live again."

**Here is what I mean when I say reach out for help:**

- Call someone you trust and tell them you are suffering thoughts of suicide and just need to talk. Those brain attacks can last for a while, but thirty minutes is typical length of time. Be intentional and say, "I'm having thoughts about killing myself."
- Call the suicide hotline 1800-273-8255 in USA
- Contact the crisis text line 741-741 in the USA
- Follow up and make an appointment with a psychologist, social worker or ask someone to help you do that

Suicide Prevention Lifeline in the US **988**

U.S. Crisis text line. Text the word **HELP** to **741-741**

Veteran's Services **1-800-273-8255, press 1**

Veteran's Text line send **HELP** to **838-255**

**International Resources**

Canada 1-833-456-4566

United Kingdom 116 123

Australia 13 11 14

Grief Resources at the end of this ebook

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## About the Contributing Authors

**AnneMoss Rogers** is a mental health and suicide education expert, professional speaker, trainer, and consultant. After her 20-year-old son, Charles died by suicide in 2015, AnneMoss chronicled her family's tragedy in a newspaper article that went viral, and her blog, [Emotionally Naked](#), has reached millions. She is the author of the award-winning memoir, [Diary of a Broken Mind](#) and the best seller, [Emotionally Naked: A Teacher's Guide to Preventing Suicide and Recognizing Students at Risk](#) with co-writer Dr. Kimberly O'Brien. She has been a TEDx speaker, was featured in the New York Times, [Variety Magazine](#), and was the first non-clinician invited to speak on youth suicide at the National Institute of Mental Health. A UNC-Chapel Hill alumna, AnneMoss currently lives in Richmond, VA. Her surviving son is a filmmaker in LA.



Charles Aubrey Rogers,  
4/26/1995-26/5/2015

**Karla Helbert LPC**, [KarlaHelbert.com](#), is a licensed professional counselor (LPC), internationally certified yoga therapist, (C-IAYT), registered yoga teacher (RYT), award winning author, and a Compassionate Bereavement Care Provider certified through the *MISS Foundation*, the *Elisabeth Kubler-Ross Family Trust* and the *Center for Loss & Trauma*. Counseling and supporting those living with traumatic grief and bereavement is her main focus of work. Karla lost her son Theo at almost two years old due to a brain tumor. She is the author of three books on grief including [Yoga for Grief and Loss](#), [The Chakra System in Grief and Trauma](#), [Finding Your Own Way to Grieve: A Creative Activity Workbook for Kids and Teens on the Autism Spectrum](#)



Thelonius "Theo"  
Luther Helbert  
Fuelein, 5/26/2005-  
2/20/2006

**Charlotte Moyler** writes to heal and to better comprehend her life and its meaning. Through the sudden, shocking and devastating death of her 17-year-old daughter, Maggie, she has found her voice. Her stories are of a peace that stands stark against the circumstances of her life and of a hope that never lets go. She trusts God's grace can be seen in both triumph and tragedy. Born in 1957, she has lived a life full of obstacles and won't let them steal her joy. Mother to Jake, 27, and Maggie, who would be 25. Married to Jim since 1980. Care giver to Julep, a Yellow Lab and The Coach, a Yorkipoo. She is a support group facilitator for *The Compassionate Friends*, Williamsburg VA, founded and facilitates *Surviving The Loss of a Loved One to Suicide*, Williamsburg VA 2012, offers grief support at *Williamsburg Community Chapel*, and spiritual guidance at *Lackey Free Clinic*.



Mary Landrum  
"Maggie" Moyler,  
1/24/1994-9/13/2011

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Chapter 1: You are Going to Survive .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Chapter 2: Make a Plan .....</b>	<b>9</b>
Tips for coming up with your plan .....	9
Give yourself permission to.....	11
<b>Chapter 3: Find a Support System .....</b>	<b>12</b>
What does that mean?.....	12
<b>Chapter 4: Write .....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Chapter 5: Meditation.....</b>	<b>18</b>
Meditation cannot be forced.....	19
We hate and we long to be alone with our thoughts.....	20
<b>Chapter 6: Sleep.....</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Chapter 7: Acts of Kindness and Giving back .....</b>	<b>24</b>
Here are some kindness ideas that may spark inspiration .....	25
Here are some ideas for giving back.....	26
<b>Chapter 8: Exercise .....</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>Chapter 9: Yoga For Managing Grief.....</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>Chapter 10: Create Rituals.....</b>	<b>31</b>
In our culture we get only one socially sanctioned ritual: the funeral .....	31
Create your own ritual .....	32
Some suggestions for openings and closings of rituals.....	32
<b>Chapter 11: Make Something .....</b>	<b>35</b>
Make something ideas.....	37
<b>Chapter 12: Strategies to minimize the ‘Coulda Woulda Shouldas’ and ‘What ifs’ .....</b>	<b>40</b>
Setting self-torture boundaries.....	40
<b>Solution—Set Boundaries .....</b>	<b>41</b>
The Alter Ego Strategy.....	42
<b>Chapter 13: Talk About It .....</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>Chapter 14: Embrace Your Faith.....</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>Chapter 15: Start the Day Reflecting on What You are Grateful For.....</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>Chapter 16: Breathing.....</b>	<b>55</b>
Breathing Exercise 1: Just Breathe .....	56
Breathing Exercise 2: Simple Deep Breathing.....	58
Breathing Exercise 3: Three Part Breath .....	60
Breathing Exercise 4: The Alternate Nostril Breath .....	62

You can use the alternate nostril breath with the three-part breath for an even deeper experience.  
Do this only if you practiced in the three-part breath as well as alternate nostril breathing.

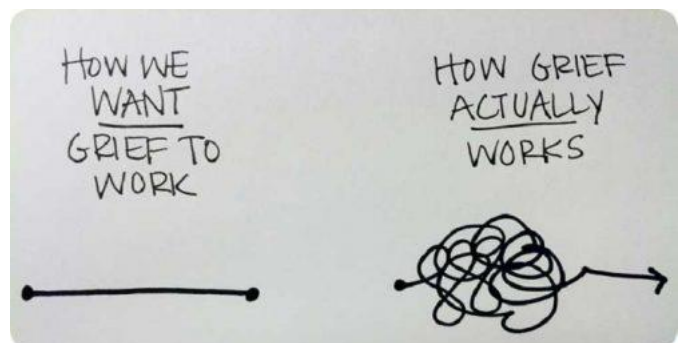
<b>Chapter 17: Forgive Yourself.....</b>	<b>63</b>
<b>Chapter 18: Music.....</b>	<b>66</b>
<b>Chapter 19: How to use DBT skills to manage the pain of grief.....</b>	<b>68</b>
Mindfulness .....	69
Emotion Regulation-Wave skill.....	70
Distress Tolerance – Radical Acceptance .....	72
Emotional Regulation- Check the Facts .....	73
Emotional Regulation – Opposite Action .....	75
Distress Tolerance – TIPP Skills.....	77
Interpersonal Effectiveness – A Change Skill .....	79
<b>Chapter 20: I don't want to live .....</b>	<b>83</b>
<b>Chapter 20: A list of coping ideas from other grieving parents .....</b>	<b>85</b>
<b>Chapter 21: Grief Resources .....</b>	<b>87</b>
<b>Chapter 20: Worksheets.....</b>	<b>88</b>

## CHAPTER 1: YOU ARE GOING TO SURVIVE

*by AnneMoss Rogers*

**Grief is not about getting over a loss; it's about integrating the loss into your life.**

In my lifetime, I have suffered a broken neck, survived attempted rape and murder, a near strike by lightning, a brain tumor, two craniotomies and radiation treatment. I have flat-lined on the table during a diagnostic procedure, contracted two deadly infections following elbow surgery, but the most devastating experience was losing my son to suicide as a result of addiction and depression.



Those experiences prior to my son's suicide did build resilience but the unforgiving agony of losing my child grinded itself in my face and the weight of it pinned me to the mattress. Nothing before had left me feeling so untethered. It was as if I was floating in water, unable to find a bottom to stand on. I had to find an outlet and a way to move through this journey but there were no breadcrumbs to follow since it's not a typical topic of conversation but one that gets tucked away at the back of a closet, giving people the impression we just "get over it," when in fact, it's about learning to live with and manage grief.

My grief journey was and has been painful but there has been growth and healing in that process. How did I survive? First, by telling myself I would over and over again. I was also driven by purpose to connect with others who had gone through this and to find ways of coping to help me move forward in a healthy way. In the movies, people always run to the bar to cope but I knew I couldn't heal if I couldn't feel and that approach was a crutch that would delay my process. Numbing the pain would leave me stranded and stuck and I didn't want to suffer more.

I have found that the best thing I could do was allow myself to grieve and feel the pain, learn to manage it, and understand it would not always be as intense as those first few months. "Riding the wave" is what that is called. Feelings are always temporary and that goes for the intense feelings that come with grief, too. Just know that your pain has a purpose and it serves as building blocks to emotional healing.

While a lot of the language used here refers to losing a child, these strategies can be used by anyone looking for a way to lessen the suffering of grief in a healthy and productive way.

It's my hope that these coping strategies help you in your path to healing which is a lifetime journey. And it's not just one strategy that works but building a toolbox of several that work for you. There is no set timing or road map for grief. We all process this journey at our own pace, and we all share one thing in common: If we have loved and lost, we hurt. I want you to

know you can love again, laugh again and find joy. You won't be the same as before. But it all starts by believing you will move forward which right now might feel like blind faith.

[Back to the top](#)



## CHAPTER 2: MAKE A PLAN

**by Karla Helbert**

Our first coping strategy is *Make a Plan*. My son, Theo, died of a brain tumor when he was just a baby in 2006. Life events, including times of year like the holidays, are a struggle for me in many ways. If you are in early grief—and by early, I mean the first year, second year, third year, sometimes further in—events like weddings, graduations, death anniversaries, birthdays, and the holidays can be excruciating.

As a therapist, I rarely give advice. It's my job to help people find their own answers. But when it comes to grief, one of the best tips I ever got was to have a plan for life events, special occasions, and holidays. Taking the time to come up with a plan for how you will deal with these important times of year may be very painful but having a plan will be one of the best things you can do to help yourself manage the pain of the upcoming event.

Very early in grief, a friend of mine whose daughter died told me, "Have a plan. You don't have to stick to the plan but have it anyway." It may be the single best piece of advice given to me as a bereaved parent.

### TIPS FOR COMING UP WITH YOUR PLAN

Spend some time thinking about how you and your family usually spend the upcoming holiday, birthday, death anniversary or other life event. What family traditions occur year after year? What times of year might be a

trigger for you? What do you think those traditions and rituals will be like this year? How will you cope?

Make some decisions about your family's holiday and life event traditions.

This can apply to events like holidays, family weddings and birthdays. For example, the first year after losing a child, the birthday is difficult as well as Mother's or Father's Day for parents.

- Make a list of traditions and holidays you think you might want to participate in and those which you think you cannot face this year
  - This works best if you write it down on paper or type it on your phone, tablet or computer. Writing it down helps clarify thoughts and feelings. Whether it's a birthday or a holiday, write that at the top and just explore that which you might or might not choose to do. (<https://annemoss.com/wp-content/uploads/make-a-plan-worksheets.pdf>)
- Think of ways you can honor your beloved in current family traditions.
- Think of new ways to honor your beloved's memory.
- Decide whether you'd like to involve other family members.

Regardless of family members who may be uncomfortable thinking about or talking about death, it is okay to include your beloved dead. You might participate in acts of kindness in their memory, donate to a charity in her name, light a special candle at family meals, place a photo of him in a

place of honor, volunteer over the holiday, give small mementos to friends and family that remind them of her.

