

The background of the cover is a photograph of a large, leafy tree with a thick trunk and many branches, situated in a field of tall, golden-brown grass. The sky is a clear, light blue. The text is overlaid on the upper portion of the image.

Adult Grief Booklet

+ *10 Day Reflection Guide*

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Introduction

I'm proud of you for opening this booklet to see how you can move forward your healing journey. It was created to reach MORE people where they are...at their own pace, in hopes of healing and growing.

Grief is not something to get over. It is not something that needs fixing, but with the right tools and information it can make your healing journey healthier and more meaningful.

These booklets are written to help explain that you are not alone in your grief journey, and hope to provide some information and action items for healing.

"A recent study, done before this pandemic by Amerispeak and WebMD, found that 57% of Americans are grieving the loss of someone close to them over the last three years. That means every other person you see is grieving — because grief never really goes away."

These booklets are published monthly to keep grief healing at the top of mind. This includes new articles and content each month, as well as a NEW 10 Reflection guide every month. I hope you find value in these booklets, and would love your feedback. If you would like to look back at past months' booklets visit www.hopeshousewi.com for a free download.

What you can expect from this booklet:

Real talk from people who have gone through a tough loss.
No SHOULDs (you should do this...)

Sending healing thoughts your way,

Gina Peotter

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Where is your loved one?

This is a great question to ask yourself as time goes on. I don't mean where are they buried or where is the urn... I'm talking about something different. When you think about the person who died, take some time and think about what you see.

1. **Where are they? (location)** _____

2. **What are they doing? (action)** _____

3. **What are they wearing? (appearance)** _____

How you answer these questions can say a lot about you.

For the first question- If they are at the scene of an accident or some part that has caused you trauma- you most likely are stuck and need to seek help processing your trauma. If they are sitting on the couch in your childhood home, you could be fixating on the past and miss them in the present. If you see them doing something with you in the future you could be at a good point in your life where you see them walking alongside you in your journey on this earth. Take some time to think about where you are seeing your loved one. There might be something there that could help you.

For the second question- take some time to reflect on this one as well. Is it tipped more towards something positive or negative? Do they look happy, angry, sad, confused, suffering, content, joyful...? This could reveal how you feel about their death or show some red flags as to where you are stuck. Set a timer for 5 minutes to sit with this one, think through it, write it out, talk to someone you trust to get their input. The goal is to be truthful as to what you learn.

For the third question- Appearance can also be clues into your hurting or healing. Were you seeing bold colors or was everything pretty drab? That could be a clue into your mood when you think of the person who died. Was your person dressed in nice clothes, regular everyday clothes, or dirty and not looking so good? This could be another indication of your current mood or feelings towards your person. Again, take some time to think through what you are seeing and what it could unveil.

This exercise is great to do when you are feeling lost or after more time has passed. The more you work on your healing the more you might surprise yourself on where your person is when you think of them.

Struggling

“We choose to heal and we choose to move forward by being brave and vulnerable enough to heal.”— Desmond Tutu

This is a topic that is near and dear to my heart. The main reason is because it is raw and real and not many people actually talk about it. Yet, most people around you are struggling with something in their lives. It is an isolating feeling when you feel alone in your struggles. By struggling I mean any topics from: mental health, depression, anxiety... or with grief and struggling with how to handle your feelings, or help others with theirs... the feeling of loneliness, physical, sexual or verbal abuse... or struggling with a divorce (either your parents, or your own), or even struggling financially... struggles internally with a spouse who doesn't communicate... struggling to conceive, or even struggling because everyone around you is married and you are not...

Almost everyone you interact with in your day is probably struggling with something, but we don't openly talk about it for many reasons.

