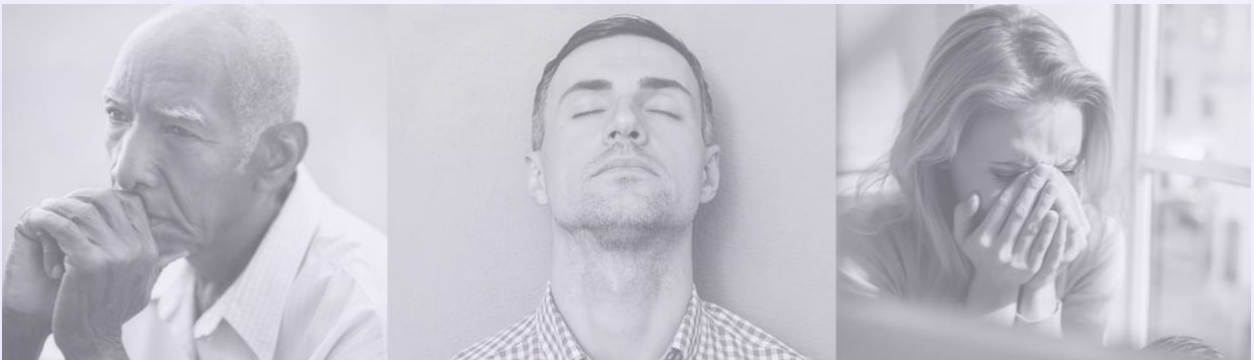


GRIEF: THE NEW NORMAL

*Offerings from the Chaplaincy Innovation Lab,
for all who are grieving and those who love them*



CHAPLAINCY
Innovation Lab

Introduction

Grief has become the new normal. Scholars and mental health providers have spent decades studying death and grief, coming to understand the processes and best ways to care for us when bereaved. Little of that research speaks to our circumstances today. Unlike during wars, when we can come together to weep and grieve, we are learning now how to care for one another at physical, but not social, distance.

Part of that learning calls all of us to attend to the shock and grief of those whose loved ones have died. Shock and grief are common in normal circumstances and more difficult now as people cannot be with their dying loved ones, accompany their bodies, and bury them in the ways most would hope. What can we do? Make phone calls. Listen. Gently accompany. Remind people that they are not alone. Spiritual and religious leaders are creating improvised memorial services by telephone and zoom that allow people to share stories. Chaplains across the country are listening and can be with us in our shock and grief, and to help us lean into and/or ease these early days of pain.

This e-book is designed to meet you where you are and support you as you grieve and/or accompany those who do. These resources are not comprehensive; this series will grow as we each find helpful tools to address this profound period of uncertainty and loss. This e-book is designed around ten commonly experienced grief reactions, with each having its own section. Each section contains some brief scenarios that will illustrate how/when the reaction might appear and a list of relevant resources. In each section, click on the underlined phrases under the Resources to connect with readings, tools, stories, podcasts, and other media for your journey of grief. At the end of the e-book is a complete list of all the resources, organized by resource type.

Please send us materials and ideas you find supportive as we all create new rituals – that can be done at physical but not emotional distance - to support those who have had a loved one die and the healthcare providers who were around them at the time. Send them to CILResources1@gmail.com and we will make this a living document for all to use.

While many chaplains describe working around death as part of what drew them to their work, most of us would rather run away from death than toward it. Let us see in the tears around us a reflection of our own grief, and sew in our care for one another a memorial quilt that can include pieces of us all.

Editors

Trace Haythorn, PhD, MDiv
Executive Director / Chief Executive Officer
Association for Clinical Pastoral Education

Aja Antoine
Research Associate
Brandeis University

Contributors

Tahara Akmal, MA, ACPE
Clinical Pastoral Education Manager
Medstar Washington Hospital

Carlos Bell, MDiv, MA, ACPE
Director of Pastoral Education
Baylor Scott & White Health

Alice Cabotaje, MDiv, BCC, ACPE
Director of Spiritual Care & Education
Massachusetts General Hospital

Wendy Cadge, PhD
Professor of Sociology
Associate Dean for Strategic Initiatives
Brandeis University

George Fitchett, PhD, DMin
Professor and Director of Research
Department of Religion Health
and Human Values
Rush University

David Fleenor, MDiv
Director of Education
Center for Spirituality and Health
Mount Sinai Health System

Liane Fry, MA, LMFT, FT
Bereavement Manager
The Elizabeth Hospice

Daniel Grossoehme, DMin, MDiv
Staff Scientist
Haslinger Family Palliative Care Center
Akron Children's Hospital

Amy Greene, DMin, MDiv
Director of Spiritual Care
Cleveland Clinic

Jennifer Keller
Director
Abbey Caskets and CareNotes

Laura Kelly
Clinic Chaplain
Hospice, Center for Connected Care
Cleveland Clinic

Allison Kestenbaum, MA, MPA, BCC, ACPE
Supervisor of Clinical Pastoral Educator
Palliative Care Chaplain
University of California, San Diego Health

Helen McNeal, MBA
Senior Advisor
Chaplaincy Innovation Lab

Joe Primo, MDiv
Chief Executive Officer
Good Grief, Inc.