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### **GIVE YOURSELF PERMISSION TO**

- Grieve
- Cry
- Have fun
- Laugh if you feel like it
- Be flexible
- Do what you need to do
- Leave when you need to leave
- Identify your support system and let them know you may need extra help
- Have plans A, B, C, D, and so on if you need to
- Include self-care in your plan—massages, walks, relaxing baths, exercise, sleep
- Know that it's okay to not follow your plan or to change it anytime you want

Be mindful of and note your thoughts, your feelings, and your reactions.

You may come up with all sorts of things you reject, and you may discover some things that may really resonate.

My wish for you is that holidays and special events are as peaceful as possible. I know it will be hard, and I am so sorry that this is your reality. I am sending you love.

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Again, here is a link to the ["Make a Plan" worksheet](https://annemoss.com/wp-content/uploads/make-a-plan-worksheets.pdf) to simplify the days you find hard to face.

<https://annemoss.com/wp-content/uploads/make-a-plan-worksheets.pdf>

[Back to the top](#)

## CHAPTER 3: FIND A SUPPORT SYSTEM

**by AnneMoss Rogers**

Human beings aren't meant to do everything in isolation. Watching my child self-destruct from mental illness and addiction made me feel helpless. So very early in the process of dealing with all the chaos, I joined a support group called *Families Anonymous*. There were few other groups at the time but this one became my lifeline. This group understood what I was going through and the friendships I forged there helped me to set boundaries and learn to live without curling up in a ball everyday crying.

There is no badge of honor by toughing it out by yourself. Support is a step you take to help yourself heal and cope. It's an act of courage, not cowardice. Besides that, your presence and your stories are profoundly helpful to others.

---

### WHAT DOES THAT MEAN?

Support systems come in a lot of shapes and sizes. Your friends and family have empathy for you but you also need to find support for your loss from someone or a group that understands that kind of loss and these are the support systems you can look for.

- **Find a support group or a discussion group.** If you have lost a child, look for that kind of group. There are overdose loss support groups,



suicide loss support groups, loss of a spouse or parent support groups, families of the addicted support groups and so on. If you suffer mental illness/addiction, there are support groups for that, too. My [resource pages](#) list support groups related to loss from addiction or suicide, groups that focus on loss of a child, support during a loved one's addiction as well as a link to mental health support groups both local and national.

- **Find a friend who has suffered a similar loss.** Unfortunately, that's not so hard to find. I reach out and do things with my lifetime friends, and my new friends who have also suffered loss of a child. I talk openly about Charles and how he died. My friends connected me to those who had recently lost and many of those people have become close friends. You have friends asking how they can help? This is how they can help by connecting you to someone else going through the same kind of loss.
- **Find a grief counselor.** Sometimes this is a professional social worker, sometimes it's a religious leader. There are even organizations dedicated to serving the needs of those who are grieving.
- **Get involved.** Sometimes support comes with being part of pushing for change. Advocacy for policy, grief nonprofits, plus those that line up with your loved one's cause of death. Giving back has helped me heal and I've seen it do the same for others. Some of the emotionally naked

tribe go to jails to support the incarcerated, send cards, run support groups, teach classes, have fundraisers. This is support for you and for others.

There are grief groups that focus on art, nature or photography. There is support out there so please look for it.

[Back to the top](#)

## CHAPTER 4: WRITE

**by AnneMoss Rogers**

After Charles died, others didn't seem to want to talk about him. Or let me talk about him. I kept wondering, "Why can't I talk about my son?"

So two months after he died, I started writing an [article](#) for the newspaper about his death. We had just moved out of the house where he had grown up because it had sold four days before he stunned us by killing himself.

**emotionally  
naked**

[emotionallynaked.com](http://emotionallynaked.com)

*I worked through my grief by  
writing on this blog.*

He died June 2015. I started writing the article in August 2015. The first version was sloppy and pointless, but I kept writing it, revising it, crying while typing. Pissed off at the world, my face swollen from tears, I wrote the angriest article ever. It would have grabbed you by the throat and spit in your face there was so much **mad** packed in those words. It was a version no one ever saw and never will.

When I opened it the next day, I laughed which was a rare event at that time. Those words were on fire. There was no way that version would be published anywhere. It sounded like a self-righteous, angry manifesto. And writing had allowed me to express it and let it go. I then started revising it.

I struggled to write well so soon after Charles' death. Lines of text would run together like melted crayons. But the hurt pushed me to keep going and

those voices inside kept telling me to go on and write my way through the pain. The grief had taken me hostage, surrounded me and flattened my spirit. Writing was my way of fighting back. It helped me see and understand, process what was happening to me, work through my anger, my tears, my hurt. It dragged me through the darkness and back into the light. Then it helped me find the rhythm of grief and recognize it wasn't my enemy.

I wrote more unorganized sentences, pushed myself, went through boxes of tissues and kept at it. There was no way this exercise was going to defeat me. Silence was supporting suicide. More kids were dying. More were becoming addicted. How could I ignore that?

We moved into our new home in September, and I kept writing that same article. The pages didn't look at me funny, scold, or ridicule me. They didn't pass judgment but begged me to keep going.

Why would I do something so painful? It didn't fix what happened or reverse time so what good was it? But it allowed the pain in and by doing so I was able to work through it. It helped me ride the waves of grief.

It wouldn't be until December 5 that I felt my article was ready to send to the editor. Four months is what it took to write just 1,200 words. While it didn't publish until February 2016, just finishing it and sending it gave me a huge sense of pride and accomplishment. I was certain no one would read it or care and I was terrified of their reaction once they did.



People did read it and before it was moved online, it went viral and had thousands of comments from others reading their story in mine.

Holidays and life events were especially difficult. So, I wrote more, not less. The more I hurt, the more it called me. It was my personal choice to write in public and that part isn't a must. Writing for yourself works, too.

Writing gave me the gift of healing. I hope you give it a try.

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**Honoring son who died by suicide is not the end of my story**

[https://www.richmond.com/life/in-my-shoes/article\\_42838b8a-9869-54a6-a1c3-84d62f1df94f.html](https://www.richmond.com/life/in-my-shoes/article_42838b8a-9869-54a6-a1c3-84d62f1df94f.html)

[Back to the top](#)

## CHAPTER 5: MEDITATION

**by Karla Helbert**

You're probably familiar with the term "mindfulness." Mindfulness the practice of being as present as possible in this moment, with as much compassion and as little judgment as possible.

Meditation is a mindfulness practice. Learning to do this can be a huge gift to yourself in grief. It's not easy, but it has big payoffs. (There is a guided meditation for you to try at the end of this chapter.)

Most people who believe they can't meditate usually say something like, "I just can't quiet my mind!" If we approach meditation as making the mind quiet, we'll rarely feel that we're succeeding. This is especially true when you're in the midst of excruciating grief. The mind in grief is almost never quiet.

Typically, in a meditation practice, you'll be interrupted by the processes of your mind over and over and over. Gently acknowledge the mind's processes and make the choice not to be sucked in. Then, place your attention on a chosen focal point instead of being pulled along on the thought train to who knows where. In this meditation, I suggest using your breath to come back to over and over.

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## MEDITATION CANNOT BE FORCED

It may take time. It's okay. Because the practice itself builds the resilience of the brain as well as the mind. It increases your ability to manage stress. It helps with sleep and anxiety. It helps with feeling connected to others—including our beloved dead. It helps us feel connected to something larger than ourselves.

In grief, the mind is powerfully affected. The way we think is changed. The content of our thoughts is altered. Particularly in early and traumatic grief, we forget things, lose things, we're distracted and inattentive. Alternatively, we can be utterly focused on thoughts of our loved ones. We zone out, draw blanks, review, scrutinize, reject and ask unanswerable questions. We may question the very foundation of our most deeply held beliefs. The way we saw the universe, other people, relationships, religion, life itself, the way things are, changes drastically.

We think about who we are now that this has happened to us and try to decide how it makes sense based on who we were before grief came and what that will mean when we become whomever it is we'll be in the future. We contemplate the strangeness of the loss of past interests and the inability to care about things that were once important.

We wonder why other people continue to care about those things. We wonder what it all means. If it means anything. And how could this have

happened? We have fears we never had before and often find brave ways of talking ourselves out of them and of continuing on anyway.

We ponder at the ways we are more fearless than ever before. We wonder why we are still here, how we will go on from this place and why we should bother trying.

We worry, and at the same time do not care, what others think of us and imagine our beloved is someplace or no place and wonder what it's like where they are, if they are. We worry we are crazy and that no one else could possibly understand and feel deep connections with others who share this kind of pain and are capable of understanding suffering, compassion and empathy in ways we never imagined before.

---

## **WE HATE AND WE LONG TO BE ALONE WITH OUR THOUGHTS**

Most of us have feelings of guilt, regret, anger, unfairness, yearning and search for relief, answers, signs of our loved ones in our continued existence and involvement in our lives. Are they okay, and safe and happy? We remember them, miss them, and continue to love and long for them. All of this changes and then, in different ways, repeats.

Sound familiar? I bet it does.

Even when we feel powerless to stop or control the chattering of the mind, we can learn to observe it, and to cultivate our inner witness. If we can learn to gently, in each new moment of now, observe our thoughts and



minds with compassion, we can get better and better at practicing the quieting of the mind. And better at moving through life with grief.

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Audio— Free Guided Meditation: Cultivating the Witness

[Link to Guided Meditation on Soundcloud](#)

<https://soundcloud.com/karla-helbert/cultivating-the-witness-a-guided-meditation>

Go to SoundCloud.com and use the keywords “*Karla Helbert witness meditation*” (10 minutes)

Another recommended resource is the *Headspace Meditation App*.

[Back to the top](#)

## CHAPTER 6: SLEEP

**by AnneMoss Rogers**

Anxiety, depression and grief can make finding sleep a challenge and we need that break. Most of the coping strategies written about thus far will help with sleep but if you are in the early days of grief, it's crucial and impossible, too. A day in early grief with no sleep is intolerable.

So, I'll share my sleep strategy after Charles' suicide. I did call my doctor and ask for a prescription for *promethazine* which is the generic name of *Phenergan*. It's a drug used for nausea, after surgery usually, that makes me very tired. It makes most people tired, is nonaddictive and for that first month, it made a huge difference. I tapered it off at about 35 days by cutting them in half, then in fourths. Getting REM sleep in grief or when healing from any kind of trauma is supremely important. And taking medications can shorten that all important sleep cycle.

Before I had tapered medication completely, I started doing this [8-minute meditation on YouTube](#) (YouTube: 8 Minutes to Calm-A Guided Relaxation) and that worked for finding sleep. The dreams I had were actually pretty spectacular. There was the occasional nightmare but for the most part I dreamed of Charles and I craved that experience.

I was also running at that time, doing the 8-minute meditation, writing once or twice a day, and going to a support group. And I was working, too. There was a generous amount of screaming at my windshield and crying in

the shower. I was not just relying on the prescription but was doing all I could to alleviate the agony that would leave me feeling ambushed in my bed at night because that's when it would become real all over. There were no distractions to take me away from the reality that my child had taken his life and half my heart with him in that process. Finding those coping strategies was key for me and I used them like a religion and added to that toolbox at every opportunity.

A good night's sleep made all the difference in how well I coped with the next day. The more sleep I got and the better the quality of sleep, the better the day went. Let me add that I banned alcohol for myself since that is a slippery slope and degrades the quality of my sleep. And I recommend looking up “good sleep hygiene” for more information.