Some facts:

“42 million adults in the United States live with an anxiety disorder”. -Nami

“Each year, about 2.5 million people die nationwide. Every death leaves behind an average of 4 or 5 grieving survivors.” -GB Health Watch

“There is 1 divorce approximately every 36 seconds. That's nearly 2,400 divorces per day, 16,800 divorces per week and 876,000 divorces a year. The divorce rate for a first marriage is around 41%.” -Hampton Rodes Legal

“The average American household has \$16K in credit card debt.” -Our Debt Free Family

“More than 60% of lonely people are married. When married couples no longer share their deepest feelings, thoughts, and experiences with one another it can leave them feeling disconnected and alone.” -Psychology Today

Reading those statistics really goes to show that most adults are walking around struggling in some shape or way. If they are struggling and not dealing with it in a healthy way, their kids (or others in your life) may mimic how they deal with life's struggles. It is a trickling effect.

One thing I know is you can't make people seek help. A person will look for healing or help when they want to. By healing and help it can be something as simple as setting different boundaries and limits. Instead of working until you are exhausted, maybe you schedule some time with your family. Instead of not communicating with your spouse, maybe write them an email.

There are many things you can do. Another idea is to validate your feelings. You may want to join an online group or forum. Most are anonymous and you can let all your worries out and connect with others. Or join an in person group about what you are struggling with. Talk to your doctor if it is mental health related or schedule a counseling appointment. (Like I said nobody can nudge you to do these things). Remember what you allow yourself, is what kids (or others in your life) might allow too. Do you want your kids to pick up the same pattern of stuffing feelings down, or learn how to not communicate, or pick up on patterns of depression and think that is the way every parent lives?

The purpose of this article is to let you know you are not alone. Others are out there struggling too. You can choose to stay where you are. You can choose to connect with others who are struggling. You can choose to let it out in healthy ways. Or you can choose to cope in unhealthy ways. Either way nobody can make that decision, it is yours.

Try to answer the questions below **TRUTHFULLY**:

- | | | |
|---|-----|----|
| 1. As of today I think I have done a good job at working through my grief. | Yes | No |
| 2. I feel like I have someone to talk to about my struggles right now. | Yes | No |
| 3. Lately, I reach out or cope in healthy ways when I'm struggling? | Yes | No |
| 4. I have a good pattern of expressing my feelings in a healthy way. | Yes | No |
| 5. I practice healthy coping skills. | Yes | No |
| 6. I can't remember the last time I cried. | Yes | No |
| 7. I am usually stressed about something. | Yes | No |
| 8. I'd rather keep everything to myself instead of bothering others. | Yes | No |
| 9. I feel shame or guilt around my struggles. | Yes | No |
| 10. Someone has suggested that I seek outside resources about my struggles. | Yes | No |
| 11. Currently I am struggling with: | | |

Reflection:

If you answered mostly Yes in 1-5 you are on a great path.
If you answered mostly Yes in 6-10 you might want to take a step in connecting with others (doctor, counselor, professions, chaplin, support groups, or try some healthy coping skills).

Action Item: Truthfully how do you feel about where you are right now with your struggles? What actions do you know you SHOULD do, but haven't taken that step yet? **An action plan-** be bold and take that step. Or dip your toe in the water and talk to someone about what you are struggling with. Or you could also think about why you haven't taken a step yet. What is holding you back?

Trauma

“An estimated 90 percent of adults in the United States have experienced a traumatic event at least once in their lives.” - Psychology Today

Don't skip over this topic even if you think you haven't experienced trauma. It is meant to educate you on what trauma really is, what it looks like and the effects of it in our bodies and to those around us. We are going deep today with this topic... well because it is not a topic openly discussed in our culture.

Most people think of trauma as some big horrific tragedy like a kidnapping, murder, accident, parilization... but it can be far broader than that.

Definition of trauma: An intense event that causes harm to your physical or emotional well-being. -kidsmentalhealthinfo.com

“It's important to note that it isn't necessarily the specific nature of the death that makes it traumatic, rather how the event is interpreted and experienced by the individual. One cannot underestimate the impact of personal factors like emotional regulation, cognitive responses, secondary stressors, coping style, prior history of trauma, and access to support and resources in determining how a person responds to an event. “ -What's Your Grief

The death of a loved one can even be a traumatic event and most people do not realize it.