Shelly Rambo, PhD, MDiv
Associate Professor of Theology
Boston University

Rabbi Seth Winberg
Director of the Center for Spiritual Life and Jewish
Chaplain
Brandeis University

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“I never said goodbye.”

M. drove her husband to the emergency room. He was whisked away to an isolation ward, and she never saw him again. To begin the journey of grief, M. needed concrete ways to say goodbye.

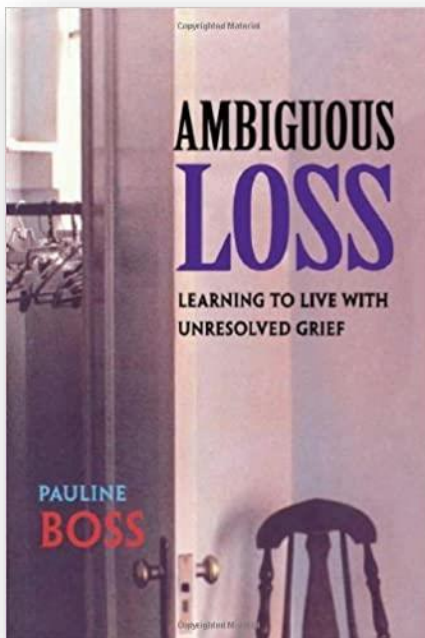
Dr. T. had to tell J.’s family that they couldn’t visit, that they would put themselves at too great a risk. The vision of J.’s family in tears, arm in arm, as they left the hospital was haunting. And it was even worse when T. had to call J.’s family to let them know he was gone. How could T. acknowledge this loss, knowing there was a long list of other families to be called.

Situations like these speak to the difficulties of grieving at the current moment and when it is impossible to say goodbye in person.



Resources for Complicated and Unresolved Grief

The resources provided here speak to the difficulties of unresolved grief, an experience of many during COVID-19. How do we say goodbye and follow all the patterns of grieving a loss when someone is suddenly no longer there?



- [BOOK: Boss, Pauline. 1999. *Ambiguous Loss: Learning to Live with Unresolved Grief*. Harvard University Press.](#)
- [AUDIO INTERVIEW: Tippet, Krista with Pauline Boss. 2016.. “Navigating Loss Without Closure.” On Being Interview.](#)
- [NEWS ARTICLE: Ungerleider, Shoshana. 2020. “Virtual grieving: Is there closure if there is no goodbye?” San Francisco Chronicle.](#)
- [BOOK: O’Neill, Rhonda. 2016. *The Other Side of Complicated Grief: Hope in the Midst of Despair*.](#)
- [PAMPHLET: Shear, Katherine. “Managing Difficult Times: A Handout for people with complicated grief.” The Center for Complicated Grief.](#)

“It didn’t seem serious... just a cough”

B. and M. had been together for 47 years. She knew his coughs, and while this one sounded different – drier, raspier – she just thought it was because of his annual spring allergies. She wished she had acted sooner; maybe things would be different.

R. knew this whole thing was a hoax. He heard it was somehow tied to the new 5G network, something about the Chinese and the president. But this cough kept getting worse.

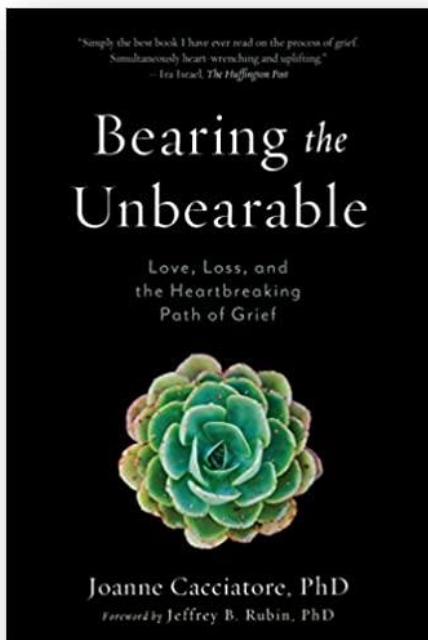
He couldn’t get his breath, and he spiked a fever. R. was furious that there might be something to this after all, but he couldn’t figure out who he was mad at.



Many of us are struggling with notions with what we might have done.

Resources for Guilt, Regret and Grief

Survivor guilt and caregiver guilt are both difficult emotional experiences in the face of the kinds of losses many are experiencing due to COVID-19:



- [PAMPHLET: Massachusetts General Hospital. 2018. “Spiritual Resources for Hard Times: Selected Readings, Practices, and Tools For Resilience in a Time for Uncertainty.”](#)
- [BOOK: Cacciatore, Joan. *Bearing the Unbearable: Love, Loss and the Heartbreaking Path of Grief*. Wisdom Publications.](#)
- [ARTICLE: Devine, Megan. 2020. “The secret side of grief: The culture of blame.” Best Self.](#)

“I can’t stop crying.”

