

THE HEALING YOUR  
GRIEVING HEART  
JOURNAL  
FOR TEENS

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FOREWORD BY BRIAN GRIESE



Companion  
PRESS

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## **Contents**

<b>Foreword</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>A Note from Megan</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Getting Started: Why Your Grief Is What It Is</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Exploring Your Feelings of Loss</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>Understanding Your Six Needs of Mourning</b>	<b>59</b>
<b>How You'll Know You're Healing: Reconciliation</b>	<b>83</b>
<b>Memories: Capturing, Treasuring, Living On</b>	<b>87</b>
<b>Getting to Know Yourself: The Real You</b>	<b>99</b>
<b>The Mourner's Code</b>	<b>107</b>
<b>A Final Word</b>	<b>111</b>
<b>Your Continuing Journey: Reflections As You Grow</b>	<b>113</b>

# INTRODUCTION

We have written this journal just for you and teens like you. It is a special place for you to share your thoughts and feelings. Within the pages that follow, you can remember, celebrate and commemorate the life of the person to whom this journal is dedicated.

Our hope is that this guided journal can be a “safe place” for you to explore your experiences with grief. As you tell your story, your words will guide you on your personal, unique journey through the healing experience of grief. As your words bring life to these pages, you will be giving testimony to the love you will always have for the person who has died.

Because you are a teen and because you’re unique, you’re very special. This is an exciting stage of your life. The changes you’re going through physically, emotionally, intellectually and spiritually can be exciting but also overwhelming. You’re not a kid anymore. You’re not an adult, yet, either. Others may expect you to act, think and feel like an adult, but much of your childhood, thankfully, is still inside you.

So when someone you love dies, it can be more difficult for you now than at any other age. When someone close to us dies, we begin a journey, a journey not of our choosing and with no exact course. It’s hard to understand and cope with all the feelings that accompany grief along with the changes your body and mind are going through. In some ways these feelings are similar; both can cause your moods to swing unexpectedly. Both can make you feel out of control of your life.

We’re so sorry you have lost someone who meant a lot to you—perhaps even the world. While we cannot think and feel exactly what you are, we do want you to know we have both been there. We both experienced the deaths of friends and family early in our lives. Like we did, you may feel very sad or hurt right now. Perhaps you’re angry. Or depressed. Maybe you feel lost or deserted. Maybe for the first time you really realize that we all die. All these feelings are part of grieving and are OK to feel.

Let us explain the very important difference between grief and mourning. Grief is what you think and feel on the inside when someone you love dies. Mourning is the expression of these thoughts and feelings—letting them out somehow. You mourn when you talk to other people about your grief, when you cry, when you look at photos of the person who died, when you visit the cemetery or when you write about your feelings in a journal like this. You may be grieving like crazy inside but unless you let out those powerful thoughts and feelings—unless you mourn—you won't truly heal.

Journaling has proven to be an excellent way for many teens to do the work of mourning. Journaling is private and independent, yet it's still expressing your grief outside of yourself. I've been a grief counselor for a long time (almost 20 years!), and I've found that journaling helps grieving people:

- clarify what you're thinking and feeling.
- have a safe place of solace, a best friend, a place where you can fully express yourself no matter how sad, scared, confused or lonely you feel.
- strengthen your self-awareness of how your grief journey changes over time. It can be amazing to go back months and years later and read what you have written and realize how much you have changed. When you pore through these pages even years later, you will remember what your grief journey was like for you and you will cherish what you have written.
- soften the intensity of your thoughts and feelings and help you better understand this journey called grief and mourning.
- clear out your naturally overwhelmed mind and full heart.
- look at the pain you are experiencing and transform it into something survivable.
- create an opportunity to acknowledge the balance in your life between the sad and the happy.
- map out your growth as you travel into and through the grief journey.

In fact, studies have shown that teens who write on a regular basis about their lives and related thoughts and feelings are healthier people physically, emotionally, socially and spiritually. Simply writing out

thoughts and feelings at least four times a week can decrease stress on your immune system and workload on your body.

Write out below three or four reasons you can think of for working on this journal:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_

### **Journaling Suggestions**

First, please remember that there is no “correct” or “right” way to use this journal! Yes, we have purposely provided thought starters (we extend invitations to you, but don’t make demands of you) to help you have what is called a “guided journal.” But, this is only to help you along your path. Give yourself permission to write whatever your head and heart are telling you. Use your imagination and individual creativity. Use colored pens if you want; slip treasured photos or letters between the pages. Cut out and attach an article or image that comforts you. There are many ways to communicate with yourself and the spirit of the person who has died. Tap into all the ways that work for you. Do expect ups and down. Many teens report an increase in sad feelings when they begin writing about the death of someone loved. That’s OK. Keep writing, even through the sadness. It can and will help you begin to heal!