Three kinds of trauma:

1. Acute (one event in time)
2. Chronic (repeated and/or prolonged)
3. Complex (multiple events)

Effects of trauma in our bodies:

- Startle easily
- Difficulty concentrating
- Edginess
- Muscle stiffness
- Insomnia

Our responses to trauma:

- Shock
- Denial
- Anger
- Disbelief
- Anxiety

A lot of people refuse to identify and even deal with trauma because they don't know it actually exists. Being educated about trauma can help you or even your child or loved one. Pushing it away or not dealing with it doesn't change the fact that it happened and you went through a traumatic event. If you decide to acknowledge it and process the emotions, healing can happen. It is possible.

Trauma can take a number on our bodies as you can see from the list above. When you hold onto that much of an emotional burden, it can come out in other ways. Ways such as anger, lashing out at people you love, or even blocking love or refusing to receive.

Learning to process your emotions and work through the past can benefit you as well as your family.

Read more online:

<https://www.webmd.com/mental-health/features/emotional-trauma-mind-body-connection>

Disclaimer: this is not meant to treat or diagnose anyone. Please consult your healthcare professional with questions or concerns.

Read more on What's Your Grief's website: <https://whatsyourgrief.com/traumatic-loss/>

Here is a great list of resources online and articles about trauma, shattered assumptions, and complicated loss <https://whatsyourgrief.com/supporting-shattered-worlds/>



10 Day Reflection Guide- New Death

You can use these anyway you would like. Read them all at once and ponder the questions. Or you can take a few minutes each day to go through one. Another idea would be to read them together with someone else, and share your thoughts. These can also be used as journaling prompts, get out a journal, notebook, paper or computer and write out your thoughts... see where they may take you. This is designed to work anyway you want it to. The goal is to be true to yourself.

Day 1: *“Keep going. No matter how bad things are right now. No matter how stuck you feel. No matter how many days you’ve spent crying. No matter how many days you’ve spent wishing things were different. No matter how hopeless and depressed you feel. I promise you won’t feel this way forever. Keep going.” -Unknown*

It can be hard to believe that statement if you are feeling stuck or exhausted living in your current state. It is possible to keep going, and feel better. Maybe it is time to try something new. Google counselors in your area, or join a grief group, start journaling, or talking to friends about how you really are doing. People don’t know what they don’t know... nobody knows your inner thoughts or feelings, and most likely people are not going to try to pull them out of you. It is your job to express what is going on.

👉Q: What do you really need right now?

Day 2: *“Some people aren’t good at asking for help because they’re so used to being ‘the helper’. Throughout their life they’ve experienced an unbalanced give and take, so their instinct is usually ‘I’ll figure it out on my own’. The self-reliance is all they’ve ever known.” - Quotes ‘nd Notes*

This resonates with me so much. I’m always quick to say ‘it’s ok, I’ll do it’, or no ‘I don’t need help’, when in reality I probably never even took a second to think if someone helping me would be beneficial. I can be an automatic response because that is what you have always done. It’s hard to change years of the same response in your brain. If this is you, I challenge you to reach out and ask someone for help this week. Yup- might sound way out of your comfort zone or scary, but it is a good way to exercise your brain.

If you are good with always taking any help, think of someone in your life who might struggle with accepting help. Try to do something for them this week that would help them. And let them know you wanted to do it because you knew they wouldn’t ask for help themselves... Maybe this will open them up a bit to accepting help more often, or not doing everything themselves.

👉Q: What can you do this week?

Day 3: *“Feelings are just visitors, let them come and go.” -Mooji*

Maybe you are like me and always stuffed sadness and tears down because that is what you did as a child. It can be hard to let the feelings come and go without resistance, with just life and in your grief. Our bodies resist these emotions because they are tough and our brain wants to

protect us from the hurt. Understanding and exploring your patterns with your emotions is a great step in moving forward in a healthier way.

Or maybe you are like a friend I have, that the emotions are so big that when she is passionate about something she is talking about, there usually is tears. Or someone that extreme emotions come out at times, like screaming at your kids for rather small things, because you are stressed or bottle everything else up. Again, by working to see your emotional patterns can help.