H. and K. had only been married for two years. They were talking about children, but they both had been so busy. And now H. was trying to drive home with a blue plastic bag filled with K.’s personal items. H. had been crying for hours, and it felt like the tears would never stop.

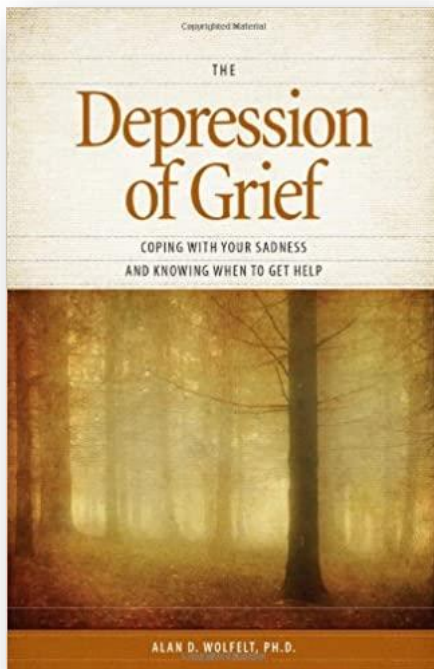
D. tried to go to work, but it seemed pointless. D. couldn’t make it through a meeting while feeling so lost, so alone, so sad. D. kept leaving work early to go through L.’s closet again, touching, holding, smelling, and crying, because what else was there to do.

Tears are a normal reaction to loss. Many of us are feeling many losses so much more deeply now.



Resources for Sadness, Sorrow and Depression

While many expect tears to come naturally with grief, the compound nature of this crisis can be especially difficult when one already wrestle with depression. Resources related to complicated grief might also be helpful:



- [BOOK: Wolfelt, Alan. 2014. *The Depression of Grief: Coping with Your Sadness and Knowing When to Get Help*. Companion.](#)
- [BRIEF PAMPHLET: Center for Complicated Grief. “Complicated grief after the loss of a spouse or partner.”](#)
- [ESSAY: Elena Zhang, “It’s Going to be Okay, and It’s Not Going to be Okay”](#)
- [PRAYER: A Prayer for Self-Care.](#)

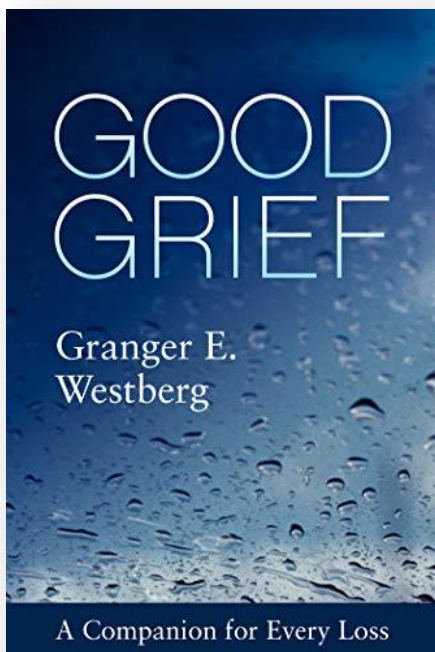
“All I feel is rage.”

V. remembered the funeral scene from “Steel Magnolias,” the moment right after the service when Sally Field’s character was so angry that she wanted to hit something. V. remembered wondering what that kind of anger was all about. Now she knew.

T. grew up in a home where no one expressed anger. Things got really quiet until his father gave some kind of signal that it was okay for everyone to talk again. Sometimes it lasted a few hours; in the worst cases it was a few days. It wasn’t until T.’s wife asked him why he kept banging pans around the kitchen that he realized just how angry he was. His father died almost three months ago, and all he felt was angry. And he had no idea what to do with it. It been almost six months since R.’s mom died from the virus, and yet it still felt so fresh. She thought she was handling it pretty well until her coworker invited her out for coffee.

She thought they were going to talk about the new project. In fact, her colleague wanted to check on her because she noticed that R. seemed angry at everyone most of the time. If she was honest, anger was all she really felt anymore.

For many, anger is a common response to loss.



Resources for Anger’s Role in Grieving

Sally Fields’ representation of anger and grief in “Steel Magnolias” captures the rage of this experience beautifully. These resources below help move us towards a state of equilibrium without denying our very real anger:

- [BOOK: Kubler-Ross, Elizabeth and David Kessler. 2005. *On Grief and Grieving: Finding the Meaning of Grief Through the Five Stages of Loss*. Scribner.](#)
- [BOOK: Westberg, Granger. 2011. *Good Grief: A Companion for Every Loss*. Fortress.](#)
- [BOOK: Potter-Effron, Ronald. 2017. *Rage: A Step-by-Step Guide to Overcoming Explosive Anger*. Audible \(audio book\)](#)
- [AUDIO INTERVIEW: Tippet, Krista with BJ Miller, “Reframing our Relationship to That We Don’t Control.” On Being interview](#)

“I can’t feel anything.”