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[Back to the top](#)

## CHAPTER 7: ACTS OF KINDNESS AND GIVING BACK

**by Karla Helbert**

For many people in grief, acts of kindness, volunteering, giving back and doing something to bring comfort, a smile, or love to another person is a way that we can find a bit of peace within our own pain.

Research shows that volunteerism and altruistic acts to benefit others have long-term physical, emotional, and mental health benefits. Doing things for others can result in increased feelings of well-being. It brings a sense of purpose and helps us create meaning when life makes no sense. Studies also show that those giving help to others report more benefits than those who receive.

The first Christmas after my son died, the most painful ritual was hanging his stocking. Looking at his empty, flat stocking was the worst. Thinking about what to do, I had an idea and felt inspired. I emailed my friends and family and wrote, "Sometime between now and Christmas, do something nice for someone, no matter how small or large, it doesn't have to involve money—just commit a random act of kindness. When you do it, think of Theo and dedicate that act to him and his sweet spirit." I asked them to write down what they did and email it to me. I printed the kindnesses without reading them, folded them and placed them in his stocking. I got acts of kindnesses in his memory from all over, even from people I didn't know. Christmas morning, we were able to take them out and read them to



each other. Each act of kindness to someone else was like a gift to our child as well as to us.

Inspired by the [MISS Foundation Kindness Project](#), I continue to do anonymous acts of kindness throughout the year, and always throughout the Christmas season. It brings a sense of connection and purpose. We share [Theo's Stocking](#) story with people every year and invite anyone who wishes to do an act of kindness in honor of someone they love.

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#### **HERE ARE SOME KINDNESS IDEAS THAT MAY SPARK INSPIRATION**

- Make a batch of cookies and share them with neighbors or friends. You might want to do this anonymously.
- Tape quarters to a vending machine for the next person to use.
- Make a card or draw a picture for someone you love.
- Create small care packages in sealable bags including lip balm, water, a dollar or two, snacks. Give them out when you see homeless or people asking for money.
- Pay the bill for the next person in line at the drive-through or a toll booth.
- Make a piece of art and give it away.
- Leave extra big tips for servers in restaurants.
- Think of someone who has helped you in your grief, or at another time in life, and write them a letter thanking them, letting them know how they made a difference.
- Offer someone who is rushed or who has more items go ahead of you at the store.
- Offer a sincere compliment to someone.
- Give a gift to someone for no reason.

- Ask how someone else you know who is going through a difficult time how they are really doing—and listen to their story.
- Place sticky notes with messages of kindness on public bathroom mirrors, in random places—in shops, tucked into grocery store flower bouquets, around your workplace, on the bus, in a taxi. They might say things that you would like to read yourself. You are beautiful. I love you. You are not alone. You can do this.
- Make note of local charities and non-profits whose missions reflect your or your beloved's values and learn more about volunteering. When you feel ready, call.
- Donate dog or cat food to your local animal shelter.
- Make copies of your favorite family and friends' photos and send them to the people pictured in them.
- With sidewalk chalk, draw pictures or write inspirational quotes or messages in public places.
- Send a copy of a book that you love or that you have found helpful to someone else.
- Send a care package to a soldier far from home.
- Leave a book with a note for the person who finds it in a café or airport or other public place.
- Plant a tree in your loved one's memory. Plant several trees.
- Create a memorial garden and lovingly care for the plants and flowers.
- If you read something that is helpful or inspirational on a blog or social media, leave a comment letting that person know that their words or posting helped you.
- Each day, ask the Universe for opportunities to serve and to be kind to others.

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### **HERE ARE SOME IDEAS FOR GIVING BACK**

These would be pursued later, after about two years.

- Connect with an organization that represents your loved one. For example, if the person you lost loved dogs, volunteer with a nonprofit like SPCA or volunteer to train a service dog.
- If your loved one died by suicide, go through training to lead a suicide loss support group, or if you lost a child to a brain tumor, start a support group for parents who have lost a child to that illness.
- Look for ways to plug in and make a change based on a loved one's passions or cause of death.

[Back to the top](#)

## CHAPTER 8: EXERCISE

**by AnneMoss Rogers**

Some of you don't want to get out of bed, much less exercise but I'm going to be a drill sergeant and tell you that it's a must. You don't have to run a marathon, do anything beautifully, or break any records. Just go walk outside, do wheelchair yoga, swim, dance inside or shake like a dog does (it actually does have a purpose which works for humans, too.) Pick what you want but do *something*. Give yourself at least fifteen minutes, ideally a half an hour or more.

It was while running after Charles' death by suicide that I thought of the title "Emotionally Naked" and got the crazy idea to start a blog that has reached millions. I ran like a lopsided chicken at the speed of sloth but pounding the pavement with my leaded limbs did give me a purpose for getting out of bed and out of my own head for a while. Tears froze on my face and my eyelashes in the winter, but I kept at it.

Due to having had my brain zapped with radiation, I have shortness of breath, so I walk, do yoga and hip-hop dance instead. No headphones while I walk—just me and my thoughts. And the dance? You'd laugh your @\$\$ off watching me because I am so out of time and rhythm it's comical.

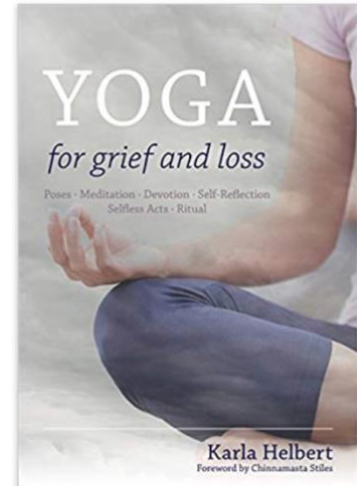
Hiking is my husband's strategy to find peace and I often join him.

[Back to the top](#)

## CHAPTER 9: YOGA FOR MANAGING GRIEF

**by Karla Helbert**

Just as grief is not one way, or one thing, neither is yoga. There are multiple yogic paths but all paths of yoga lead to the same place. The word itself means “union” and the goal of yoga is to help us see all the various pieces and parts of ourselves as unified, recognizing that we were never really separate in the first place. It helps us to remember (and to re-member) those parts of us that we forgot were One. This includes our beloved dead.



Grief impacts every aspect of our being—physically, mentally, cognitively, emotionally, spiritually, and philosophically—every aspect of body, mind, and spirit. The practice of yoga addresses self-care helps to integrate the experience of loss and supports feelings of connection and relationship with our loved ones who have died. Just as grief is an experience that affects us in myriad ways, yoga sustains and strengthens us in all of those same areas. Where grief can separate and destroy, yoga unifies and creates.

Grieving people are rarely allowed or encouraged to simply be, to feel what they are feeling. The practice and teachings of yoga, however, ask us again and again to simply be with what is, with compassion toward ourselves and others, being exactly where and how we are in the present moment. It

encourages, allows and supports us as we are, while at the same time giving us tools, support and space in which to adapt, adjust and accommodate who and where we are now that grief has visited this new and unwanted reality upon our lives.

The essential teaching of yoga is that we are whole and perfect as we are, including in grief and in pain, even in what we perceive as deprivation and heartbreak. Yoga points us toward a knowing that we are more than a grieving person while allowing and supporting our experience in grief. It helps us see ourselves, our world, the universe, our beloved dead differently, in ways that can lead to peace, even within pain. Yoga allows us to be exactly where we are, when we are and supports us in accepting where we are physically, cognitively, emotionally, mentally, spiritually in this moment—and then in this one, and again in this one, and when it changes, now, in this moment. Yoga teaches that we are whole and perfect just as we are, even when we do not believe it for ourselves. This is an ongoing practice. Just like grief. Famed yoga teacher BKS Iyengar once said, “Yoga teaches us to cure what need not be endured, and to endure what cannot be cured.”

I've made a short practice for you here that you can modify any way you like. If you are uncomfortable on the floor, you can do it in a chair. I hope this short practice brings you some peace. [Yoga Practice](#)

[Back to the top](#)

## CHAPTER 10: CREATE RITUALS

**by Karla Helbert**

Rituals large and small can help us manage the chaos of grief. Rituals of remembrance help to bring order, aid in transition and help us to understand complex feelings.

Through observing our own senses, acknowledging how we are feeling, and purposefully using the tools of ritual to safely come into the present moment with our grief, with our love, and with whatever else the moment holds, we can find ways of moving through each moment and into the next. In grief, this can be an essential practice.

### IN OUR CULTURE WE GET ONLY ONE SOCIALLY SANCTIONED RITUAL: THE FUNERAL

That is not enough to help us move through the ongoing turmoil of grief. Grieving people create their own rituals whether they know they're doing it or not. Wearing his shirt to bed, lighting a candle, putting on the special piece of jewelry, saying good morning to them each day. We do these things to connect with them and to bring some stability to our shattered lives. When you create and engage in ritual purposefully, you can deepen this connection and care for yourself at the same time.

Creating your own personal rituals lets you access grief in a safe and structured way. A ritual can be as elaborate as a public memorial service or as



small as a quiet moment alone with your loved one's picture. All the things suggested here can also be part of a ritual. Ritual itself is creative.

- Light a candle at special times of the day or week to remind you of your loved one
- Create a memory book and fill it with things that connect you to them
- Create an altar or shrine in their memory
- Plant a tree or flowers for them
- Make a donation to a charity that your loved one supported or that reminds you of them
- Visit the burial site
- Carry something special that reminds you of your loved one. Hold it when you need to.

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## **CREATE YOUR OWN RITUAL**

Rituals tend to follow a basic structure. They include preparation, an opening, a middle, and a closing. Clearly marking the beginning and the ending of rituals helps us move into a different frame of mind, into sacred space, and then signals that it is time to shift our consciousness back to an ordinary mode of being at the closing.

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## **SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR OPENINGS AND CLOSINGS OF RITUALS**

- Lighting a candle or some incense.
- Read or say aloud an inspirational verse, poem, or prayer.
- Sing, chant, or play music.
- Ring a chime or a bell.

After the opening of your ritual, take a few deep breaths to center yourself. Remember that all feelings are okay. A ritual is your space and time to express grief and love in whatever ways you choose and need to. Whatever

happens in between the opening and closing of the ritual is up to you. You can plan an activity, such as working on a memory book, writing a letter, looking at pictures, planting a tree—the possibilities are unlimited. Or you might have nothing planned. After opening, you might simply sit quietly, listen to music, cry, look through photos, meditate, pray, read. It is okay to do whatever comes to you in the moment.

Sometimes you may need to communicate something to your loved one. The sacred, safe space of a ritual is an ideal for this. When you need to communicate, you may choose to speak aloud, meditate on your thoughts silently, or write a letter.

You might feel the need to release energy in your ritual space. Yell, scream, or cry as much as you need to. If you're working with anger, keep pillows nearby that you can hit, punch or throw. Tearing and ripping paper or stomping cardboard boxes can also help release anger. You may wish to include some movement, dance, or vocal expression such as singing, chanting, or yelling. You might want to beat on a drum or play some other instrument to release energy and emotion through sound.

You can have rituals alone or with others. Your ritual could be a good time to share your grief with friends and family members. If you share your ritual, you might ask each person to share a memory or have a group activity like chanting, drumming, or letter writing. You might ask them each to bring something to read or share.

You can have grief rituals for as long and as often as you need or want to. You might find that your need to engage in ritual will diminish over time as you grow and integrate your grief in different ways.

Everyday rituals like carrying your loved one's photograph, or wearing a particular sentimental piece of jewelry or sleeping with an item of clothing may also shift over time. You may feel the need to hold more structured rituals only on special days such as birthdays or anniversaries or not at all. This is all okay. Change is natural, like grief is natural. Rituals help us move from chaos and pain to wholeness and stability. They are always there when we need them.

