BARE.

Write Your Grief.

Introduction

A grief journal is a place where you can begin to work through your grief. You may choose to share parts of it with others or keep it as something private. You might choose to do ten minutes a day or two hours. You might type it up on your computer or write with a nice pen in a notebook.

When we hear the term grief journaling we may think about tediously chronicling all of our uncomfortable emotions, blow by blow. The fact is that different sorts of writing suit different people. Some people may prefer to write about a made up character who's grieving. People may prefer to write poetry or lists or letters. Adapt these prompts to suit you or skip them altogether if they're unhelpful.

Over the next 30 days, you'll see a writing prompt encouraging you to explore an aspect of your grief. The prompts aren't like the typical "tell me about the funeral" prompts – they're deeper, and designed to provide a different perspective to what you might get from family and friends.

You don't need perfect grammar or spelling to find this helpful. You don't need to have written anything before. You don't even need to be a reader. When you're writing, try not to re-read what you're working on or cross things out. Keep your pen moving (or your fingers typing).

DAY 1

How did the person you're missing die?

Was it after a long illness, or unexpected and sudden?

Were you there for the death?

Write about how the person you're missing died. Ideally, write a few paragraphs about how they died.

This might be spanning back months or years or – in the case of an accident – it might just be a single day.

DAY 2

Sometimes when someone we love dies, we'll have people asking what they can do to help. They might be uncertain what would be most useful, worried about overstepping boundaries or perhaps somehow making things worse.

In this practical exercise, write a list of all the things you'd like the people around you to help with. You can choose to share what you write with others, or not.

The important part here is that you reflect on what you need right now.

As a starting point, write down five things that would be helpful to you. If this exercise feels particularly useful to you, try to come up with fifteen things that could be useful to you.

Perhaps it's help sorting out bills; perhaps it's grocery shopping; perhaps it's having someone sit on the couch with you for the day and watch terrible television or send you a text each night.

DAY 3

There will likely be parts of the death of your loved one that you keep coming back to and possibly reliving (if you were there) or imagining (if you weren't). Maybe a sound or a smell or an expression. What were these moments? Why do you think they've stayed with you so vividly? Traumatic grief is when our grief is entwined with a traumatic experience. This might be a car accident, a natural disaster or not being able to help someone who's dying in front of you. In cases of traumatic grief, aspects of the loss refuse to be processed the way that other experiences are. In this way, the experience of traumatic grief stays active within us – the experience refuses to become a memory.

Writing about these moments and thinking about what underlies them can be a helpful way to finally let the experiences become memories.

In this exercise, write about the moments that are troubling you. Think about why these particular moments are so vivid. Perhaps they were scary? Perhaps you feel guilt? Perhaps the person you're missing was really vulnerable or unfamiliar in this moment? Write with as much detail about each moment, including why you think you might be hanging onto them.

DAY 4

Language is so important. Often people can be uncomfortable about using terms associated with death. For instance, people may describe someone as passing away rather than dying. How have you been describing your loss? How have other people been describing your loss? What terms or phrases are most helpful to you right now?

Maybe you feel immensely frustrated every time you hear someone tell you that the person you're missing has gone to a better place. Maybe you wish more people would say your loved one's name.

For this exercise, make a list of words, phrases and topics that are helpful to you right now.

You might like to leave it as a bullet-point list or perhaps write in paragraph form. You can choose to share this with the people around you, or just keep it for yourself.

The point of this exercise is to reflect on the impact that language can have on us.

DAY 5

Do you remember your dreams? Sometimes, when we're stricken with grief, our relationship with sleep changes. We might suddenly be sleeping much more than usual or else we might develop insomnia. We might start having nightmares.

Are you dreaming about your family? Friends? Are you dreaming about something random and seemingly disconnected from what's going on in your life?

Dreams are complex, but sometimes they can give us insight into the emotions that we might not be consciously aware of.

Write down any dreams that you can remember having over the last few nights. You might like to start keeping a dream journal, which you write in when you wake up each morning.

Think about what these dreams might mean – they might not mean anything and that's fine!

Please feel free to skip this exercise if you have trouble remembering your dreams.

DAY 6

Stories make up the fabric of our lives and when we lose someone we love, we lose their stories. What stories can you remember the person you're missing telling you?

Maybe it was a story they told you over and over, or perhaps it was a story they only told you once.

Write this story down in as much details as you can. You might like to do this regularly; creating a collection of stories that you can re-read whenever you need to.

DAY 7

Maybe you've heard of the five stages of grief. Maybe you think that grief means sadness.