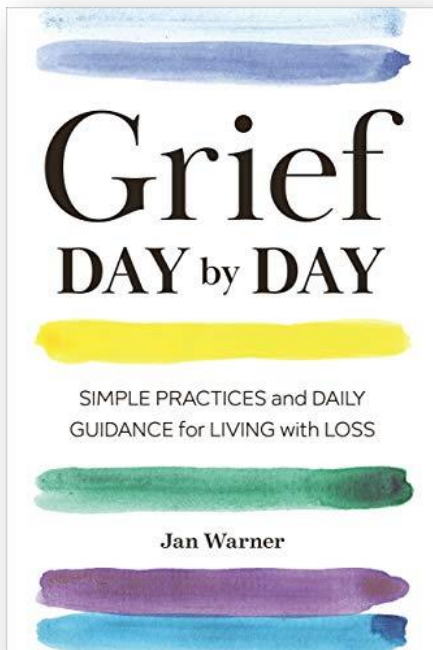
F. was worried about N. The onset of their father’s illness had been so fast that F. felt like they were in a whirlwind of emotions, but N. seemed to be going through life as if everything was normal. F. finally confronted N.: “Do you even care that Dad is gone?” N. blinked and replied, “Of course I do. But it’s so strange – it’s like I can’t feel anything.”

As the family gathered at their mother’s home, hoping to see her one more time through the iPad the hospital had given her to communicate, P. stood away from the family. They were lots of tears and hugs, but P. stayed quiet and wondered why she felt utterly empty. She wasn’t sad or angry; she just felt numb. What was wrong with her?



Everyone processes loss in a different way. It is not uncommon for some people to feel distanced from themselves and others.

Resources for Emptiness, Disconnection and Ambiguity in Grieving



Feelings of numbness and emptiness can stay with a grieving person for weeks. These feelings are explored in the resources below:

- [BOOK: Warner, Jan. 2018. *Grieving Day by Day: Simple Practices and Daily Guidance for Living with Loss*. Althea Press.](#)
- [BOOK: Stang, H. 2014. *Mindfulness and Grief*. New York: Cico Books.](#)
- [TED TALK: Saul, Peter. 2011. “Dying in the 21st Century.” TedxTalk](#)
- [BROCHURE: Princess Alice Hospice. 2020. “When Bad Things Happen.”](#)

“Who is responsible for this happening?”

The family gathered on a Zoom call to connect and begin processing the loss of their father. At one point, B. broke into the conversation and started shouting, “I need to know who is responsible for this! Was this something the government did?”

Should somebody have acted sooner to prevent so many deaths? Was this because of one of those conspiracies I keep hearing about? Could the doctors have done more? Did they not treat him because he was older? This shouldn’t have happened!”



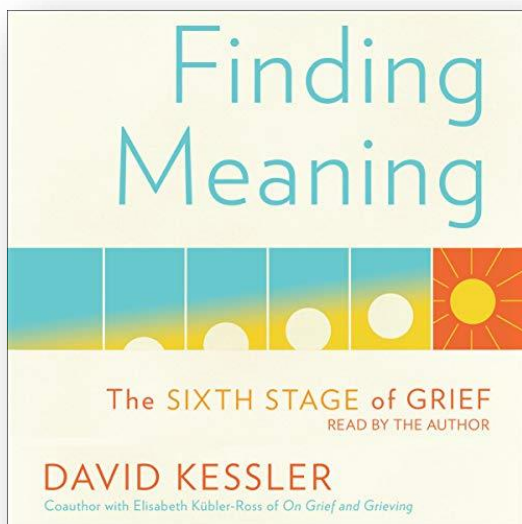
It had been several months since the memorial for their younger brother’s death. They were meeting with his physician because they still had so many questions. C. asked, “How do you think he got this?” D. followed, “And why didn’t we?”

C. continued, “Do you think we have grounds to sue, because I’m sure the hospital did not do everything they could.” D. replied, “And the government acted so late. Shouldn’t they be held responsible?”

Many of us are asking why questions right now and wondering how to find meaning in this.