[Back to the top](#)

## CHAPTER 11: MAKE SOMETHING

**by Karla Helbert**

It doesn't matter whether you think you are creative or not. You are.

When you're living with heart-crushing grief, just figuring out how to get out of bed is a creative endeavor. I talk to people

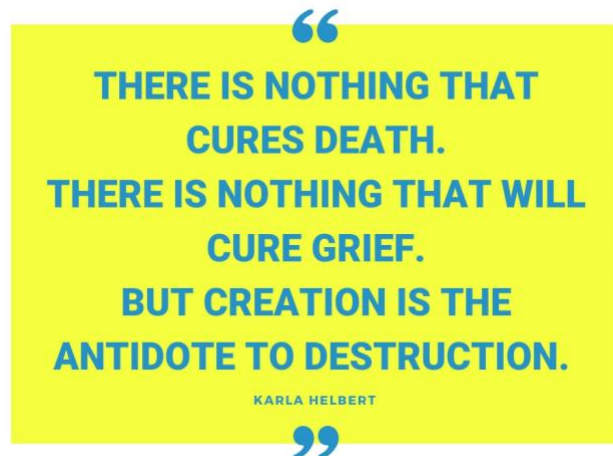
a lot about being creative in grief and how helpful it can be. When I teach workshops or do retreats, we do all sorts of creative things in our grief. And people always say, "I'm just not creative," or "I'm not an artist," or "I can only draw stick figures." Stick figures can do some really cool things, actually. But the point is that creating something is often not what you think it is.

Learning to live with the heartbreak of grief is an incredibly creative thing: every single day you are figuring out how to re-create your life.

This strategy is about creativity, but it is also a directive: **Make something.**

When we make something, *anything*, we are being creative. We are creating something that wasn't there before.

After my son died, I realized I thought I knew a lot of things. Once his death occurred, though, I understood that I know almost nothing. I had no



idea what to do. Since I had no idea what to do, I started to do all sorts of things. Some of what I did took my mind off my grief; some of it took me straight into the middle of it. But I knew that I had to DO something.

I felt an urge to create things. I started doing all kinds of making. I painted, I collaged, I wrote—a lot—I re-finished furniture, I made wire sculptures, I took a pottery class, danced, baked things, made a scrapbook. You can do any of those things and more.

Anything you make that was not there before is an act of creation. It might be an amazing dinner, a garden, a bench, a letter, a painting, a scarf, a novel, a sculpture, a photograph, a collage, a quilt, an ornament for the tree, a poem, a film, a doodle, a cupcake, a sandcastle, a scrapbook and so on.

There is nothing that cures death. There is nothing that will cure grief. And when your entire life, your entire conception of the Universe has been destroyed, creation can be the antidote to destruction.

We can't fix the things that have gone so terribly wrong, and a lot has gone so very wrong. But when we create, we feel just a bit different, the energy inside us is changed just a bit. When we really get into the zone of what we are making and creating, our bodies, minds and hearts can experience the tiniest bit of respite, even calm, possibly even peace.

And most of the time, whatever we are making in our grief has something to do with our grief, with our love for our beloved we are missing, with our newfound state of how things are. So, then, the act of making and

creating helps us to be connected to them, to continue to grow our never-ending relationship to them and with them.

What we create can help us to understand ourselves and our new circumstances maybe the tiniest bit more. We can look at what we've created and have the experience of a new way of seeing ourselves and our own experience. This is creative.

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## **MAKE SOMETHING IDEAS**

Anyone can do at least one of these.

- Paint. Just pick out colors that seem to speak to you and put them on a piece of paper or a canvas.
- Draw. Take a pencil and make swooping, swirling shapes on a page and then color them in.
- Take pictures of things that seem to represent how you feel.
- Make a collage. Use photos or magazine cut outs. Have it represent a tribute to your beloved, or let it show how you are feeling on the inside. Do both of those things.
- Make ornaments for the tree.
- Make soap. Or Candles. Or home-made paper.
- Do a self-portrait. Do it in paint or ink or clay or mud or crystals or create a pizza that looks like how you feel.
- Create a playlist of songs that is the soundtrack for your relationship with your beloved.
- Create a playlist that is the soundtrack for your grief journey.
- Write a letter to your beloved.
- Write a letter of gratitude for your beloved dead.
- Write a letter to your grief.

- Write a letter to yourself.
- Write down your thoughts.
- Write your story or about whatever emotion is consuming you.
- Dance. Choose a song that represents how you feel right now. Close your eyes and let your body move in whatever ways it feels like moving.
- Bake. Share the things you bake with others.
- Plan a memorial garden for your beloved in your own backyard.
- Plant it this Spring.
- Sing.
- Make lists. Make a list of the things you hate about this grief crap. Make a list of the things that have helped you, even for a second, through this journey. Make a list of the people who have been there for you. Make a list of the things you love about the person you are missing.
- Go to the grocery store and pick out colorful things in the produce section. Go make a salad or some other interesting dish with the stuff you pick out.
- Go on walks and notice how many colors you see.
- Pick up interesting rocks on your walk and go home and make a design with the rocks.
- Close your eyes and wait for something to show up in your mind's eye. Whatever it is, write 3 sentences about it. Draw it or paint it.
- Get a box of crayons. Pick 3 colors that represent how you feel right now. Draw a circle or a heart on a piece of paper and fill it in with those colors any way you want. You can add colors or change it any way you feel like.
- Play an instrument. Nobody is listening. Just play.
- Go to a thrift shop and find a piece of furniture you like and refinish it.
- Cook a meal of your beloved's favorite foods.
- Build something: a bookcase or a table
- Cook something you've never made before.



- Create a film festival of movies with a theme about your beloved. Host a viewing party for just you or for friends and loved ones.
- Take lessons for some creative and interesting thing you've always wanted to do.
- Take lessons for some creative and interesting thing you never thought about doing before.

Just go make something.

[Back to the top](#)

## CHAPTER 12: STRATEGIES TO MINIMIZE THE 'COULDA WOULDAS SHOULDAS' AND 'WHAT IFS'

**by AnneMoss Rogers**

When we lose someone we love, we look back and see things differently because we know the outcome. Often those grieving get into a cycle of negative self-talk and blaming themselves. So, there are some strategies to combat this negative cycle.

### SETTING SELF-TORTURE BOUNDARIES

Do the what-ifs and coulda wouldas shouldas stalk you? I have a strategy that won't magically make the pain vanish but it will lessen your suffering and help you find some peace. When I lost my son to suicide, my issue was going down that rabbit hole of coulda woulda shouldas which sounded like this–

“Why didn’t I answer the phone that one last time?”

“*What if* I had gone and picked him up when his voice expressed obvious despair?”

“Why didn’t I call him every day he was away after walking out of detox, just to say that as much as I wanted him to get well, I loved him even if he didn’t?”

If you lost a loved one in an accident, you might ruminate over why you didn’t leave 10 minutes earlier, or *what if* you hadn’t planned the vacation where your loved one’s life ended. If you had a husband with a heart issue

and now you are torturing yourself for having insisted he get the surgery that he ultimately didn't survive. And what if a child in your care died in a hot car because you got distracted with other children? These are survivable although extremely difficult and painful. It will take time. You will torture yourself, but the idea is to minimize the amount of time you do it which will alleviate some suffering in the long run and ushering in the opportunity to allow you to forgive yourself for being human, not having control over the universe or another person.

### **Solution—Set Boundaries**

Since you can't shut these thoughts down and it isn't healthy to do that, why not give yourself a time limit?

When I was grieving my son's loss, I made the rule that I could not wallow in the "coulda woulda shouldas" and "what ifs" for more than seven minutes at one sitting. After that time was up, I had to distract myself. If I caught myself torturing myself later that day, I would say to myself, *"AnneMoss. You've already tortured yourself for a whole 7 minutes today. Tomorrow, you can torture yourself all over again for 7 minutes. But today you are done."* That's just a way to minimize the suffering. After the self-torture, I would then distract myself because I had acknowledged, sat with, and reflected on those feelings. I didn't deny them, numb them or push them away.

So eventually I'd reduce the time to 4 minutes, then 3, and so on as weeks passed and even learned to give myself the day off! At the same time, I also pledged that one day I'd forgive myself. I didn't set a date, just the intention. And then I kept setting boundaries and reduced the time I spent self-torturing.

Others have adapted this strategy and instead of a time limit a number limit. So instead of ten times per day, two times per day. Start with what you think will work and then adapt that.

Be patient and loving to yourself. Trust the process and stay in the present without worrying about the outcome. Tearing yourself apart is not a place you want to stay in forever and the goal is to lessen your suffering and by setting boundaries you will start to find emotional healing.

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## THE ALTER EGO STRATEGY

Ever since I was fifteen years old, I've used a strategy to help me get out of the cycle of beating myself up. I didn't realize I'd been using this method for decades until after Charles died when I started writing "alter ego" posts on [emotionallynaked.com](http://emotionallynaked.com). It's what I do to break a self-defeating cycle, work through fears and debate issues so I could decide on a direction to take.

When I was a young teen, I would join in those teen conversations about hating this body part or that. "My thighs were too fat." "I am too tall." And at some point, I realized this self-deprecating talk was dragging me

down and creating issues that didn't exist or making things worse. Overall, these conversations just made me feel worse.

If I don't lift myself up, how can I expect others to? Slowly, I eradicated all self-imposed meanness towards myself. But that doesn't mean it happened by snapping my fingers. It was a habit I had to "unlearn."

Denying those feelings doesn't work.

The alter ego process was and is a way to work through those feelings and allow some internal debate and facing of fears but end on a positive note--an agreement of such between me and my alter ego. It has helped me work through how others see my tragedy and how they might react and allow me to judge whether that is important to me or not. It's a way for me to work through the fear of stepping outside the lines into unknown territory and this has given me permission to be bold and authentic.

It's been through this process that I realize, "So what?" When I apply my alter ego strategy, many social traditions we've held onto make no sense anymore.

This works in grief. But also works in pretty much any area of my life. There are enough events in life to push me into dark places without my having to help dig the hole. There are enough people who would put me down, but I'm not going to join that chorus. I need to be my own cheerleader sometimes.

This is how I coped with the coulda, woulda, shoulda after Charles' suicide. And when I wanted to go public with my family's story because I was terrified, I had to use this process to find out what I was so afraid of and determine whether it was really as big as my imagination had painted it to be. It does tend to whittle down big fears into reasonable ones and make me realize things are not as insurmountable as I believe them to be. Similar to that old saying, "Will the sky fall if you do that?"

**So here are the rules of alter ego conversations:**

1. Say how you are really feeling.
2. Use your name when speaking to your alter ego to reframe it like you're speaking to a friend
3. Consider the resources you have and think of it as a challenge or a sparring partner that helps you work through things that are difficult
4. Your alter ego can throw jabs at you but you must stand up to it and say those things you fear like what others might think or say and the consequences of your actions. In the end, your fearful self and your alter ego have to end that conversation on a positive note and some course of action.
5. Both parties have to come to some kind of conclusion, agreement, or understanding, and act as one having thought through a number of issues.

6. Ask or pray for the strength to manage whatever it is to the best of your ability and tell yourself you do have the resources and the strength.

So having read that, do you see how self-talk can actually be productive? The goal is not to allow it to take you down but instead bolster you and work through that which you fear so you can move forward.

After Charles died by suicide, I was facing our first death anniversary and wrote a blog post called “The Final 48 Hours.” but was immediately fearful about sharing my ugly, naked momma grief. All that boldness I’d felt earlier went *vamoose* in my moment of need and pure terror took its place. This is the conversation that happened in my head that helped me work through that fear. Notice how I speak to my alter ego like it’s another person by putting my name in there. That also changes the perspective.

