



THE GRIEF JOURNEY: compiled by a group of grieving moms.

every path is different.

It's true that every grief path is different. It's also true that grief doesn't have a timeline. But there is one consistency we hear over and over: the tide of support vanishes as quickly as it appears. A brief overview of the first year describing grief trauma.

0-2 months: darkness >

SHE DOESN'T HAVE THE STRENGTH TO COME TO YOU. GO TO HER.

Mom is in complete shock. This is a paralyzing time and she is counting on family and friends to help. About two weeks after the funeral, a silence sets in that is deafening. The level of desperation is overwhelming and the loneliness is unbearable. She needs someone to listen to her story over and over and validate her grief. The injustice of losing a child emotionally and physically starts taking a toll. It's important that she not be judged or criticized for her emotions. Life is resuming for the community where she once belonged and it's painful to see friends and family moving on. Isolation sets in and she doesn't feel like she belongs anywhere. Life is forever changed. Mom can't escape the pain that her identity has been tragically redefined.

THE FUNERAL IS OVER. INITIAL SUPPORT FADES. THE REAL WORK IS JUST BEGINNING.

3-6 months: agony/anger >

NO ESCAPE FROM THE NIGHTMARE. TORMENTED & BEWILDERED. ALONE.

Mom is functioning and caring for the family only by the grace of God. Everything that was once normal is overwhelming and painful. Simple tasks like preparing a meal, grocery shopping or doing laundry causes anxiety. Going out to eat feels foreign and frightening. Running into casual friends is met with dread. She feels restless and exhausted. She sighs constantly. Her heart physically hurts. Ironically, one of the hardest activities to resume is attending church or small group. It is painful to sit in a pew and see families intact, healthy, and alive. Worshipping God is confusing. Anger sets in and it's difficult to constantly be exposed to the so-called normal everyday activities she once enjoyed. Mom can start pulling back, putting up walls and isolating herself from the outside world.

DO NOT STOP REACHING OUT EVEN IF REJECTED. SEND A CONSISTENT MESSAGE THAT YOU CARE.

7-9 months: realization >

A BRUTAL TIME. INTENSE LONGING. REALIZATION IT'S REAL. DEPRESSION SETS IN.

To the outside world, Mom appears to be functioning normally, but this is an intensely dark and hopeless season of loss. The rest of the world has moved on and not many people acknowledge her pain. The world assumes she is surviving and healing, but actually she is probably admitting to her doctor she needs some meds to help with depression and anxiety. The reality sets in that this agony is now her life. Nothing sounds appealing about rebuilding a new life minus your child. Mom is struggling to stay engaged with her living children and be enthusiastic and supportive of their interests. She tries to resume some normality, but feels alone and misunderstood. Marriages are tested because most spouses grieve very differently.

CRUCIAL TIME OF MONITORING THE OVERALL DYNAMICS AND NEEDS OF THE FAMILY.

10-12 months: survival >

LEARNING HOW TO DEAL WITH HARSH REALITY. HOW TO TURN PAIN TO PURPOSE?

Mom is still struggling with the hand of injustice she has been dealt. Her new reality is still a nightmare to her. She is forced to reinvent her life whether she wants to or not. She is preparing for the one year mark. She realizes that her pain is never going to completely go away but she cannot allow the pain to become her identity. She enters what we call the Viking/Victim time of grief. Mom starts down the path of turning pain into purpose or she chooses to be a victim of grief that will chain her to the grave. This is where her friends and/or church can support and encourage to build a legacy in memory of her child. Standing in the gap for Mom will leave an indelible impression. There is nothing more powerful than watching brokenness serve the broken.

ACKNOWLEDGE THE ONE YEAR MARK. STAND IN THE GAP. SUPPORT A LEGACY PROJECT.

YEAR 2 begins: the grief marathon continues

20 THINGS I WISH YOU KNEW [AND WHY]: compiled by a group of grieving moms.



1	I wish you wouldn't say you could never survive losing your child.	[I have to. And you could if you had to. No other choice.]
2	I wish you wouldn't tell me MY loss has made YOU a better parent.	[That's good. I guess.]
3	I wish you wouldn't tell me my marriage is doomed to fail.	[It's a myth that 90% of couples divorce after child loss.]
4	I wish you'd stop telling me my child wouldn't want me to be sad.	[Trust me, I am battling to overcome this despairing sadness.]
5	I wish you'd tell me you won't forget. And really try not to forget.	[My biggest fear is that my child won't be remembered.]
6	I wish you'd share your memories with me.	[I don't get to make new memories. Hearing yours is a gift.]
7	I wish you wouldn't compare the loss of your mom, grandpa, aunt...	[There is no comparison to losing a child. None.]
8	I wish you wouldn't be afraid of rejection and reach out anyway.	[I'm a mess and might be harsh. But your trying matters, a lot.]
9	I wish you'd avoid asking the dreaded "how are you?" question.	[I'm not fine. And answering you just hones my lying skills.]
10	I wish you'd sit with me on my grief bench. And listen.	[There are no answers. I just want you to be my friend. Or try.]
11	I wish you'd take an interest in my other kids. (#8 applies here)	[They're grieving, too. I'm worried, weary, and at times, detached.]
12	I wish you would stop asking if I'm going to church or small group.	[I'm just not ready. I'll show up when I am. Please, no pressure.]
13	I wish you'd stock my fridge, mow my lawn or run an errand.	[The grocery store is torture, and easy things are now hard.]
14	I wish you wouldn't ask me to go out to eat for the first few months.	[Seeing intact families and making small talk is pretty tough.]
15	I wish you'd come to the cemetery occasionally.	[That means so much. It shows me you care.]
16	I wish you'd dial back the giddy. Even if you just won the lotto.	[Happiness is beyond my imagination. Giddy is unbearable.]
17	I wish you'd tell me you don't expect a response from your call / text.	[I notice, need, and remember every one, but I'm overwhelmed.]
18	I wish you wouldn't remind me that I need to live for my other kids.	[I know. I'm trying. I have one foot here, and one in heaven.]
19	I wish you wouldn't admire my strength or pity my weakness.	[I just want to be understood. I'm just trying to survive.]
20	I wish you'd expect nothing of me, because I'm gone. Really gone.	[No interest. No small talk. No simple tasks. No clear thoughts. No memory. Breathing maxes me out. Barely alive. I'm gone.]