Does your experience of grief match up with what you've been told about it? Often it doesn't – we expect grief to be much simpler and neater than it really is.

This can cause us stress and guilt – perhaps without us even realising it.

Take a moment to write about what you understand about grief.

Write down everything you can think of and then take a moment to consider whether your experience of grief matches with what you expect grief to look like.

DAY 8

When we experience grief, it can be easy to get stuck in our heads and forget about our bodies. What can you feel in your body? Maybe you've got a headache or a churning stomach. Maybe you've got tingling feet or a physical pain in your chest.

Noticing and listening the sensations in our bodies can help us to become aware of emotions that we might not otherwise be able to acknowledge.

Write a list of what you can feel right now in your body. If this feels like a useful exercise for you, add detail to your list.

This is an exercise you can come back to whenever you like – it can be useful to check in and see if the sensations in our bodies have changed.

DAY 9

Sometimes the things we miss most about someone who's died are not the big moments, which we might get to talk about with others, but the tiny moments that make up the fabric of our lives.

These are the moments that might feel a bit silly talking about with other people, but that doesn't mean they're not important.

Write down five small moments that you remember experiencing with the person you're missing.

If this exercise feels useful to you, you might like to write about ten little moments and identify why they're important to you.

DAY 10

Images are so powerful. Pick a photo depicting an experience you shared with the person you're missing (or several photos!).

These might be photos that have special meaning to you or could be ones that you have picked at random.

Write about the photos. Where was the photo taken? What can you remember about the clothes and food and the weather? Who was there with you?

Start with one photo and if the exercise is helpful to you, move on and write about as many as you'd like.

DAY 11

What's the funniest memory you have of the person you're missing? Perhaps it's a joke they told or a face they pulled. Maybe it was something really undignified that happened.

What did it feel like, when you experienced this funny moment? Did your stomach hurt from laughing? Did you have to bite the inside of your cheek to stop from making too much noise? Why was it funny?

Write down this funny memory in as much detail as you can remember.

Pay particular attention to how writing this funny memory down makes you feel – does it make you feel happy? Teary? Numb?

DAY 12

Imagine a character in a book (or a movie) who has experienced what you're experiencing right now. Think about what they might be feeling or doing or noticing.

Perhaps it's a character that already exists or perhaps it's a character that you've made up.

Write a scene with this character. You might like to write it in third person (e.g. "she walked through the house") or you might prefer to write it in first person (e.g. "I walked through the house").

You might even want to have a go at writing it in second person (e.g. "you walked through the house"). You might like to mix up all three. There is no wrong way to write this scene.

DAY 13

When we experience a loss, it's easy to get very bogged down in the past. We relive moments leading up to or immediately after the death – particularly if it was traumatic.

We might keep going over regrets - all the things we wished we'd said or done differently.

Write down where you're going to be in six months.

What are you going to be working towards?

What are you going to be doing to honour the memory of the person you've lost?

What food will you have in your fridge?

What things will have changed around your house?

What things will have stayed the same?

This exercise is about shifting our focus to the future. This doesn't have to be an in-depth plan, but a way of gently finding balance between the past and the present.

DAY 14

When someone dies, we often try to only think about the positive things they brought to the world.

This might work for you, but sometimes it's comforting to remember them as flawed, real humans. Maybe they had frustrating habits.

Maybe they interrupted you when you spoke or were terrible at cooking. Maybe they drank too much or never said sorry.

Write about these things – maybe a list, maybe a letter, maybe a story.

It's not about judging the person who has died; it's about recalling the parts of them that are less likely to be talked about.

It's about remembering them as frustrating, wonderful, flawed people.

DAY 15

What are you struggling with most today?

Is it practical considerations?

Is it feeling lonely or overwhelmed?

Write down what you're struggling with today. Don't worry about trying to find a solution, just write about what's hard and why it's hard.

Give yourself permission to acknowledge this struggle.

DAY 16

When we're missing someone who's died, we might expect ourselves to only experience moments of sadness, anger and other negative emotions.

Often, this isn't accurate. We may feel all sorts of thing when we're grieving and this is completely normal.

What are some feelings you've experienced in the last day?

Write a list – even if the feeling only lasted for a second.

DAY 17

Often, we're not very kind to ourselves. We might be very compassionate and understanding if someone else is going through tough times, but impatient and furious with ourselves in the same situation.

For this exercise, imagine if someone you loved was facing a huge loss and asked you what they should know about grief.

What would you tell them? How would you take care of them?

DAY 18

When we're grieving, we may find meaning in unexpected places. Pick an object that's meaningful to you – maybe because it reminds you of the person you're missing.