***Alter Ego:*** Are you really going to push that “publish” button and depress everyone?

***Me:*** Well, AnneMoss, that’s not why you are writing all this.

***Alter Ego:*** Then why?

***Me:*** I am not sure why.

***Alter Ego:*** Then why bring everybody else down? Who wants to read this crap? No one wants to be dragged into your grief about your dead child. Who wants to hear about that? This is your journey, not theirs.

***Me:*** They don’t have to read it. It’s not a required reading assignment.



**Alter Ego:** *You know people are going to feel forced or obliged to reach out because they feel sorry for you.*

**Me:** *I wondered about that at first. But friends and family have been very supportive. I don't think we grievers give others enough credit.*

**Alter Ego:** *Then what's this all about?*

**Me:** *I think it's OK to express grief. We used to wear black to let the world know we are hurting. Now for some reason we are supposed to buck up and deny the hurt, keep it to ourselves, get back on the speed train and move on. People should not feel ashamed of hurting.*

**Alter Ego:** *Do you really think anyone cares?*

**Me:** *I do. Look, AnneMoss. I'm not the only one out there hurting. That's the point. I want others to know they are not alone and that "being strong" doesn't mean glazing over things and jumping back into the saddle. Crying doesn't mean I am weak; it means I am healing and that's OK.*

**Alter Ego:** *But why put that on Facebook, Debbie Downer?*

**Me:** *Because that's where people are. We've made Facebook our own fake reality show--a lollipop land of shiny faces and perfect families. It's the highlight reel we want to put out there and not always reality.*

**Alter Ego:** *What's the matter with that?*

**Me:** *When you look over the landscape it looks like everyone is having a perfect life. And it's a dangerous façade. Those suffering think no one wants to hear what they have to say because it reveals the darkness in their soul. So they feel ashamed and they keep it to themselves. But we need to listen. Or we lose people we love-- like I did.*

**Alter Ego:** *So you want to make social media depressing? Is that it--a big whine fest of hurting souls?*

**Me:** *No. I want hear the good stuff, too. But I don't want to bury the hurt. Charles buried the hurt but used his lyrics to express it. It offered him relief. I am doing the same. It's a release for me, too.*

**Alter Ego:** *Charles would want you to do this wouldn't he?*

**Me:** *Yes. I didn't realize that until right...now. Yes, I guess he would.*

**Alter Ego:** *I understand now. Push that "publish" button. You'll drive me nuts all night if you don't and I won't get any sleep!*

This is unorthodox. Or maybe it's not and you've been doing it without realizing it? Or maybe you've been doing it but not ending on a positive note but leaving yourself hanging out there feeling unworthy.

It takes time to shed the habit of self-punishment. Now, when people engage in self-critique, women especially, I don't participate. Beating myself up doesn't help me reach any goal. When I catch myself doing it, I acknowledge the thought, put it on a conveyor belt and watch it roll away. Anytime my mind says, "Why you?" I instinctively follow with, "Why not you?"

Why engage in self talk at all? One, it happens without my prompting so I might as well give it structure and have it help me instead of defeating me. Oftentimes my worries look so trivial after this exercise which helps me move my agenda forward. And that agenda is talking about a subject no one wants to discuss.

[Back to the top](#)

**A good book on self-talk is "Chatter."**

## CHAPTER 13: TALK ABOUT IT

**by AnneMoss Rogers**

This one is easy but difficult for some to do. Talking about your loved one helped me heal. I feared I would start crying and make the other person feel awkward. But then I wondered why is it that I apologize for crying when, in fact, it's healthy to give myself an outlet for my hurt. I could just cry which lasts ten minutes or less or spend all day trying to deny myself the cry. The latter makes no sense to me.

Many of you have realized that other people will completely ignore you and wish you'd just stop talking about your dead child. But this is my argument to those people, "I will stop talking about my dead child when you stop talking about your living ones."

I have written a lot on this subject and refuse to let someone else make me bury the memory of my child because it makes them uncomfortable. Someone who does is "grief shaming" me and I won't tolerate it.

I deserve to talk about my child. If you don't talk about your child or loved one, who will?

### ***Related Articles:***

- [Let people know it's OK to talk about your deceased child](#)
- [Grief shaming. Why is she still talking about her child who died?](#)
- [I refuse to bury my son's memory](#)
- [Please do not avoid the subject of my son who died](#)

[Back to the top](#)

## CHAPTER 14: EMBRACE YOUR FAITH

**by Charlotte Moyler**

I am writing about my faith helped me before, during and especially after the death of my daughter. I write from my heart and an openness of my soul.

Many who suffer the loss of a child lose their faith. This actually makes a great deal of sense. How was my faith strengthened rather than weakened? Sense has nothing to do with it.



Sometimes in life, events occur that fracture the very foundation on which we stand. Our life, as we have known it, is forever changed and we find ourselves in an unexpected struggle, first just to survive and then to move forward.

The night of my daughter's death, I was at my church serving as a Stephen Minister. Stephen Ministry is a one-to-one lay caring ministry which provides confidential care to those who are hurting. Maggie was recovering from tonsillectomy surgery one week prior. If I had stayed home that night, would Maggie still be alive? One day I will know all of the answers and it will not matter.

It is difficult to explain my emotions when I returned home to find out that my 17-year-old daughter had killed herself. It was (and still remains) a

***“More than half of suicides in 2015, in a subgroup of 27 states, were among people with no known mental health conditions.”***

*Center for Disease Control and Prevention*

horrific nightmare, full of shock and confusion. But even in the depths of my deep dark despair, I felt the presence of God. “How?” many will ask. Words are hard to appropriately find, but I had this tiny

peace within me. This peace kept me together enough to tell my husband that his precious daughter had died and that her death was by suicide. It enabled me to be driven to the college where I also had to tell my son the devastating news that his sister and only sibling had died by suicide. I relied on God’s strength, not my own. I am an emotionally strong person, but this was bigger and more troubled than I could deal with on my own power.

All during the night, I cried out in fury to the God who had forsaken me. If He were all powerful than how could He allow such evil to happen? I was a faithful follower and had been for years. I served God’s people and studied His word. How could He have let all of this happen? Why did I not know of the internal pain my baby was experiencing? My main job was to keep my children safe. How could I have failed? These thoughts and fears could destroy me if I had let them.

Interwoven with my anger, I was crying out in desperation to Jesus to save me. I believe that God and Jesus are one, but that night I was furious

with the God of the Old Testament yet pleading with Jesus of the New Testament for comfort and healing. They met me in my pain. This is where the totally broken me and the Great Healer collided. This is where God's glory met my suffering.

Almost immediately after Maggie died, by pure grace, God placed upon me the need to not look inward, but outward and upward. The question WHY is often common with losing a child and especially suicide loss. It distracts from healing and growth. God placed upon my heart to not ask why, but how. How can I salvage something worthy from this ghastly disaster? Where can I find the hope my soul yearns for?

Philippians 4:8, became my life verse after Maggie's death. God's word has comforted me, and this verse helps to bring me back to life.

***“Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things. “Philippians 4:8***

I had a long heavy journey ahead and Jesus was with me every step of the way. I had heard the term “the strong name of Jesus” and never really understood the power in it. After Maggie's death, that strong name calmed and comforted me. When the reality of Maggie's death fully hit and the darkness tried to surround me, I would repeat Jesus, Jesus, Jesus. This brought me hope--a hope I would hang onto.

God gave me grace to grow from Maggie's death. I had to make the choice to receive it. Faith is not a feeling. It is a choice to trust God even when

the future is uncertain. Through my trust, I have been able to sit alongside other suffering and just be.

One year after Maggie's death, I was able to start a *Survivors of Suicide Loss* support group in my town. Surviving the Loss of a Loved One to Suicide provides healing support for people coping with the shock, excruciating grief and complex emotions that accompany the loss of a loved one to suicide. We provide resources to help you deal with, and eventually heal from, what may well be the worst pain you will ever feel. It is important to know that people can and do survive loss by suicide. They are forever altered, but they do survive and go on to lead meaningful and contributory lives.

I also manage and facilitate *The Compassionate Friends* support group. When a child dies, at any age, of any cause, the family suffers intense pain and may feel hopeless and isolated. *The Compassionate Friends* provides highly personal comfort, hope, and support to every family experiencing the death of a son or a daughter, a brother, a sister, or a grandchild, and helps others better assist the grieving family.

Both are secular groups, but I am able to let my light shine by not being judgmental of other's beliefs and by letting others ask me how I have healed. When asked, it is with great joy that I can share my faith!

[Back to the top](#)

## CHAPTER 15: START THE DAY REFLECTING ON WHAT YOU ARE GRATEFUL FOR

**by AnneMoss Rogers**

Many of you might be thinking, “How can I be grateful when I just lost a child?” And you might even think this is way to toxic positivity minded and be pissed off. That’s OK. Skip this one if it makes you mad. I will confess though, I thought the same thing and that’s why my first “grateful” confessions were sentences like, *“I’m thankful Charles was not tortured, then murdered.”*

[Studies have shown](#) that people who write down and think of things they are grateful for have a more positive outlook on life. When I first read the study my first instinct was to go punch the researcher in the face. But I knew someone in my *Families Anonymous* group that did this every day and she swore by it and kept a journal of all of them. She would often read them to the group. The mere thought of trying this made me angry at first. But the purpose of why I did this was to open up a crack of light in my head where only darkness was in residence. Wonderful things were happening around me, but I could see none of them because I was so wrapped up in despair. My brain and heart needed a break. As I kept at it, I felt a sliver of light enter to allow for a moment of relief and for my heart to feel something other than despair. I do want you to know that I am not pushing toxic positivity here. And you might loathe this kind of exercise like I did. If that’s the case try one



of the others and ignore this one. Because it's not the end all of strategies and you might not be in the right place in your grief to wrap your head around it.

Some say do five things per day, some say three, and if you are going to try it, I say do **one per day**. Writing it down or being intentionally mindful of thinking of one thing sets the tone for the day.

Give it a try even if you are early in the process.

**Here are some examples of things I am grateful for.**

- I'm thankful that my older son, Richard, is so independent and doing well.
- I'm grateful I am still married and that my husband respects where I am in my grief journey.
- I'm thankful I've had the good fortune of having my parents in my life for so long.
- I'm thankful we went to Families Anonymous which surprisingly helped us later in our grief process.
- I'm grateful for my blog and all the people who offer support and share their own personal stories that help themselves and others.
- I'm grateful the sun is out today after days of rain.

This process doesn't take a lot of time or effort and can help you stay in touch with humility. And no matter how bad your life is, you can find ONE thing to be thankful for. It's a simple solution that may help you find some light and a moment of joy after devastating loss.

## CHAPTER 16: BREATHING

**By Karla Helbert**

*We breathe all the time, right? So, what's the big deal?*

Most of us are not breathing properly for optimum health and well-being. We have poor posture, we sit for long periods of time, stare at screens, and move very little. Many grieving and traumatized people have the sensation of being unable to breathe fully. Sometimes you might unconsciously hold your breath until you find yourself gasping for air, not even realizing you weren't breathing. If we have been hurt, are grieving or have experienced trauma, we may feel like we want to be slumped down, curled up, protecting our hearts. This posture causes our lungs to be unable to expand fully and breathing is even more restricted than normal.