Resources for Projected Anger, Justice and the Need for Meaning

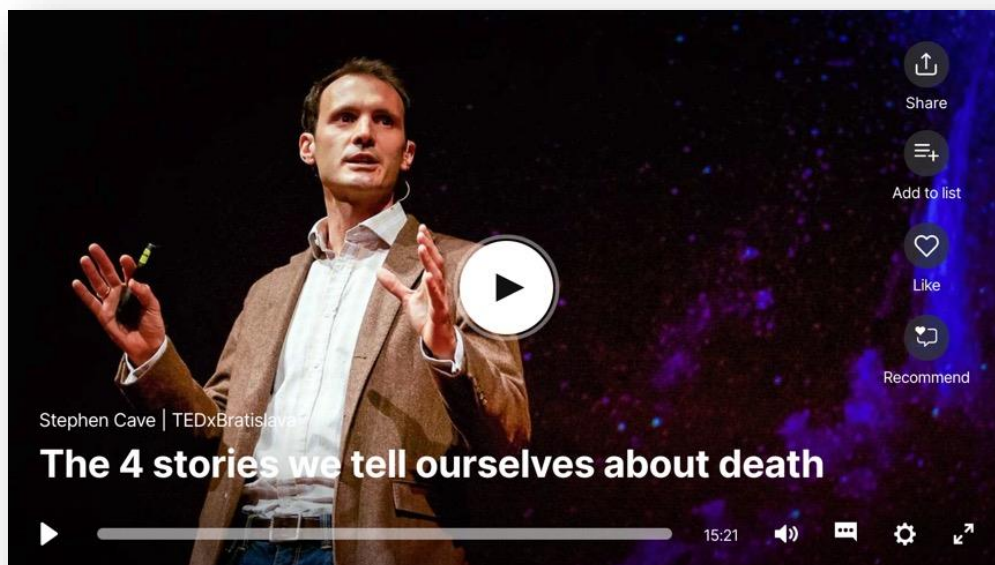
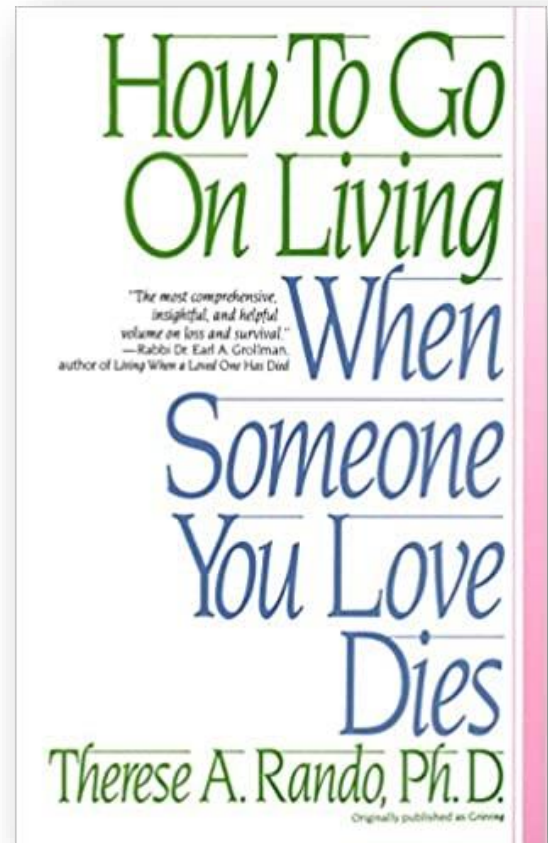
While there are times where someone may be at fault in the death of another, the underlying issue is our human need for meaning, for understanding why something happened. Blame is not necessarily a healthy response:



■ [BOOK: Kessler, David. 2019. *Finding Meaning: The Sixth Stage of Grief*. Simon & Schuster Audio.](#)

■ [BOOK: Rando, Therese. 1991. *How To Go On Living When Someone You Love Dies*. Bantam.](#)

- [BOOK: Ostaseski, Frank. 2017. *The Five Invitations: Discovering What Death Can Teach Us About Living Fully*. Flatiron.](#)
- [TED TALK: Cave, Stephen, 2013. “The Four Stories We Tell Ourselves About Death.”](#)
[TedxTalk](#)



“How do you believe in a God that let his happen?”

E. called to check on J. J. hadn't been attending the meetings of their faith community, and E. was worried that the death of his wife left him isolated.

E. began the call by saying how much the community missed J. J. said, “Thanks but I don't think I'll be back. I just can't believe in a God that would let something like this happen.”

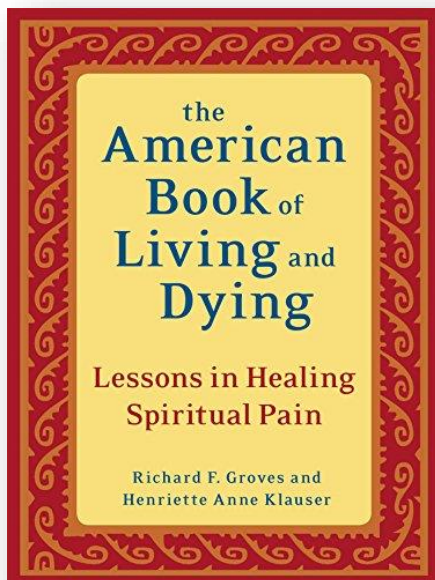
G. and R. were talking about the pandemic and how many people they knew about who had died. Some were friends, most were friends of friends. G., with tears in his eyes, said, “I always believed in a good and loving God. I just can't believe that anymore.”



For those who believe in God, questioning God's role is an expected part of this grief.