Maybe it's a red teapot or a sock. Maybe it's a rose in the garden or a piece of jewellery.

Write about this object. Write about why it's meaningful, write about the memories you have with this object, how long you've had it, why you've kept it. If you can, pick the object up.

What does it feel like? Does it have a smell? Is it heavy? Do you have memories of this object?

This piece of writing might be quite short, but if it feels useful to you, write as much detail as you can.

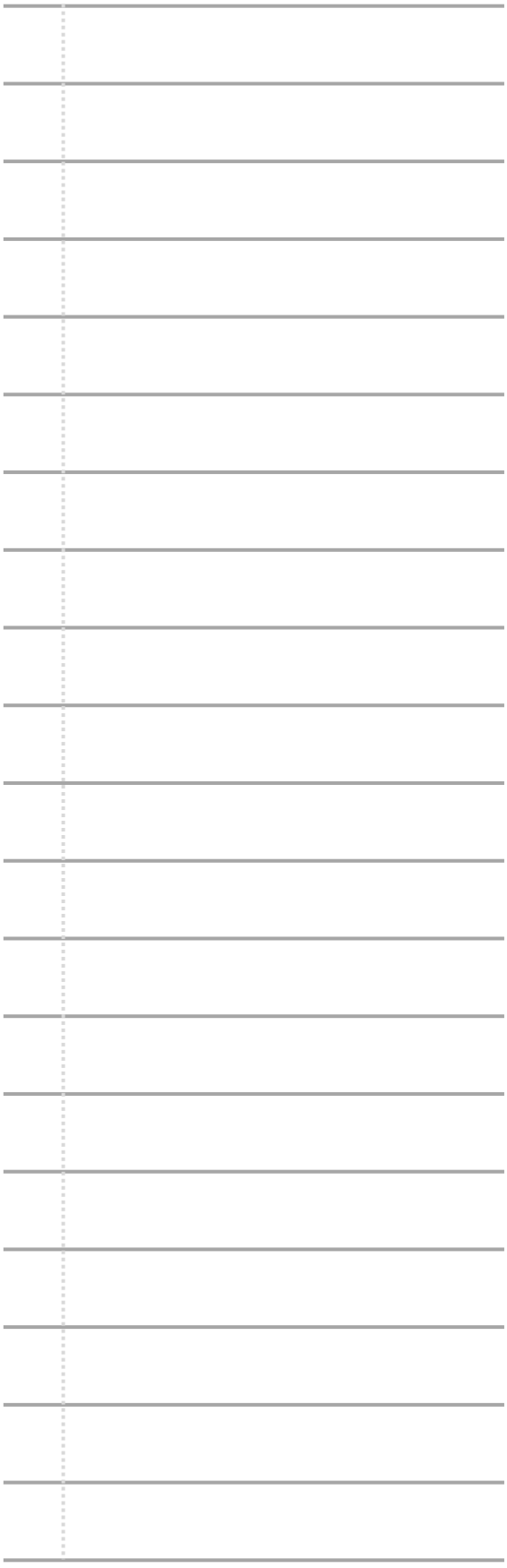
DAY 19

When we lose someone we're very close to, we lose the ability to talk with them and tell them about what's happening in our life (and hearing about what's happening in theirs).

This is a sort of pain that can hit over and over – going to text them or call them or find them in another room for a chat.

Write a letter to the person you're missing. You might like to tell them about what you're feeling or recount a memory you have of them. Maybe there are things you wanted to say and didn't get the chance to before they died.

This letter can be quite short, but if it feels like a helpful exercise, you might like to write a long letter to the person you're missing or even begin a routine of writing them something short each day.



DAY 20

Is there a particular song you've been listening to lately? Or have you been avoiding music?

For this exercise, pick a song – it might be a song that matches your mood or it might be a song that's the complete opposite of what you're feeling. Listen to this song and write without stopping for the whole song (if it's a longer orchestral piece, write for about three or four minutes).

Don't worry about what you're writing – put down whatever comes into your head. This is called steam of consciousness writing. Is there anything surprising about what you wrote about?

DAY 21

Tell the person you're missing about what's worrying you – tell them all about the thoughts that you can't get rid of.

Maybe you're worried about finances. Maybe you're worried about sleeping alone. Maybe you're worried you'll never be able to laugh properly again. Maybe you're worried about running out of juice or focusing at work or that the laundry you hung out is going to get rained on.

You might write down a short list of some concerns you have at the moment. If this is a useful exercise for you, you might consider writing a more detailed list or even including what advice the person you're missing might give you.