When asked to take a deep breath, most people suck in their stomachs and fill up their chests. This is actually the opposite of deep breathing. This posture restricts our lungs' ability to take in oxygen and to release carbon dioxide. The result is an excess of CO<sub>2</sub> in our bodies. Not inhaling enough oxygen and failing to exhale enough CO<sub>2</sub>, can create fatigue, mental fog and decreased tissue function. For a grieving and traumatized person, this can intensify many of the normal grief reactions that we go through as part of the grief experience. Breathing deeply and fully can be a helpful tool to decrease stress, increase clarity of thought and help to counteract fatigue.

Practicing the breathing exercises on the following pages can help.

Anytime you notice that you are feeling anxious, particularly tired, or that you are holding your breath, take a moment —right then and there—to breathe. Stop lights make good cues to practice breathing as well.

In addition to helping, you notice your breath and serving as reminders to practice your breathing exercises, breathing at stop lights can help to counteract the stress we experience when we are confronted with the stress of the rest of the world—other drivers, traffic jams, errands that must be run—while we are in the midst of grief or anxiety. Inside your car, you can create a space of calm and peace simply with your breath.

Additionally, noticing your breath and increasing your use of breathing exercises can also help you to become more mindful of your own thoughts and feelings, giving you a sense of control and stability in an otherwise chaotic time of life. The more you notice how you feel--what your thought patterns are, how your body is affected by your responses to the world around you as well as your thoughts and feelings--the more in control you feel.

(To find these on [emotionallynaked.com](https://www.emotionallynaked.com), use the search bar and type in “breathing strategies” click on the post and the videos are in that post.)

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## **BREATHING EXERCISE 1: JUST BREATHE**

### **Video instructions for Just Breathe:**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NTLVshMNVNM>

### **Written instructions for Just Breathe:**

This is an exercise in simply noticing your breath. Becoming aware and mindful of your own breath as it moves in and out of your body.

1. To begin, sit in any comfortable position, on the floor or on a chair, with your spine long and straight but not stiff.
2. Find a comfortable position for your hands, either folded gently in your lap, or resting on your thighs or knees—palms up or down, whichever feels right to you.
3. Close your eyes if that feels comfortable. If not, find a spot on the floor a few feet in front of you and let your gaze be soft.
4. Begin to notice the temperature of the air on your skin. Notice any sounds you may hear within or outside the room. Begin to notice your body's weight as it is supported by the chair or the floor. Notice the feel of the floor or the chair under your sitting bones, under your legs. Notice the feel of the floor beneath your feet. Expand your awareness to noticing the sensations of your entire body without feeling the need to change anything, simply notice.
5. Now, begin to notice and follow the movement of your breath as it moves in and out of your body, as you inhale and exhale.
6. Inhaling, notice the temperature and the feel of the air as it flows through your nasal passages, down your throat and trachea, on its way into your lungs.

7. Notice the different sensations of your belly, your ribs, your chest, as they expand.
8. Exhaling, notice the temperature of the air, the movement of the tiny hairs of your nose, the feeling of your lungs emptying of the air as it leaves your body.
9. Simply notice these things and any other sensations that occur as you continue to breathe, easily and naturally, in and out.

Simply notice your breath as it moves in and out of your body without the need to change anything at all. Just Breathe.

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## **BREATHING EXERCISE 2: SIMPLE DEEP BREATHING**

### **Video instructions for Simple Deep Breathing:**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b7hBfdzZCRg>

### **Written instructions for Simple Deep Breathing:**

1. Sit in a comfortable position with your hands relaxed, either in your lap or resting on your thighs or knees.
2. Relax your shoulders. Pull them up toward your ears, then roll them back and down, creating space between your shoulders and your ears.
3. Breathe normally in and out for a few breaths. Notice how your belly rises and falls easily as you breathe naturally. Your chest should not rise a great deal as you breathe in and out. If you like, you can place a hand

on your abdomen to help notice the movement as you breathe in and out.

4. When you are ready, breathe in. On the exhalation, breathe out slowly through your nose, counting to five.
5. During this exhalation, pull your diaphragm inward, toward your spine, squeezing all the excess air out of your body.
6. When all the air is squeezed out, pause for two counts, and inhale slowly again, to the count of five, allowing your belly to expand as you breathe in.

If you are comfortable doing so, close your eyes and continue to repeat this easy deep breath, 5-10 times.

If you find that your mind wanders during this exercise, don't worry. Simply bring your focus back to your breathing and begin your counts to five again. You may find it helpful to think of a happy color (such as yellow or pink) or a calming color (like blue or green) as you breathe in and a dreary color (like grey or tan) as you breathe out.

You might choose to imagine breathing in a calming pleasant emotion such as peace or love as you inhale and breathing out stress or anxiety as you exhale. As your awareness of your breath increases, it will become easier to practice your deep breathing without focusing so much of your attention on it.

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## BREATHING EXERCISE 3: THREE PART BREATH

The three-part breath is a specific breathing technique used in yoga practices and can be very useful in times of stress, or whenever you need to relax. This type of breathing triggers your parasympathetic nervous system or the "relaxation response" and allows your body and mind to more easily release stress and tension.

Practicing the three-part breath before bed can be very helpful with sleep issues—a common problem for bereaved people.

### **Video instructions for Three-Part Breath:**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HE2-g3PzCbM>

### **Written instructions for Three-Part Breath:**

1. Find your comfortable sitting position, allowing your hands to be relaxed. (The three-part breath may also be done lying down.)

Practicing this breath while lying in bed before sleep is a good choice if you have difficulty clearing your mind and falling to sleep.

2. To begin, inhale.
3. Then, with your mouth closed, exhale slowly *through your nose* as you did with the simple deep breathing exercises, using your abdominal muscles to pull your diaphragm inward.
4. Squeeze all the stale, excess air completely out of your lungs.

5. As you prepare for your next inhalation, imagine your upper body as a large pitcher. As you inhale, you are filling the pitcher from bottom to top.
6. First, fill the diaphragm and lower belly, allowing them to expand and completely fill with air.
7. Next, continue to allow the pitcher to fill as you notice the lower, and then the upper, parts of the ribcage expanding outward and up.
8. Next, fill the upper lungs, noticing the chest expanding, the collar bones and shoulders rising, as the pitcher is filled completely to the top.
9. Pause for 2 counts.
10. Exhale in the opposite way, allowing the pitcher to empty from top to bottom.
11. As you slowly exhale, allow the shoulders and collar bones to slowly drop, the chest to deflate, the ribs to move inward. Again, pull your diaphragm in, using it to completely empty the air from the bottom of the lungs.
12. Repeat the process, re-filling the pitcher slowly from bottom to top. Continue with the complete and full exhalations and inhalations, emptying and filling your pitcher.

The three parts are bottom, middle, top—expanding and contracting as you slowly and completely fill your body with fresh, cell-nourishing, life-giving



oxygen and then slowly and completely empty it of carbon dioxide, toxins, and tension held in the body and mind.

As you increase your practice and the muscle movements become familiar, you may wish to add the counting of your breaths or your color visualizations. Ideally, the exhalations should be about twice as long as the inhalations. Initially, if you count to 5 as you inhale and exhale, gradually try to make your exhalations to count of 6, then 7, then 8, and so on until you feel more comfortable lengthening your exhalations.

If you feel dizzy or lightheaded while practicing the three-part breath, or any other breathing exercise, stop the practice immediately and allow your breathing to go back to normal. Sometimes if we are not used to a great deal of oxygen, the change can cause lightheadedness or dizziness. Know your own body and be mindful of the changes you notice.

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## **BREATHING EXERCISE 4: THE ALTERNATE NOSTRIL BREATH**

### **Video instructions for Alternate Nostril Breath:**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nWGLFO0m0n8>

### **Written instructions for Alternate Nostril Breath:**

Known by several different names, the purpose of this breath is to purify the energetic channels of the body. In yoga it is called *nadi suddhi* or *nadi shodhana*. This type of breath promotes relief of anxiety and helps to calm the mind and body. It is one of the most calming of the breathing

techniques. The alternate nostril technique helps balance our energy channels and calm the mind.

1. To practice, stretch out the fingers of your right hand, fold in your index and middle fingers. You will use your extended thumb and ring finger to alternately close off and release your right and left nostrils as you practice *nadi suddhi*. You can just let the pinky finger hang out and relax. If you have trouble with this hand movement, don't stress about it, use whatever hand position allows you to close one nostril at a time with one hand.
2. To practice, exhale fully and then inhale fully through both nostrils. Close off the right nostril with your thumb, and exhale slowly through the left. Inhale through the left.
3. Release the thumb and close the left nostril with the ring finger—you'll do this smoothly, almost at the same time. Exhale slowly through the right.
4. Inhale through the right nostril, close it with the thumb. Release the left and exhale.
5. Inhale through the left, close it. Release the right and exhale.
6. Inhale through the right, close it. Continue this pattern.

YOU CAN USE THE ALTERNATE NOSTRIL BREATH WITH THE THREE-PART BREATH FOR AN EVEN DEEPER EXPERIENCE. DO THIS ONLY IF YOU PRACTICED IN THE THREE-PART BREATH AS WELL AS ALTERNATE NOSTRIL BREATHING.

## CHAPTER 17: FORGIVE YOURSELF

**by AnneMoss Rogers**

No matter how someone died, somehow, we feel we didn't do enough. And in some cases, we made an error and that cost someone their life and now we are alive, and they are not which comes with crushing guilt as well as grief.

We ask questions.

Did we make the wrong decision by opting for that last surgery? Should we have done A instead of B? Why didn't I know my child was suffering? Wasn't it my job to protect my loved one? How could I have lived through that accident while my child died? How will I ever live with myself after the death of my friend in a car I was driving?

You may not be ready to forgive yourself now but tell yourself that one day you will. If you are suffering from loss by suicide or an accident in which you may have been part of, this process is very lengthy with considerable guilt baggage.

The trick is to keep saying you will one day arrive at a place where you are able to let it go and forgive yourself because you recognize it's not productive or helping you move forward. It doesn't mean when you arrive at that day, you will never feel guilt again. But it will allow yourself to accept any human mistakes you may have made and realize that which you have held yourself unrealistically accountable. It will also give you the permission to

focus on the 95% you did right and stop using a magnifying glass to hyper focus on the 5% that you did imperfectly.

The truth is, if your loved one was still here, he or she wouldn't want you to torture and blame yourself because it doesn't honor their life or yours.

[Back to the top](#)

## CHAPTER 18: MUSIC

**by AnneMoss Rogers**

You can write it, perform it, listen to it but there is no denying that music can heal a battered soul. This could be tucked under the “do something creative” or “write” chapter but I do believe it deserves one all its own.

It turns out music is connected to the pleasure center of our brain and is a great coping tool because it allows us to release feel-good neurotransmitters without resorting to booze, pints of ice cream, or shopping till we drop. When grief renders words inadequate, music can give a voice to overwhelming visceral emotion.

Sad songs make us feel less alone, happy songs elevate our mood. My son, Charles, used writing and performing rap to help him through his mental illness and thoughts of suicide. And if the addiction had not complicated his mental illness, I do believe that strategy would have carried him through, and it did for many years.

Writing and performing it is a way of expressing yourself creatively that can help you work through the pain of loss. Judy Collins' "Wings of Angels," is a song she wrote as a tribute to her son Clark, who died by suicide in 1992. "Tears in Heaven" is a ballad written by Eric Clapton and Will Jennings about the pain Clapton felt following the death of his four-year-old son, Connor, who fell from a window of the 53rd-floor New York apartment in 1991.

We add music to our funerals and to serenade our sadness. Sometimes it celebrates our beloved dead, offering comfort for the grief-stricken; sometimes it confronts us with the anguish of mortality and loss or reflects the painful, complex and laborious task of mourning.