👉Q: What do you do when you are stressed and frustrated- do you keep it in? Talk to someone? Write it down? Do nothing?

Day 4: *“For a seed to achieve its greatest expression, it must come completely undone. The shell cracks, its insides come out and everything changes. To someone who doesn’t understand growth, it would look like complete destruction.” -Cynthia Occelli*

The way you perceive your current life today may be different to someone else. Some people may feel like the walls are collapsing and your life is completely shattered (which can absolutely be true!) But to the outside world they might see you as the strongest person they know, and have seen you vulnerable and surrounded by so much love.

👉Q: What growth have you seen in your family or in yourself since the death?

Day 5: *“You will emerge from this nightmare like the powerful, beautiful, resilient person that you are. It can be hard to remember this when you feel like a shell of the person you once were. But trust me: you are capable of overcoming so much more than you think.” -Elite Daily*

What you are going through is not fun, probably one of the most challenging things in your life. Take a moment to think about others in your life, or even famous people who have overcome such big challenges, deaths, accidents and setbacks in their lives. There is the ability to get out of your nightmare and overcome this difficult time. It may not seem like it right now, but you can do it. I believe that YOU can!

👉Q: Who in your life do you look up to for overcoming some tough obstacles?

Day 6: *“When thinking about life, remember this: no amount of guilt can change the past, and no amount of anxiety can change the future.” -Unknown*

Way easier said than done, right?! I carried guilt around for many years after my dad died, for not being home when he died. My mom did the same thing, she had guilt for not being in the room when he actually died because she was on the phone with 911. I always like to share what her counselor told her that she used to share with a lot of people who also struggled with guilt. She said, “Maybe God knew you wouldn’t be able to handle it so he placed you in a different room when it happened?!” That made me think! Wow.

👉Q: What guilty thoughts are you hanging on to? What do you think a best friend, counselor or someone you look up to, would say to you? What do you think the person who died would say to you about your guilt?

Day 7: *“You can’t calm the storm. So stop trying. What you can do is calm yourself. The storm will pass.” -Timber Hawkeye*

How does this quote resonate with you? To some it might feel like a struggle to just let things go as is and not control the storm. Some people jump into reading all the books, going full force and finding ways to fix how you are feeling. If that is you, try to take a day to just stop. On purpose don’t pick up those books, or seek out ways to fix things. Take a day off to see how it feels.

Or are you the opposite where you are just living in the storm and not sure which way to turn. Take some time to take a scan of your current situation from an outside perspective.

👉Q: What do you need today, a break or to take action?

Day 8: *“If your path demands you to walk through Hell, walk as if you own the place.” -Unknown*

Some of us are living in what feels like Hell. Your life has been thrown upside down in an instant. It can be your current reality for a while, but just remember your current situation is not your final destination.

👉Q: Who can you lean on this week that you haven’t reached out to before?

Day 9: *“Kids are like a mirror, what they see and hear they do. Be a good reflection for them.” -K. Heath*

If you have kids around, don’t hide your emotions in front of them. Because subconsciously they are going to see you doing that and think that is what they need to do too.

If you don’t have kids, think of the others around you, spouse, coworkers, friends... how you are reacting to situations can become a learned behavior for others around you.

👉Q: Are you repeating patterns from how you reacted to things in your childhood or reacting how your parents would have in your situation?

Day 10: *“Don’t get frustrated if it feels like all you’re doing is chipping away at something too big for you. That’s exactly how masterpieces are eventually made.” -Rigel Dawson*

Things can seem overwhelming at times for people going through a new grief journey. Putting one positive foot forward each day can help even if you can’t see the big picture. Make sure you carve out some time to mentally list or write it out how far you have come.

👉Q: What have you done since the death that you can say you are proud of?

10 Days of Reflection- 1 Year+

This section is intended for anyone over the year mark after a death. Not saying there is a time limit on grief, but most lives look a bit different days after a death vs a year or more out.

You can use these anyway you would like. Read them all at once and ponder the questions. Or you can take a few minutes each day to go through one. Another idea would be to read them together with someone else, and share your thoughts. These can also be used as journaling prompts, get out a journal, notebook, paper or computer and write out your thoughts... see where they may take you. This is designed to work anyway you want it to. The goal is to be true to yourself.