Resources for Alienation, Theological Conflict and Loss

A search for meaning in grief is natural. If that meaning was rooted in particular convictions about the divine or a deity, grief will naturally challenge those beliefs. These resources help explore those challenges:



- [BOOK: Groves, Richard. 2015. *The American Way of Living and Dying: Lessons in Healing Spiritual Pain*. Random House.](#)
- [BOOK: Lewis, C.S. 2009. *A Grief Observed*. HarperOne.](#)
- [BOOK: Anderson, Herbert & Kenneth Mitchell. 2010. *All Our Losses, All Our Grievs: Resources for Pastoral Care*.¹](#)
- [BOOK: Bowler, Kate. 2018. *Everything Happens for a Reason: And Other Lies I've Loved*. Random House.](#)
- [AUDIO INTERVIEW: Tippet, Krista with Studs Terkel. 2005. “Life, Faith and Death.” On Being interview.](#)

¹ This resource is designed for caregivers and professionals but may be helpful to others.

“Who will take care of me?”

CHILDREN: W.’s aunt and uncle were caring for W. since both his parents died due to complications of the virus. They were listening to W. play with her toys, when they heard her put one toy back in the box and say, “You have to stay in there because you don’t have a momma and daddy anymore. You have to go be by yourself.”

ADULTS: L. didn’t realize how much he had relied on B.’s care of the house, of meals, of the garden, of him. Now that she was gone, he felt like a child, embarrassed to ask for help and yet at a loss to do so many things he now realized he took for granted. He always assumed he would go first. Now what?



This is a scary time and personal losses make it more so.

Resources for Abandonment, Fear, Loneliness and Isolation in Grief

The first of these resources is for adults to hear the perspectives of children about the pandemic. The others are for children to explore the meaning of death and grief. As with many children’s books, adults will likely find these helpful as well:

- [SHORT VIDEO DOCUMENTARY: “The Pandemic, According to Kids.” *The Atlantic*. \(Short documentary\)](#)
- [CHILDREN’S BOOKS:](#)
- [Buscaglia, L. 1982. *The Fall of Freddie the Leaf: A Story of Life for all Ages*. Thoroughfare, NJ: SLACK Inc.](#)
- [Hanson, W. 1997. *The Next Place*. Golden Valley, MN: Waldman House Press.](#)
- [Karst, P. 2000. *The Invisible String*. Camarillo, CA: DeVorrs Publications.](#)
- [Mellonie, B. & Ingpen, R. 1983. *Lifetimes: The Beautiful Way to Explain Death to Children*. New York: Bantam.](#)
- [Ringtved, G. 2001. *Cry, Heart, But Never Break*. Brooklyn, NY: Enchanted Lion Books.](#)
- [Schwiebert, P. & DeKlyen, C. 2000. *Tear Soup*. Portland, OR: Grief Watch.](#)
- [Thomas, P. 2001. *I Miss You: A First Look at Death*. Hauppauge, NY: Barron’s.](#)



“How can we say goodbye or pay our respects?”

A.’s family was huge. Every member knew that whether a birth, a graduation, a marriage, or a death, everyone in his family turned out. It was how they were; it was who they were.

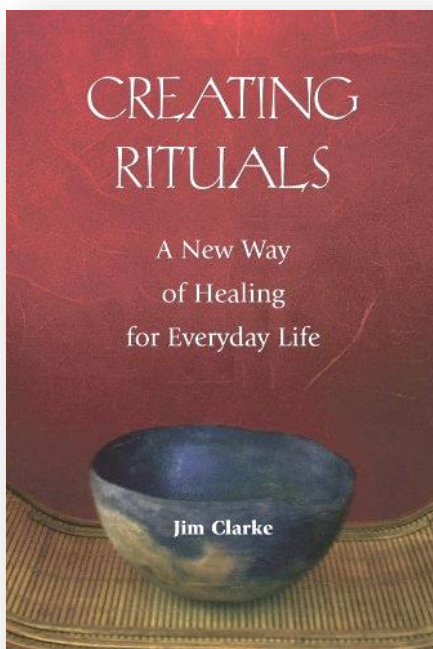
But in the pandemic, they couldn’t do that. How could they say goodbye to the matriarch, to the woman who had been so central to all of those gatherings of the past? To not come together seemed like a slap in her face. What could they do?



O.’s community had very specific religious expectations for the disposition of a body. The hospital tried to make sure that their wishes were followed, but so many people were dying and communication from the hospital was spotty. O. is concerned whether their religious expectations were followed and is worried about the implications of any oversights for their family member and their family.

We are used to physically gathering together to remember and honor those we have lost. An inability to do so makes these losses feel even greater for many of us.

Rituals for Times When a Body is Absent



This pandemic has raised so many questions about things we often take for granted, like how we gather to say goodbye when a loved one dies. These resources help imagine ways of redesigning such moments:

- [BOOK: York, Sarah. 2012. *Remembering Well: Rituals for Celebrating Life and Mourning Death*. Apollo Ranch Institute Press.](#)
- [GUIDE: Sacred Design Lab. *Principles for online ritual design*.](#)
- [PAMPHLET: Princess Alice Hospice. 2020. “Funerals and Bereavement: Suggestions and guidance during social isolation.”](#)
- [ARTICLE: Winburg, Rabbi Seth. “You don’t need Zoom or Skype to say Kaddish without a minyan. Here’s a healthier option for the community.” Jewish Telegraphic Agency.](#)
- [BOOK: Clarke, Jim. 2012. *Creating Rituals: A New Way of Healing Everyday Life*. Paulist.](#)

“I feel so overwhelmed.”