[Back to the top](#)

## CHAPTER 19: HOW TO USE DBT SKILLS TO MANAGE THE PAIN OF GRIEF

**by AnneMoss Rogers**

There are some self-help strategies in DBT (dialectical behavior therapy) that I used to manage my grief. Now I want to be clear that while I used these skills, I didn't know at the time that they were actual DBT skills but looking back, I can now identify how I used them in my grief process. I'm going to tell you what those are, and how I used them to help myself through the devastating loss of my son, Charles, to suicide.

DBT was developed by Dr. Marsha M. Linehan, an American psychologist. This methodology can apply to situations beyond grief but at any point **when you want to change how you feel**. It won't "fix" the pain, but it will prevent you from needlessly wallowing in your pain for extended periods of time.

In short, it lessens your suffering. Are you with me so far? Because who wants to suffer more?

DBT includes four modules—Mindfulness, Interpersonal Effectiveness, Emotion Regulation, and Distress Tolerance. Instead of an exhaustive DBT lesson, we're just going to focus on a few that you can use right away. There is an explanation of the skill and an example applied in grief so you can see how it might be used.

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## MINDFULNESS

This is a foundation for DBT. In grief, we tend to ruminate on the past--  
*“What did I do wrong?” “Why did I decide that that surgery was good for my child?” “What if I hadn’t been driving on that highway at that time? Maybe my child would still be alive.”* Then we also hover over a future that has yet to happen, wondering how we rebuild our lives and our sense of self when what we have imagined has exploded in our faces. It leaves us lost and feeling broken, not able to see ahead.

Mindfulness is about staying in the present. It’s about telling yourself to focus on that moment. It’s about acknowledging any “what ifs” and “coulda woulda shouldas” and then bringing your mind back to the present, and what’s happening right now.

**Example:** Next time you find yourself thinking *“I can’t possibly survive this loss,”* remind yourself: *“Yeah, this hurts like mad. And I’m doing all I can right now to cope and survive.”* Because it’s just going to take a while to accept the loss and learn to live without your loved one.

**Another Example:** *“I could have saved him from suicide.”* I’d take a deep breath and I say to myself, *“I know it’s a preventable death which really hurts. And I have to recognize I can’t control the actions of another human being. I*



*can only control my actions and reactions. My son grew up in a house of love. We went to the beach together, we baked cakes and had birthday parties and bonfires. I don't need to put a magnifying glass on the 5% I did imperfectly but instead on the 95% of parenting I did do well. And this might take some time."*

You might dwell in the "what ifs" and "coulda woulda shouldas" for a while. It's a process so be patient with yourself.

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## **EMOTION REGULATION-WAVE SKILL**

Riding the wave is about allowing your emotions to be with you without acting ineffectively. In short, when you are emotionally overwrought, we can make some uninformed and detrimental decisions that we can regret later. The wave skill is about moving with your emotions instead of fighting them much like a surfer who rides the waves. In times of distress, you can experience emotional tsunamis. Coping with powerful emotions in a harmful or ineffective way can make the situation worse. This skill is all about riding it out instead of overcompensating with harmful behavior.

Going with the flow, riding the wave involves observing and coping with the experience without trying to change it. The more frequent tendency is to escape and/or attempt to fix an uncomfortable

state of being, so riding the wave, sitting with the discomfort may seem unnatural.

But no emotion is permanent. **They are always changing and the worst of it lasts some 60-90 seconds.**

Although these emotions can be met with intense fear and can seem counterintuitive, accepting painful emotions can lessen your suffering. Do you want to prolong it? Or do you want to move through it and heal?

**Example:** You might think that drinking a bottle of wine might help you manage your pain of loss but instead it can bring on more problems, making your situation far worse. You might get in the car and drive because your judgment is poor enough in grief and even worse when you've had too much to drink, therefore putting others in danger. Even worse, you could become dependent or addicted.

Months after losing Charles, I had a conversation with a dad who told me it would never get better. It had been seven years since he'd lost his son. He then revealed he drank heavily every day since that death to deal with the pain. In other words, he numbed it, leaving him in that raw state of grief so many years later. At first, I thought I was doomed to never enjoy life again.

It was only after having lunch with my friend Roz that I recognized how she had moved forward through creating a foundation and giving back. Although she'd lost her son seven years prior, she had learned to live with the death and enjoy life again without forgetting or minimizing her son's legacy.

She didn't rely on temporary in-the-moment, feel-good strategies like overeating or drinking too much. And she proceeded to tell me about her upcoming planned vacation.

The goal is to focus on healthy coping strategies and accepting and sitting with difficult emotions.

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## **DISTRESS TOLERANCE – RADICAL ACCEPTANCE**

Radical acceptance is exactly what it says it is. It is a way to thoroughly, and without reservation, invest and engage in the process of embracing reality, however harsh. Those feelings of loss feel like they will kill you, but they won't.

Within the context of grieving, radical acceptance invites us to dive into the center of our mourning without judging ourselves or circling the wagons. Have you been trying to avoid your pain? What is one step you can take toward that pain, knowing that these are the building blocks to emotional healing?

The really intense moments of pain last 60-90 seconds and while it feels intolerable and like you won't survive, no feeling is permanent. And you will survive because billions (if not trillions) of others before you have. So, if you allow your emotions to happen, you can sit with them until they dissipate, and then when the pain lifts, you can distract yourself with some other activity.

Pushing them away has the effect of stalling your process and leaving you in the rawness of pain for a lot longer than you need to be.

**Example:** Shortly after we had arrived home after the police officers had delivered the news they'd found our son dead, my husband and I collapsed on the floor. I didn't think it was possible to live through pain this intense. While I was telling myself there was no way I could survive the pain, something in my head pinged and said, *"You will survive. As bad as it is right now, and I know it's brutal, it will never be as bad as getting the news. That part is over and it will never hurt that much again."* I also dreaded waking up the next day but forced myself back into the present because I needed to call my family and I would just repeat *"You will survive. I don't know how but I will."*

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## EMOTIONAL REGULATION- CHECK THE FACTS

We assume a lot. It helps to go back and check the facts particularly if we are in an emotional or irrational state of mind. Right after the memorial service, I was sure none of my friends were calling me because I had lost a child and had been permanently branded as "no fun at all, forever, for the rest of my life." In my head, I had cooked up all kinds of scenarios that they, my friends, were avoiding me until one day I challenged my ridiculous "oh woes me" illusions by thinking about the facts. And then I asked myself, *"Do you*

*really think they are not calling because they are avoiding you and don't like you after 20 years?"*

When I thought about it, I realized how ridiculous it was to think that. How would I feel if one of my friends lost a child to suicide? Could it be that they are not sure what I wanted? Might they have been fearful of walking into my tragedy? Didn't they have busy lives, family, and probably weren't aware of my day-to-day agony or even know what to do? Were they even aware that I needed to hear from them and wanted to go out some? How could I help them understand what I wanted?

Smoke signals weren't going to work. Not saying anything and brooding wasn't going to work. Sitting around demonizing the world wasn't going to do anything but make me bitter.

So, I decided to have a party—to have them all over. It was a signal that I wanted their company and didn't want to isolate.

I provided the space and they all came—brought the food and wine since I was incapable of all that. We had fun sitting on my deck at night. Later I would share with one of them what I needed so they could share with the group. Sure, there are people who will never reach out. That's their loss! But most want to do something, they are just not sure what to do because each of us wants something different and they cannot read minds. We, that means those of us who are hurting and

grieving, need to communicate that to at least one person in the friend group. A worksheet is included at the end called name that will help you go over the inventory of that conversation.

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## EMOTIONAL REGULATION – OPPOSITE ACTION

This helps when what you need to do isn't what you want to do. Because sometimes grief gets in the way of the life we have to live or want to be living. When is the worst time for you? For many, it's first thing in the morning. (The nighttime isn't great either.)

Opposite action won't "fix" the pain but it will prevent you from needlessly wallowing in your pain for extended periods of time. **In short, it lessens your suffering.**

**Example:** In the days and months following the loss of my son Charles to suicide, facing the morning sun's assault on my consciousness reminded me that my child was dead. Sleep was a break from this reality and where I could live in dreams where he was alive and even hugging me. The mornings were brutal, but I set my intention to get up and go running every morning which was the opposite action of what I wanted to do. I really wanted to crawl back in bed and hibernate. Thinking ahead to all those steps was overwhelming so I broke it down into small, doable steps.

Step one, I'd tell myself, "*Just lift your head, turn around and put your feet on the floor. That's all you have to do.*" Next, I'd focus on, going to the bathroom and then brushing my teeth. I didn't set some big, bodacious goals but rather small, doable micro-steps because my mind couldn't grasp a whole set of steps, but it could do one.

Low and behold I would find myself outside eventually and I would say, "*I don't have to run, but since I'm out here, I might as well try.*" By the end of my run, despite crying for at least the first mile of a three-mile run, I did feel better. I didn't deny my feelings or try to push them away. I felt the feelings and I just ran with them. The cold and the exercise helped me lessen the amount of time I spent suffering.

I used opposite action when I wanted to blow off going to suicide loss support group. Instead, I made myself go and never regretted it. I used it again when a friend asked me to go out to lunch. I did cry at the table when I arrived because it was my first holiday after the loss and the emotions overwhelmed me when I saw her. I freaked out the waiter with my tsunami of tears but so what? The world did not explode or stop spinning because I balled for thirty seconds in a restaurant. My friend didn't post a photo on social media but instead gave me a much-needed hug. And by the end of the lunch, we laughed at the fact that the waiter was totally freaked and that my grand entrance was met with a desperate search for Kleenex. (a little humor helps)

It's not what I had envisioned but I was a grieving mother and I decided not to admonish myself for what is a perfectly natural response for having lost something as precious as a child. I also appreciated my friend because asking me to go somewhere had to make her feel fearful.

All emotions trigger some kind of action. And some emotions spur actions that might not be beneficial to you and your goals. You can use the opposite action because you fear failure, rejection, suffer guilt or because you feel lethargic.

I remember Tammy Ozolins told me that as a young adult, she had to get on the phone and find help for her bipolar disorder in the midst of a depressive episode. It was the last thing she wanted to do but by doing so she saved herself.

Our opposite actions can lead us to feel better and even discover successes we have not even imagined.

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## **DISTRESS TOLERANCE – TIPP SKILLS**

TIPP=Temperature, Intense Exercise, Paced Breathing, Paired Muscle Relaxation. TIPP skills are survival skills and are used to bring yourself into a state of stability from a crisis mode. They won't eradicate the source of the pain but offer strategies of healthy coping in a moment of extreme pain.

### **Temperature**



When we are sad or upset, our bodies heat up. To counter that effect, you can hold an ice cube to your wrist, splash your face with cold water, or run/walk outside in the cold (that's what I did). Changing your body temperature helps reset your brain both physically and emotionally. In fact, a strategy for those who are suicidal is to dunk your face in ice water for 30 seconds.

### **Intense Exercise**

Exercise intensely enough to match your current emotion. You don't need to be a world-record runner. Walk fast, sprint to the end of the street, jump rope, run the stairs or do whatever would be considered intense for you until you've worn yourself out. Investing that energy and rechanneling it into intense exercise increases your oxygen flow, helps decrease stress levels and what's more, it's impossible to stay dangerously upset when you're exhausted. It gives you an outlet for extreme emotions. I have a hill in my neighborhood I call "angry hill." Whenever I am overcome with mad, I tackle that hill. It takes so much effort, I don't have the energy to be mad. I wear out the emotion and don't let it wear me out.

### **Paced Breathing**

Breathing, which Karla Helbert LPC covers really well in this post, [Breathing strategies to quiet anxiety or manage grief](#), has a

profound impact on reducing emotional pain. I won't go into it in detail here because Karla has covered it so well in the linked article.