Day 1: *“Expecting things to change without putting in any effort is like waiting for a ship at the airport.” -Bright Vibes*

Maybe you have been waiting for things to get better... but haven't taken any steps on your own. A lot of people do this with grief. They get wrapped out in everyday lives and don't work on processing their grief and poof it's a year or 10 later. I'm guilty of this, but the difference for me is that I started taking steps. I started writing about what was going on inside. I started going to grief groups, and volunteering at kids grief groups. I went to counseling, I talked to my doctor and was on medication for a bit. I rented books from the library. I started opening up more to my sisters and friends about how I was struggling. The neat thing was, I began to see that I wasn't alone. Others had unprocessed grief years later. It is very common.

👉Q: What change have you been waiting for? How can you take a small step towards it?

Day 2: *“Don't forget to drink water and get some sun. You're basically a houseplant with complicated emotions.” -Unknown*

Even a year or more later, people can forget to take care of themselves or realize some of their normal self care might have fallen to the wayside. No joke today's prompt is about getting outside and drinking water. This could be something you try to do once a day for a week. Drink half your body weight in ounces of water each day, and spend at least 10 minutes a day outside. This could even be sitting on your porch, or taking your dog for a walk. The movement and getting enough water in your body is a form of self care.

👉Q: How many ounces of water do you need to drink today?

I completed my water intake at ____:____ on _____.

Tomorrow I will _____.

Day 3: *“Now, everytime I witness a strong person, I want to know: What darkness did you conquer in your story? Mountains do not rise without earthquakes.” -Katherin MacKenett*

The more and more I meet new people and encounter how strong they are as a person, I often wonder what heartache or tough times they go through to make them who they are today. Think about the strong people in your life and what they have overcome.

👉Q: What has gotten in the way of you getting stronger? No faith, fear, confusion, lack of motivation, complacency, victim mentality... Truthfully, what “muscle” do you need to flex to make yourself stronger?

Day 4: *“When a flower doesn’t bloom, you fix the environment in which it grows, not the flower.”*
-Alexander Den Heijer

You would add fertilizer, or more water to your plant if it was not growing. You wouldn’t start taping petals to the stem to make it into a flower, would you?! Are you in an environment (physically or mentally) at which you are not allowing yourself to grow. They say the five people you associated with most are the sum of your reality. Do you live with someone who is going through some tough stuff like anxiety or depression? Are you associating with people who only talk about the bad stuff in the world. Or are you hanging out with friends who only consume drugs or alcohol... If you could envision a better environment, what would it look like to you?

👉Q: If you could envision a better and healthier environment, what would it look like to you?

Day 5: *“To the girl who hasn’t been herself lately.. Your spark will return, and you will shine like you were meant to. It’s difficult when you catch yourself not being you. When you feel your whole world falling apart before your eyes.”* -Alison The Minds Journal

Some people say it feels like you are in a hole trying to climb out, but each day you slip back down and the hole gets bigger. Other people describe things as looking dull and not very vibrant. Take a moment to think back to when you were most happy as a child. What were you doing- laughing, playing sports, dancing, running around with friends, riding 4 wheelers, playing games with family, swimming...

👉Q: Thinking back to those happy times, how does that make you feel inside? Does something light up thinking about the good clean fun? Now how can you recreate that in your life today? Maybe it is doing one of the things you loved to do as a child and acting goofy, or maybe it is taking time to just take a break, look through old photos or reminisce about old times with friends and family.

Day 6: *“You are the artist of your own life, don’t hand the paintbrush to anyone else.”* -Unknown

If you don’t like your current state, change it. Nobody is going to change your life for you, unless something is forced. Your own happiness resides with you. That can be tough to hear if you have been waiting for something or someone to change your happiness. (I will be happy when..... When this happens life will be better...) Statements like that running through your head is a trigger that you are the product of not taking action.

👉Q: What do you want your life to look like? What step this week can you take to make an action step in that direction?