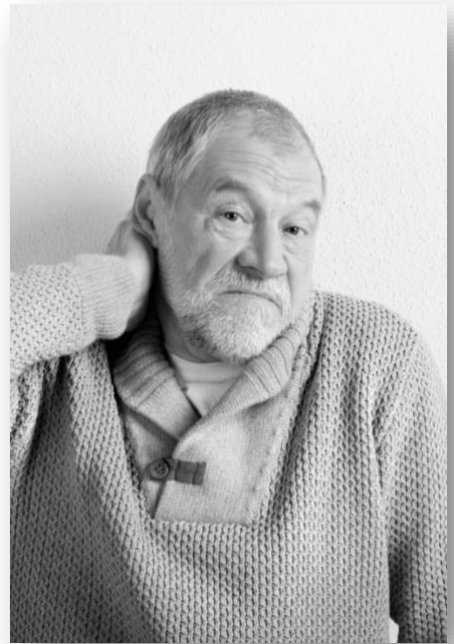
It seemed like everywhere that T. looked, all he saw was death. He lost three friends, his boss, and at least two neighbors. He was scared to go outside, scared to touch anything. It was all too much.

S. was beginning to feel stronger, but the days were still a struggle. She hadn't taken the virus that seriously – there had been such conflicting messages in the news. Her husband was even less careful and now he was gone. She struggled to make it through a day, and she hadn't even begun to process her grief. How was one supposed to go on?

K. walked through the unit she had directed for the last six years and could hardly believe they were 'past peak.' There were still ICU bays that had more than one bed in them because of the overflow of patients.

She hadn't had time to check on her own father who, half-way across the country, refused to get his cough checked out. And her next shift was supposed to start in six hours. This was all too much, and there was no sign of anyone coming to the rescue.

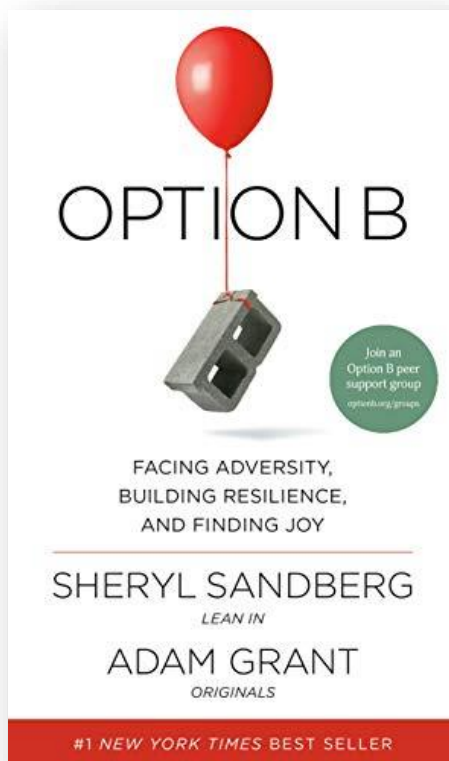
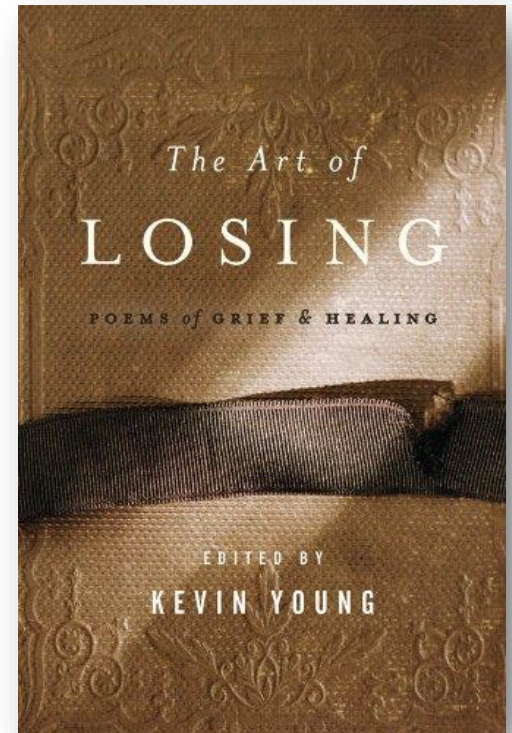
As we try to settle into this new normal, many of us are overwhelmed about virus itself, resource overload and all of the demands on our time.