10 ACTS OF KINDNESS I'LL NEVER FORGET

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- 1 "TERRIBLE FIRST" FLOWERS: We were touched when friends we barely knew took the time to send flowers on our son's anniversary date each month. They always included a note acknowledging whatever "terrible first" was hitting us that coming month. It was comforting to know that someone remembered and anticipated our upcoming struggles.
- 2 UNCONDITIONAL EARS: We had friends who consistently listened over and over to our anger, pain, questions, and longing without giving shallow advice or empty platitudes. They were comfortable with "not knowing". Pastors and people who tried to fix it with theological explanations proved to be unsafe. But those who sat in the confusion with us provided hope.
- 3 INDEX ENCOURAGEMENT: A few months after our son died – after all the mail had significantly slowed down – we received an unexpected package from a friend. Inside were 30 or so index cards with verses that had helped her through her cancer journey. Each card and each verse was handwritten. This wasn't a store-bought package of hope. It was authentic encouragement.
- 4 A TRIP TO SERVE: I had an amazing friend who had a ministry in southeast Asia invite our family to join them on a mission trip. It was exactly the invitation my family needed to go and love on orphans in a third world country. Our family quickly learned that our path to healing was to serve the suffering.
- 5 YARD WORK: In those early, agonizing months of our grief, we heard the buzz of a lawn mower outside. We looked out to see a group of people working. These beautiful people – some that we didn't even know – weeded our lawn, mowed the grass and planted flowers without even ringing the doorbell.
- 6 CONSISTENT CARDS: I had a friend who sent me a card once a week for a solid year. One week it was spiritual and encouraging and the next week it was a Holy Crap card that made me laugh at myself. I have a special place in my heart for her.
- 7 FROM MEALS TO FRIDGE: We were blessed by all the people who wanted to make meals for us. But after a couple of months, we just wanted a fraction of our life back. My friends picked up on that and instead of preparing meals, they left bags of groceries for us once a week. That was really helpful, especially since grocery store trips were so painful.
- 8 ONE YEAR GIFT: At the one year mark, my husband's work friends took a collection and gave us a card filled with money. The money didn't matter as much as the thought behind it. It meant a lot to us that these friends remembered and cared, even 12 months later. We used their donation to provide a gift for orphans in our son's honor.
- 9 GIFT CARDS: For us, going out to eat was excruciating, and we didn't have the energy to cook at home (it is beyond painful to see that empty seat at the table). We had friends who gave us batch of gift cards with everything from Sonic to Pei Wei to local gas stations. That really helped.
- 10 GRIEF GETAWAY: On the week of my child's heaven date, a dear friend offered her timeshare condo as a getaway to be alone in my grief and away from the grind of "normal life" at home. She's done this year after year after year. It's proven to be one of the greatest gifts I have ever received.

30 SIMPLE WAYS TO SHOW YOU CARE

compiled by a group of grieving moms.



1	Walk their dog(s).	16	Make a picture memory book from all the tweets, posts & pics.
2	Take their other kid(s) out to eat after school.	17	Drop a loaf of fresh bread at their door.
3	Plant a tree to honor their child.	18	Offer to decorate their house for them at the holidays.
4	Show up and mow their yard.	19	Pick up their laundry, do it at your place, then take it back.
5	Send a housekeeper service to clean their house.	20	Leave a bag of groceries at their door.
6	Give dining cards, so they won't have to face the empty chair.	21	Send a "you're on my mind" text when they cross your mind.
7	Give an engraved rock with their child's name for the garden.	22	Bring their favorite Sonic drink occasionally.
8	Invite their kids to a movie or to hang out at your house.	23	Offer to meet them for a walk.
9	Give them an embossed bookmark. They'll be reading a lot.	24	Go wash their car.
10	Send them a wind chime.	25	Offer to plan a getaway for them. Give them a ride to airport.
11	Give them a journal. Writing helps the grief process.	26	Show them how you remember. It's ok. You're not bragging.
12	Drop a memento by their child's marker.	27	Wear the memory bracelet. Use the decal. That means a lot.
13	Leave Unisom or ZzzQuil at their door. They can't sleep.	28	Send an occasional text on the monthly anniversary date.
14	Donate to a charity in their child's honor.	29	Look them in the eye. Be willing to be vulnerable. Be bold.
15	Leave a note on their door. Just because.	30	Expect nothing in return. Remember, they're gone. Really gone.