

Coping with Grief

Cheat Sheet



A gentle companion for the days after a loss. Keep it somewhere close - the fridge, a drawer, folded into a book - for the moments grief arrives without warning.

There is no right way to do this. Take what helps, leave what doesn't, and come back whenever you need to.

What Grief Actually Looks Like

WAVES, NOT STAGES

Grief rarely moves through tidy stages. It comes in **waves** - close together at first, then slowly further apart - and every wave can feel different from the last. All of these are normal grief:

Anger

Numbness

Guilt

Laughing at a memory

Relief

Forgetting, then remembering

Wanting people close

Wanting to be alone

Feeling fine, then suddenly not

None of them need justifying. Feeling okay for an afternoon is not disloyal, and falling apart on a Tuesday is not going backwards.

Getting Through a Wave

WHEN IT RISES, LET IT COME



- **Don't fight it.** Resisting a wave stretches it out; letting it move through you lets it pass.
- Stop what you're doing if you can. Most waves crest and ease within minutes.
- Let the tears or the heaviness happen. Holding it together is not the assignment.
- Afterwards, anchor gently: a warm drink, one slow breath, feet flat on the floor.
- Then rest a little. A wave is real work, even when nobody saw it.

Grief Bursts

MONTHS LATER, OUT OF NOWHERE

A song, a smell, a supermarket aisle - and it is all suddenly back.

- **A burst is not a setback.** It is love with nowhere to go, and it means the person mattered.
- Pull over, step aside, or set down what you're holding. Give it a minute of room.
- Let it move through. Bursts are sharp but usually brief - shorter when you don't brace against them.
- No apology needed. Not to strangers, not to your family, not to yourself.

The Firsts

BIRTHDAYS, HOLIDAYS, ANNIVERSARIES

The first ones after a loss carry weight. **Plan them, don't wing them.**

- Decide ahead of time: who you will be with, and where you will spend the day.
- Build in an exit option - your own car, an early goodbye, a quiet room to step into.
- You may keep the traditions, change them, or skip a year entirely. All three are allowed.
- If it helps, mark the day in one small way: light a candle, cook their dish, visit a place they loved.

The Body Keeps Grieving

GRIEF IS PHYSICAL TOO



- **Exhaustion, brain fog, appetite chaos** - these are grief in the body, not weakness or laziness.
- Sleep when you can, even badly. Grief tires you in a way one good night won't fix, and that is normal.
- Eat something, drink water. Small and simple counts double right now.
- A gentle walk in daylight is grief work too, not avoiding it.
- Lower the bar. A mind that loses keys and forgets names is grieving, not failing.

When to Reach for More



Most grief, given time and company, slowly finds a livable shape. But if months have passed and life is still fully stopped - you can't work, can't care for yourself, and there are no moments of relief at all - please tell a grief counselor or your doctor. **That is a kindness to yourself, not a failure.** Prolonged grief is real, recognized, and very treatable.