Would they tell you to go easy on yourself? Would they tell you go stop being silly? Would they say nothing at all, because they'd never been great at dealing with worry?

DAY 22

For this exercise, write down a list of all the books, movies or television shows that have brought you joy over the years. You might feel like revisiting them now, or you might not be in the mood.

Having a list of things that bring us joy (while demanding nothing from us) can be soothing, even if we're not ready to do them, yet.

DAY 23

What's the happiest memory you experienced with the person you're missing?

This memory might be a big memory, like being at a landmark together, or it might be a tiny moment, like reading together on a couch, drinking a beer down at the pub together or driving somewhere unexciting.

The small moments make up a life, not just the big ones.

Write a scene about this happy memory. Think of what you could smell, taste and touch.

What exact feelings were you experiencing?

What was so wonderful about this memory?

You might like to add happy memories regularly into your grief journal.

DAY 24

What's the worst memory you experienced with the person you're missing?

It's tempting to only recall the good times we had with a person who we're missing, but it's important to remember people as fully as we can – as flawed; as perfectly imperfect.

Perhaps the worst memory was towards the very end of their life. Perhaps it was a fight you had or a moment you let each other down.

Write a scene about this happy memory. If it feels too difficult to write about what actually happened, you might want to write some fiction about characters who had the experience.

This is an important exercise, but if the thought of completing it is overwhelming, feel free to put it aside for now.

DAY 25

Consider the ways you've changed since you started grieving.

Perhaps you've been laughing less (or laughing more). Perhaps you've lost your appetite or been binge eating comfort food from.

Sometimes the hardest moments you've experienced since the person you loved has died are not the sort you'd expect.

Maybe it was the first time you realised you couldn't call them up on the phone. Maybe it was the silence the first time you entered the house you once shared. It can be tempting to avoid thinking about these moments, but it's important to consider them. The only way to soften the hard edges of fresh grief is to experience them.

Write about the hardest moment you've had since your loved one died. This might be a detailed account of the moment or it could be a fictionalized account, featuring a character you've made up who's feeling just like you are.

DAY 26

There are multiple theories we can use to help us understand grief. They often overlap and sometimes they contradict each other.

Imagine you're an expert in grief and you've been asked to come up with a theory for what grief is and how it impacts on people.

Write about this theory. Perhaps your theory of grief has stages or perhaps people oscillate between grief and avoidance. Perhaps your theory of grief stretches on for years, or perhaps it only lasts a few weeks.

The idea of this exercise is to think about your experience of grief from a new angle that you might not have considered before.

DAY 27

Grief is a constellation of emotions. Grief is not being sad for a while and then achieving closure and going back to "normal" again.

Grief is a process of adaption and we will go through all sorts of emotions as we grieve.

What's the best moment you've had since the person you're missing died? Perhaps it was a moment when you didn't feel raw with grief; perhaps it was a moment when you realised how much other people care for you. Perhaps it was standing out in the sun or listening to a beautiful piece of music. There is no wrong moment.

Write about the best moment you've had since the person you're missing has died. You might like to frame it as a letter to them, telling them all about it.

DAY 28

What foods remind you of the person you're missing? Are there particular recipes?

Perhaps you and the person you're missing shared a guilty love for McDonald's chips. Maybe you'd make a special fish curry every winter. Maybe you'd always buy a certain packet of chocolate when you went to the movies or had toast with marmalade every Sunday.

Write about this food. Perhaps creating a list of foods will be most useful to you, or you might like to go further and write down some of the memories you have of sharing this food with the person you're missing.

If you're feeling up to it, you might like to eat this food with a friend or family member.

DAY 29

Balancing the past and the future can be tricky when we're grieving.

How do we move forward with our lives and still honour the legacy of the person we're missing?

For this exercise, think about what our loved one would want for us moving forward.

What would the person you're missing want you to do now?

Maybe they were able to tell you, or perhaps their death was unexpected and it was not a conversation you ever got around to having.

You might like to write this as a letter or an imagined conversation.

DAY 30

When someone dies, they leave behind a legacy. This legacy can take so many different forms. Perhaps it's something useful they taught you. Perhaps it was the kindness they showed to strangers. Perhaps it was an appreciation for boats or pickles or nice clothes.

While it's useful to focus on happy memories and positive legacies, you might have had a complex relationship with the person you're missing.

It's okay if you're overwhelmed with anger or regret or frustration over things that happened that you maybe never got to resolve or heal from before they died.

What legacy has this person left behind? This might be a list, a letter, a poem, or a fictional account.

BARE.