### **What is a journal?**

Some teens have taught us that it helps to define what a journal is. This journal is your account of the life and death of someone special to you and how you think and feel about it. It is usually hand-written, but you can also type on a computer or record your thoughts and feelings onto a cassette or CD. The “journaler”—that’s you—can decide which method is best. Keeping a journal is not the same as keeping a diary. A diary records events as they happen, usually on a daily basis. A journal is a record of thoughts, feelings and memories over a longer period of time. This way, over the weeks, months and years you will see patterns, notice changes and progress, and monitor your growth.

## **Setting**

Pick a private place to write and store your journal. Naturally, journaling is usually easier to do in a quiet place. You should be free from interruptions and distractions. Most teens have taught us that they like to journal in their bedroom, but you should pick the place that works for you.

## **Time**

You probably have a busy schedule with school, friends and activities. Your journal isn't something you have to write in every day. Yet, the more often you use this journal, particularly in the beginning, the more benefit you will get from it. Maybe you have a time of day that is best for you—early in the morning or right after school or just before bed. Be your own judge about how much time you spend writing in your journal on a particular day. One day you may write a lot; another time you may simply sit and think. That's the beauty of a journal; you can write whenever you feel like it. There's no pressure, no timetable and no absolute deadline.

## **Honesty**

In an effort to understand yourself and your grief journey, you must be honest with yourself. This journal is a place to truly be yourself—think your real thoughts and share them, feel your true feelings and express them.

## **Privacy**

This is your journal and it is private and confidential. You have every right to your privacy. Remember—you don't have to share your journal or show it to anyone you don't want to. So, keep your journal in a safe, private place. Tell your family and friends that your journal is personal and private.

## **Selective Sharing**

It's important to let others help you with your grief. Now, we understand that you may not want help. You are a teenager and one of your main tasks in life is to become more independent and handle things on your own. Nature designed it that way so you'll learn how to fend for and make a life for yourself. But grief is an exception; you

can't cope with it alone (nobody can, not even adults) and you shouldn't try to. As hard as it is, you need to let others be there for you

This said, you may want to share a particular journal entry with someone you trust—a best friend, a parent, a teacher or a counselor. When we say someone you trust, we mean someone who accepts you where you are right now in your grief journey. This means they don't judge you or think their job is to “get you over grief” quickly.

The purpose of this kind of guided journal is, in part, to help you learn to understand your grief and become friends with it. If you are around people who judge or criticize you, it's hard to mourn openly and honestly. Critical people aren't likely to understand you or your journal so we suggest you do not share your journal with them. But selectively sharing your journal with people you love and trust can help them understand what you're thinking and feeling. It can also help them understand how they can (and can't) support you in your journey through grief.

### **Getting Started**

When you are ready to start exploring this journal, find the right place that feels comfortable (we hope you have already done this as you read this Introduction). Quiet yourself and try to just relax. You may want to have a few moments of silence before you begin so that you can focus your attention on what you are going to do in the journal. When you feel relaxed, slowly close your eyes and reopen them. Now you are ready to begin.

Oh, before you begin, remember this: Don't criticize what you find comes to the paper. Ignore your penmanship and don't worry about grammar or spelling (you have to do that enough in school!). This journal is just for you!

### **Godspeed to You**

Please take care of yourself and be patient as you explore this journal. With time and the support of others, you will come to feel hope and a renewed excitement for life and living. This journal is an invitation to

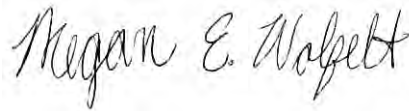
pour out your heart, to cry, to allow yourself to hurt, and most important, to believe in yourself. A journal is a confessor. It simply listens as you write. And it may be hard to believe this now, but you'll also emerge wiser, more sensitive and more complete than you were before. Believe in your ability to grow and heal. Believe in God's plan for you on this earth. Good luck and Godspeed.

So what are you waiting for? Pick up your pen and get started! Months and even years from now, you'll be glad you did.

All the best,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Alan D. Wolfelt". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial "A".

Alan D. Wolfelt

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Megan E. Wolfelt". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial "M".

Megan E. Wolfelt