Day 7: *“Never let the sadness of your past and the fear of your future ruin the happiness of your present.” -Wise Mystic*

Well that is easier said than done, but I do like this quote. The reason why I say that is because I have dealt with depression and anxiety for a large part of my adult life. Put being a mom on top of that and I constantly am going between both worlds of past sadness and future worry (of me and my family). Some exercises people do are things like meditation, or working out and bringing their bodies to the present moment. There are apps out there that can help with this.

But for some that seems too woo woo or foreign. Some exercises you can do, and can teach your kids are easy grounding techniques.

Taking a break and counting backwards.

Name 5 things you can see around you.

Take a break and take some deep breaths

Read some more ideas in our [March booklet](#).

👉Q: What is something long term you can do to remind yourself to take a moment to be in the present instead of the past or future? (wear a worry bracelet, keep a rock in your pocket to remind you each time you put your hand in your pocket... leave a post-it in your car, write a message on your mirror...)

Day 8: *“Don’t compare your Chapter 1 to someone else’s Chapter 20.” -Unknown*

This is sooo easy to do, I play this game all the time. I look at where someone is and run all the reasons why I’m not as good through my head. But I don’t stop to think that they have had more experience in life, or they have had many more years in the field.

The same holds true for grief. I often hear, “so and so’s husband also died around the same time and she is doing much better than me...” What they don’t realize is that a person’s circumstances and coping skills are different from theirs. They might have had a lot of family support or different ways to work through the tough times.

👉Q: Who’s Chapter 20 have you been comparing yourself to?

Day 9: *“Everything in life starts with your mindset first and your actions second. Your actions follow your thoughts, your beliefs and ideas. To make a shift, to free your energy: start with getting your mind right, and then, take action.” -Unknown*

If you took a scan of your mind right now, would you say it tipping the scale of being more positive or negative? I’m guessing if it is more negative, your current life is feeling like it is lacking or things aren’t moving forward like you had hoped. Taking action in getting your mindset in a healthier place can do wonders to make a shift in your life.

👉Q: Do you wish a shift would happen in your life?

Day 10: *“Enjoy life now. This is not a rehearsal.” -Unknown*

You know this more than most people, life is short. Life is precious and we are not all guaranteed tomorrow.

👉 Q: If you were told you have two days left to live what would you do and say to friends and family?



About the Booklets

Find more booklets at the Hope's House website www.hopeshousewi.com. These are written every month by Gina Peotter, the Executive Director of Hope's House and the Grief Support Specialist at Muehl-Boettcher Funeral Home.

About the Author

Gina is a Seymour native, she graduated from Seymour High School in 2003. She then went on to complete her Bachelor's Degree from UW-Stout and Master's Degree from Concordia University-St. Paul. She also holds her Grief Support Specialist Certification from UW-Madison.

Gina and some peers started a non-profit in 2018 called Hope's House in the Greater Green Bay area that focuses on free grief support for kids ages 4-18 and their families, and is currently the Executive Director. Gina has written and published a grief book called, ["It's Ok Not To Cry"](#) based on her own life story, and the story of others who have gone through a tough death. She currently writes and publishes a free Adult Grief booklet and Reflection Guide each month available at the Funeral Home or an electronic version on the Hope's House website.

After going through the death of her parents when she was in her 20's, and numerous other friends and family members she started on a path to helping others find hope in dark times. Gina is the Grief Support Specialist at Muehl-Boettcher Funeral Home and is available to the families they serve, to help find the right resources to help navigate life after the death of a loved one.

Gina loves helping others any way she can. She was awarded the WPS Volunteer of the Year Award in Leadership in 2020 for her work with Hope's House. She also is a volunteer at Camp HOPE- camp for grieving children in the Stevens Point area. She volunteered at the Boys and Girls Club- Fox Valley Center for Grieving Children for a number of years, was a Hospice volunteer through Aurora, and a meal prep volunteer at numerous homeless shelters in the area.

"The greatest good is what we do for one another". -Mother Teresa

Find More Grief Resources

Website: www.hopeshousewi.com/resources