Tools for Living in the Midst of Grief

For some, it is not just one emotion that feels challenging; it is quite literally everything. These resources offer tools and stories to help walk back towards something that feels more like equilibrium:

- **BOOK:** Sandberg, Sheryl and Grant, Adam. 2017. *Option B: Facing Adversity, Building Resilience and Finding Joy.*
- **AUDIO INTERVIEW:** Tippet, Krista with Sheryl Sandberg & Adam Grant. 2019. “Resilience After Unimaginable Loss.” On Being.
- **HANDOUT:** Shear, Katherine. “Managing Difficult Times: A Handout for people with complicated grief.” The Center for Complicated Grief.
- **PAMPHLET:** Epsom and St. Heliers University Hospitals. 2019. “Spiritual Support for Patients and Staff.”
- **BOOK:** Young, Kevin. 2013. *The Art of Losing: Poems of Grief and Healing.* Bloomsbury.



Full List of Resources

Audio Interviews

AUDIO INTERVIEW: Tippet, Krista with Sheryl Sandberg & Adam Grant. 2019. "Resilience After Unimaginable Loss." On Being.

AUDIO INTERVIEW: Tippet, Krista with Pauline Boss. 2016..

"Navigating Loss Without Closure." On Being Interview.

AUDIO INTERVIEW: Tippet, Krista with Studs Terkel. 2005. "Life, Faith and Death." On Being interview.

Books

BOOK: Anderson, Herbert & Kenneth Mitchell. 2010. *All Our Losses, All Our Grievs: Resources for Pastoral Care.*

BOOK: Boss, Pauline. 1999. *Ambiguous Loss: Learning to Live with Unresolved Grief.* Harvard University Press.

BOOK: Bowler, Kate. 2018. *Everything Happens for a Reason: And Other Lies I've Loved.* Random House.

BOOK: Cacciatore, Joan. *Bearing the Unbearable: Love, Loss and the Heartbreaking Path of Grief.* Wisdom Publications.

BOOK: Clarke, Jim. 2012. *Creating Rituals: A New Way of Healing Everyday Life.* Paulist.

BOOK: Groves, Richard. 2015. *The American Way of Living and Dying: Lessons in Healing Spiritual Pain.* Random House.

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BOOK: Ostaseski, Frank. 2017. *The Five Invitations: Discovering What Death Can Teach Us About Living Fully.* Flatiron.

BOOK: Potter-Effron, Ronald. 2017. *Rage: A Step-by-Step Guide to Overcoming Explosive Anger.* Audible (audio book)

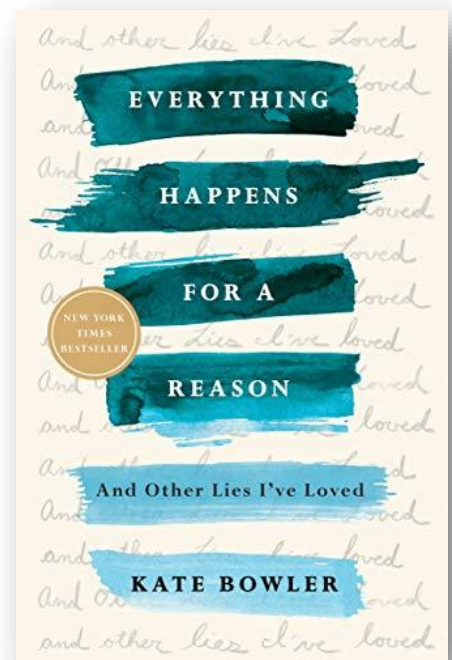
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BOOK: Westberg, Granger. 2011. *Good Grief: A Companion for Every Loss.* Fortress.



BOOK: Wolfelt, Alan. 2014. *The Depression of Grief: Coping with Your Sadness and Knowing When to Get Help*. Companion.

BOOK: York, Sarah. 2012. *Remembering Well: Rituals for Celebrating Life and Mourning Death*. Apollo Ranch Institute Press.

BOOK: Young, Kevin. 2013. *The Art of Losing: Poems of Grief and Healing*. Bloomsbury.

Children's Books

Buscaglia, L. 1982. *The Fall of Freddie the Leaf: A Story of Life for all Ages*. Thorofare, NJ: SLACK Inc.

Hanson, W. 1997. *The Next Place*. Golden Valley, MN: Waldman House Press.

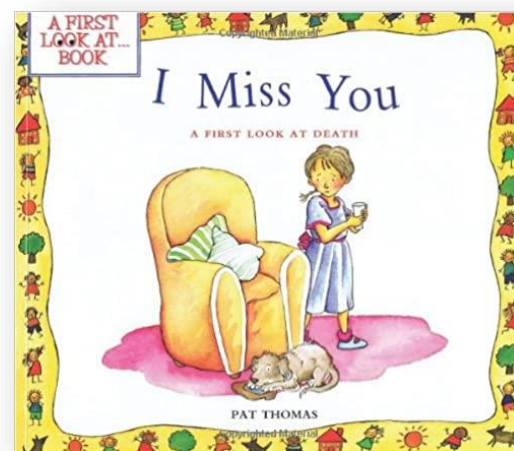
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Just a reminder – if you have resources that you would like to see added to this e-Book, we would appreciate your letting us know. [Send the information about those resources to CILResources1@gmail.com.](mailto:CILResources1@gmail.com)