



Introduction

Throughout this packet, you'll see a few different subheadings that have different meanings. When you see a heading that reads "**Jenny**" that is a real-life person who has experienced a loss in her life and wants to try and help others going through similar situations. When you see a heading that says "**Words of Wisdom**" this section is giving some reflection and advice. When you see "**Journal Prompt**" that means get out your journal and write 😊

First please read below, "The Grieving Teen's Bill of Rights".

Reading this list of your "rights" can help you understand that what you are feeling is shared with other grieving teens. You may want to show this list to a trusted adult, who can help you achieve your rights.

As a grieving teen, you have the right...

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- To know the truth about the death and the deceased
 - To have your questions answered honestly
 - To see the person who died and the place of the death
 - To be involved in the funeral or memorial service plans
 - To be heard with dignity and respect
 - To be silent and not talk to anyone about your emotions
 - To not agree with the perceptions and conclusions of others
 - To grieve in any way without censorship, as long as you do not harm yourself or others
 - To feel all the feelings and think all thoughts of your unique grief
 - To have guilt about how you could have prevented the death
 - To be angry at the death, at the person who died, at God, at yourself, and at others
 - To have your own philosophical beliefs about life and death
 - To not be taken advantage of when you are mourning and vulnerable



Journal Prompt: What are some things that you would add to this Bill of Rights? What do you feel that your friends or adults don't understand? Have you ever gotten yelled at, in trouble, or made to feel guilty for acting a certain way due to your grief?

If there is nothing you wish to add to this list, name a few things above that you agree with and your reasoning.



My Mom and I cried together often and shared how we were feeling, which helped me heal from some of my grief. Writing also helped me. Pages from this packet are from my own thoughts and feelings I hope what I've written helps you. You don't have to agree with everything I say...take what you can and leave the rest. Just know there are others who understand what you are going through. Sometimes just knowing you aren't alone can keep you open to the hope of healing from your loss.

When you're going through the pain of a deep loss, it's hard to believe you'll ever feel normal again, let alone happy. Even though it might be impossible to believe right now, things will get better.

Everybody Grieves

Jenny: The first thing I'd like to say is that it's okay to grieve. You have the right to be grieving, whether you have lost a friend, a family member, or a pet. No loss is too small. Nobody has the right to tell you that you shouldn't grieve over a certain loss.

Everybody will grieve at some point. Everyone is allowed to grieve. Everyone grieves differently. And what you feel is what YOU feel. It is not necessarily what anyone else feels. People might assume they know what you're thinking, but they probably don't. Do not let anyone tell you how you should or shouldn't grieve.

Words of Wisdom: Everyone's grief is different because everyone's situation is different. YOU are an individual. Your relationship with the person who died is unique. The way the person died also makes your situation unique.

We're not mind readers. No one knows what anyone else is thinking. So you're the only one who knows the best way for you to express your feelings. As long as it's a healthy expression, do what feels right to you.

While everyone's grief journey is different, there are parts of the grieving process that are similar for everyone. What you're feeling is most likely normal. Know this doesn't fix the pain now. But it can help you to not feel so alone.

Some common thoughts shared by grieving teens and adults alike:

Survival Guilt: "It should have been me."

Magical Thinking: "If I had done things differently, she wouldn't have died."

Regrets: "I wish I wouldn't have had a fight with him before he left." "I never told him how much he meant to me."

Relief: "She was suffering for so long. I feel guilty for feeling relieved she's gone." "She was abusive to me. Why should I feel sad?"

Journal Prompt: How do you feel your grieving situation is unique? Have you felt any of the thoughts stated above? If yes, name which one and why you've felt that way. Feel free to jot some words in the space below to try and get your thoughts together before you journal.

The Many Emotions of Grief

Jenny: The day my Dad died felt very strange to me. When we got home from the hospital, I sat alone outside while my Mom talked with our family. It felt like I was taking a breather for just a few minutes. I couldn't believe it when my mom told me I had been sitting there for almost an hour.

During the first year of my grief, many people gave me their sympathy. I walked around saying, "Thank you," or "It's okay," and I was so numb that getting through the day wasn't that hard. My focus then was just on surviving moment to moment. I didn't even think about the next day, let alone the next year.