### **Paired Muscle Relaxation**

I call this Rigid to Ragdoll. You tighten, tighten, tighten a muscle, then relax it, and allow it to rest. A more relaxed muscle requires less oxygen, so your breathing and heart rate slow. Try this technique by focusing on a group of muscles, such as the muscles in your back and arms. Tighten the muscles as much as you can for five seconds. Then let go. Rigid to Ragdoll.

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## **INTERPERSONAL EFFECTIVENESS – A CHANGE SKILL**

This skill focuses on getting what you want while also nurturing relationships and maintaining your self-respect. We'll focus on the most popular: **DEAR MAN**.

DEAR MAN is an exercise that helps people express their needs to others. It involves:

**D**escribing the Situation

**E**xpressing Feelings

**A**sserting Wishes

**R**einforcing

(Staying) **M**indful

**A**ppearing Confident

This one can be complex so it's easier to explain with an example. Here is one way this might be applied in a grief situation where well-meaning relatives want to push you back into the light before you are ready or make you think something is wrong with you because grief is still in your life and by the way always will be in some form.

**Example:**

**Scenario:** Your sister has told family members that you insert commentary about your deceased child every chance you get despite the fact it's been six years since her death. This makes her uncomfortable which has infuriated you and made you feel hurt. What's more, she's expressed concern that you are still visiting your child's grave which to her, indicates you are not "moving on" from the loss in a way she thinks you should.

Here's how you can use DBT skills and "I feel" phrases to address this because it's hurtful and you want to be able to tell your sister in a thoughtful and respectful way that preserves your relationship but allows you to be heard instead of frustrated and angry. You can also write this in a letter. It helps to be able to let it sit overnight so that you remove dagger phrases that might otherwise strain your relationship.

**Describing the Situation** – *"Whenever I bring up my sweet Denise who died, you cut me off and change the subject. What's more, you have expressed*

*discomfort with the fact that I visit my child's grave even though she died many years ago. You are important to me, and I love you and while this is a very difficult conversation for me to have, I believe it's important to make our relationship stronger."*

**Express Feelings** – *"This loss was extremely painful, and it has evolved over time to where I can enjoy life but there are times I will feel sad and want to talk about my deceased child—to remember her and know you do, too. When you cut me off in conversation when I speak of her, it makes me feel like you are trying to erase her from my family tree and forget her. As if you'd rather she was forgotten. When you try to ignore what I say or move past it, I try harder to be heard because I feel dismissed. I don't feel you understand that talking about her and visiting her grave helps me cope with this loss in a healthy and productive way. I don't think it was your intention to grief shame me but that's how it feels. Wouldn't you want me to be able to live with the grief in a way that helps me cope? I have to ask if your daughter died, would you want no one to ever utter her name because she died?"*

**Assert Wishes** – *"I would appreciate it if you didn't make comments that make me feel invalidated but instead supported my need to talk about my daughter, even engaging in conversation about things you remember about Denise. Because she loved you so much and you both had such a special*

*relationship. Those stories are soothing to me, and it reinforces that she is remembered by my family as the special person she was."*

**Reinforce** – *"If you could, just ask me how it feels to me so you can understand things from my perspective since you've not had this happen to you. And I am grateful for that and would never ever want it to. I invite you to just ask me and let's have open conversation. Don't worry that you are reminding me of her. I think of her every day since her death and always will. All I need is a few minutes and not an exhaustive conversation about her."*

Remain in the present and be prepared to stand your ground but also open to negotiation. Your sister might not be in a place to manage this well so give her some grace for making an effort even if it's clumsy and imperfect. She also might need time because her initial reaction might be shame. Or she may defend herself and re-accuse. She doesn't know how it feels to you and it's likely to take some time for her to reflect before she can understand what to do and say and fully accept that something is not "wrong" with you. Because it's not.

If you find that after a year after your loss you are completely unable to find joy in anything, you might need to look for a therapist for help to work through this traumatic loss.

## CHAPTER 20: I DON'T WANT TO LIVE

*By AnneMoss Rogers*

This chapter is dedicated to helping you find a way forward after a devastating loss that leaves you questioning the meaning of life, especially your own. A friend of mine, Gray, has lived with depression most of her life. When she lost her adult son to suicide, she didn't want to live. A friend of hers noticed that she was in trouble and got her into therapy which she has attended for many years.

As many as 30% of parents struggle with thoughts of suicide after losing a child to any cause of death. In groups over the years, parents and other loved ones have talked out loud about this and those with similar feelings have felt validated and less isolated once they did. If you've lost a child, partner, sibling, or other loved one do talk to a loved one to find a resource locally to help you navigate through this.

Some have not confessed it out loud but instead whispered it to me after I brought it up, ashamed they'd have those thoughts and leave other family members with the pain of more loss.

Oftentimes a grieving person can start to feel like they are a burden and all they can focus on is stopping the unrelenting pain. Like all intense thoughts, they last 60-90 seconds. While the whole episode might be more like a half hour or an hour, those intense seconds can feel unbearable and exhausting. I'm always honored someone trusts me enough to make a

difficult confession because it's hard to tell someone your deepest darkest, most painful thoughts and it's hard for people to feel in need of help and support. But we are all human and humans thrive on connection and support.

If you are questioning whether you want to live or die, please tell someone you trust, get a suicide risk assessment and a safety plan. Enlist a friend to help you find a good therapist. If ever there was a time when you need support and extra love this is it. You cannot do this alone, nor should anyone expect you to.

Gray decided to live at first because she felt obligated to live. And it would be after working with her therapist she regained the will to live again. So, it's OK if at first you don't feel you want to live and you rely on "obligated to live" for a while. Long term that's not sustainable but it has carried a lot of people through that initial raw phase of grief alive.

## CHAPTER 20: A LIST OF COPING IDEAS FROM OTHER GRIEVING PARENTS

There is no way to have a chapter on every single coping strategy, so this is a list of ideas that people have used to help them through the grief of losing a loved one. It is never just one, but a combination of strategies that help people move through loss.

1. Go out with friends
2. Support group text
3. Go to a movie
4. Dance
5. Take a class to learn a new skill
6. Focus on a fixer or cleaning project
7. Cook
8. Read fart jokes or watch stupid videos
9. Draw, doodle, paint, woodworking
10. Plan a party or get together
11. Make a gift for someone
12. Binge old movies or sports programs with a friend
13. **Use imagery:** Imagine a very relaxing scene. Imagine a calming, safe place. Imagine things going well; imagine coping well. Imagine painful emotions draining out of you like water out of a pipe.
14. **Meaning:** Find or create some purpose, meaning, or value in the pain.
15. **Prayer:** Open your heart to a supreme being, greater wisdom, or your own wise mind. Ask for strength to bear the pain in this moment.
16. **Relaxation:** Try muscle relaxing by tensing and relaxing each large muscle group, starting with the top of your head and then working down. Download a relaxation audio or video; stretch; take a bath; get a massage.
17. **One thing at a time:** Focus your entire attention on what you are doing right now. Keep your mind in the present moment. Be aware of body movements or sensations while you're walking, cleaning, eating.



18. **Vacation:** Give yourself a brief vacation. Get outside; take a short walk; go get your favorite coffee drink or smoothie; read a magazine or newspaper; surf the web; take a 1-hour breather from hard work that must be done. Unplug from all electronic devices.
19. **Encouragement:** Cheerlead yourself. Repeat over and over: "I can stand it," "It won't last forever," "I will make it through this," "This hurts like crazy, I'm doing the best I can."
20. **Find Quotes:** Find quotes that move you, write them and post them where you can see them.

[Back to the top](#)

## CHAPTER 21: GRIEF RESOURCES

*by AnneMoss Rogers*

6-minute TEDx- [Can a Blog Save Lives?](#)

Resources on Emotionally Naked:

1. [Grief Resources](#)
2. [Recommended Grief Books](#)
3. [Free eBooks](#)

Popular Grief Blog Posts on EmotionallyNaked.com. You can search by the titles.

1. [5 things to help you find hope after tragedy](#)
2. [7 things we need our 'ungrieving' friends to know](#)
3. [My grief timeline. The first two years.](#)
4. [How grief matures](#)
5. [Grief: 5 things that helped me turn a corner](#)
6. [From where do I draw my strength?](#)
7. [9 Things I no longer tolerate since my son's suicide](#)
8. [Why do I post about grief? My alter ego and I have a battle](#)
9. [Forgiving myself](#)
10. [Don't talk me out of my tears](#)
11. [Grief Writes Me a Love Letter](#)

Emotionally Naked Blog: <http://emotionallynaked.com>

AnneMoss Rogers Professional Speaker:

<https://mentalhealthawarenesseducation.com/mental-health-speaker/>

Store with Books and free eBooks:

<https://mentalhealthawarenesseducation.com/mental-health-books/>

## CHAPTER 20: WORKSHEETS

**by AnneMoss Rogers**

You know what you want. But maybe your loved ones and friends don't seem to be there for you and don't know what to do. I can tell you that your friends and loved ones have no idea what to do and are even afraid or nervous about talking to you since this unspeakable tragedy happened in your life.

It's my recommendation you meet with one friend, and using the topics on the worksheet, determine what it is you need and allow that friend to communicate to your other friends and family. Because no one grieving person wants the same thing as another person and they are paralyzed of "reminding you of your loss" (like you'd ever forget) or saying the wrong thing. This helps those on the other side understand what to do. Check in periodically with that friend because your needs change over time. Five years out you don't need the same things you need soon after the death. But you might still want friends to reach out and ask, "How are you coping?"

- 1. [Worksheet for General Grief](#)**
- 2. [Worksheet for Loss of a Child](#)**

[Back to the top](#)

	
<p><b><u><a href="#">Diary of a Broken Mind: A Mother's Story, a Son's Suicide and the Haunting Lyrics He left Behind</a></u></b> (Memoir)- \$16.95</p>	<p><b><u><a href="#">Emotionally Naked: A Teacher's Guide to Preventing Suicide and Recognizing Students at Risk</a></u></b>- \$29.95</p>
<p>by AnneMoss Rogers with lyrics by Charles Rogers</p>	<p>by AnneMoss Rogers &amp; Kimberly O'Brien, PhD, LICSW</p>
<p>Publish date: October 2019. Beach Glass Books.</p>	<p>Publish date: August 2021. Wiley Publishing.</p>
<p>Description: The funniest, most popular kid in school, Charles Aubrey Rogers, suffered from depression and later addiction, then died by suicide. Diary of a Broken Mind focuses on the relatable story of what led to his suicide at age twenty and answers the “why” behind his addiction and this cause of death revealed through both a mother’s story and years of Charles’ published and unpublished song lyrics. The closing chapters focus on hope and healing– and how the author found her purpose and forgave herself. By AnneMoss Rogers with lyrics from Charles Rogers.</p>	<p>Description: In this guide, AnneMoss Rogers, and Kimberly O'Brien, PhD, LICSW, empower middle and high school educators with the knowledge and skills to leverage their relationships with students to reduce suicide. Educators will learn evidence-based concepts of suicide prevention, plus lesser-known innovative strategies and small culture shifts for the classroom to facilitate connection and healthy coping strategies, the foundation of suicide prevention. Included is commentary from teachers, school psychologists, experts in youth suicidology, leaders from mental health nonprofits, program directors, and students. In addition, readers will find practical tips, and sample scripts, with innovative activities that can be incorporated into teaching curricula.</p>

[Back to the top](#)



The grief journey is all about learning to move forward by incorporating your loved one in your life by carrying the memory in your heart.