

Grief Journaling

Why should you write?

There are many positive benefits of grief journaling which I would like to share with you here:

Writing about your grief means you are confronting it

Writing about your loss through journaling can help to make meaning of it in a much deeper way. Research suggests that grief journaling has therapeutic value in the healing process particularly when losses are traumatic, or may be difficult to discuss or disclose with another person.

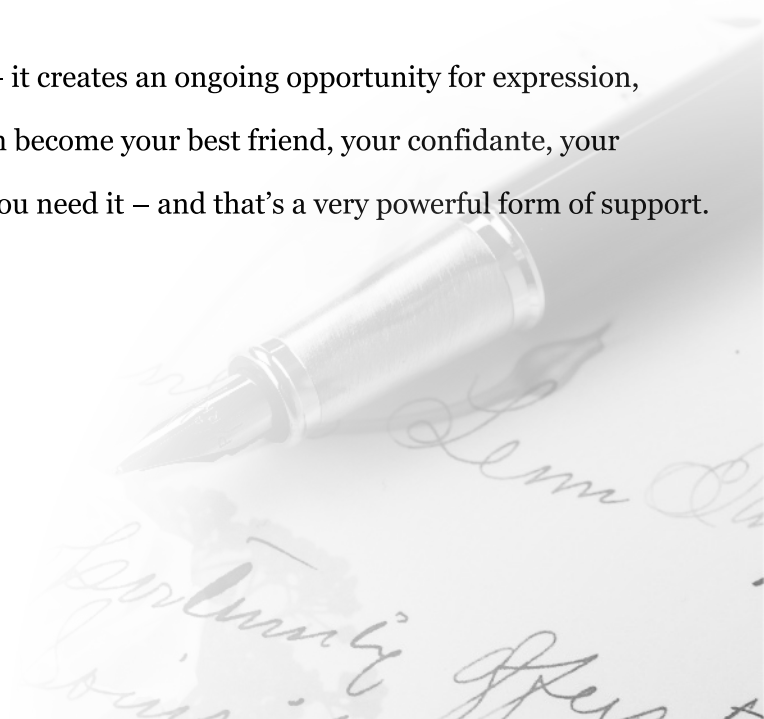
Journaling allows you to reflect, pause and closely examine what your grief is for you, how it makes you feel, what triggers certain reactions, and to give you the opportunity to delve into parts of yourself that you may be avoiding in an attempt to block out painful memories, thoughts, emotions and unpleasant physical sensations.

By embracing everything that our grief makes us feel, rather than denying it, we can accept it easier and move forward through it.

You can tell your story as many times as you need to

We know that grief is an invisible pain – because others cannot see it, it doesn't mean it isn't there. The initial support of being surrounded by people during the early days/weeks can ease off quite quickly as people go back to their own lives, leaving you feeling as though there may not be anyone available anymore to hear about your loss. Yet, during the grief process, we often need to keep talking about our loved one to keep the memory of our them close to our hearts.

Your journal does not judge you for not yet 'moving on' – it creates an ongoing opportunity for expression, to write fearlessly, openly and honestly - your journal can become your best friend, your confidante, your companion and importantly, will always be there when you need it – and that's a very powerful form of support.



Physical and emotional health benefits of journaling

There has been research carried out on the physiological changes that take place in the body when people have written about difficult or traumatic experiences as the body enters a “letting go” state.

The findings indicated that whilst those individuals were writing about their pain, their physical stress response (blood pressure, heart rate, breathing, sweating, alertness levels) increased dramatically. But when they measured those same stress responses after they had finished writing, their stress response was lower than they had been to begin with and they remained there.

This highlights how the increased feeling of wellbeing can be maintained following the release of pent-up emotions and is often why people talk about the need for a ‘good cry’ to produce healthy endorphins which induce a state of calmness. In turn, this can also help with better sleep.

Reducing feelings of anxiety

If you suffer from anxiety or panic attacks, journaling can support you to spot patterns in factors that may trigger these experiences for you, or to notice early signs that they are beginning to happen by consciously increasing your awareness of what is going on for you.

It can also benefit you by identifying what is going well as living with anxiety can mean you spend a lot of time thinking about things that worry you (real or imagined) or are hard to do. It can be encouraging to make a note of things you have managed to do and to acknowledge your successes. You may feel as though you are not making any steps forward at all with your grief but having journal evidence (you may want to date it) which marks your journey/your story can make it easier to see the progress you are making as you work through it.



Helping you to identify what support you need from others

Within the feelings of overwhelm and confusion of grief, it can be so difficult to know what we actually want and need from others who might be trying their best to help. Through the process of writing, you may gain further clarity on what those needs are and find expression in how you might ask for that support.

We often take out our anger/pain on those closest to us, unwillingly, but through journaling we can reflect on our truest, deepest feelings and needs and that can help us, in turn, not to push away those who want to support us (but often just don't know how) but instead, to reach out to them so they can be guided by you.

Journaling for remembrance

Journaling can help to remember your loved one by recalling your favourite memories, happiest times together, what they meant to you, how they impacted your life, and how you want to remember them ... it's an opportunity to be honest, to recall the good and the bad and to continue the ongoing relationship you have with their memory.

It may even help to write a letter to your loved one, saying all the things you wished you had been able to say to them in person, or anything which may be left unspoken. Even though they cannot read it, just the act of writing a letter can be a way of telling them everything you feel about them and your relationship and may help to bring some peace around difficult feelings that might have emerged over any words left unsaid.