The second year after my dad died seemed a lot harder than the first. Facing the second Christmas without him, the second Father's Day, etc, it really hit me that he wasn't ever come back. I felt dumbfounded.

Words of Wisdom: As weird as it sounds, feeling like you're going crazy is normal when you're grieving. This is because all these emotions are hitting you all at once. Circle any of the following below that you've felt:

- Walking around in a daze
- Feeling lost, alone, empty
- So angry you want to hit someone or something
- Feel out of control
- Sure no one understand how you feel
- Hurting too much to be able to think straight
- Too shocked and numb to feel anything

If you do feel like you're going crazy, don't worry. Your brain and body are reacting just like they're supposed to. It may be hard to tell which feelings are "normal" and which ones might mean you need help. Trying to dull the pain with high-risk behaviors does not help.

As awful as it is, grief is something you have to let yourself feel. The longer you put off grieving, the more intense the feelings will be later.

Below are a few thoughts shared by other grieving people. There are a lot of emotions that are common to those who've lost someone they loved. Circle any of the emotions below that you've felt.

Angry Sad empty shocked tired nervous confused
ashamed alone depressed helpless

Journal Prompt: What are some other feelings you've had, if any, that aren't listed? Look at your feelings worksheet if you need help. What triggers you to feel this way? Certain time of day? Certain person?

Your feelings are YOUR feelings

Jenny: Many adults, and even other teens, may have preset ideas about grief. Some might think you should just “get over it” when you’re not ready to. Some may think that you should be sad for longer than you actually are. Remember, you are grieving on your own timetable. You might take a long time to get over your grief, or you might heal sooner than you thought.

While I was grieving the loss of my dad, a friend said, “It’s been a year already. You’re still grieving?” I tried not to get upset. She had not experienced a big loss before. I explained that, yes, I still needed support from friends and family. She seemed surprised.

You might find that not everyone will be as sensitive to your feelings as you would like them to be. If someone thinks that you should be over your grief and you’re not, hang in there. Try not to take it personally.

Words of Wisdom: The length of time someone feels like they are actively grieving depends on the person. It depends on how sudden the death was. It depends on how much support you get. Just like everyone’s grief is different, so is everyone’s timetable for grieving.

You may come across people who do not get what you are going through at all. This could include some of your closest friends. Keep in mind that death is a touchy subject for a lot of people. And it’s usually an unfamiliar subject for many young people.

If someone has never been through a tragic loss, try to understand that it may be hard for the person to relate to you. You might want to reach out to others who have experienced a similar loss. Connecting with people who have been through grief can also help you to not feel so alone.

Remember:

- It’s normal to feel like there’s a hole in our heart when someone you cared about dies.
- If a parent or guardian died, it’s normal to feel abandoned or to lose trust in adults.
- Having issues with friends or family is part of finding out who you are.
- It’s okay to not want to talk about your loss. But it’s not okay to never talk about it. Try to find someone you trust to talk to.

Journal Prompt: It is said that there are five stages of grief: Denial, anger, bargaining, depression, acceptance. Where do you think you’re at right now? How has your timetable of grief been coming? Do you feel that you’re moving on with the grieving process too fast, too slow, or just at the right pace for you?

Grief is Not Easy, Especially for Teens

Jenny: If you hear other teenagers' stories, you'll notice most of our grief can be bizarre. As a teen, I know I'm unpredictable. My moods can change often. These big changes in our moods can complicate our grief. Also, we're not treated like adults, so we might feel frustrated or left out.

Grief can also be hard for teens if friends start to avoid us. If this happens to you, it's not because of anything you've done wrong. A lot of people feel awkward talking about death or grief. Still, this can be really hard to deal with because our friends mean a lot to us.

Words of Wisdom: The teen years can be filled with promise. They can also be the most challenging, confusing, and frustrating years of your life. You're juggling friends, family, school, extracurricular activities, and work. It's no surprise that most teens feel completely stressed.

This can be the most difficult time to deal with loss and death. You were probably already feeling overwhelmed in some ways before your loss. Now everything feels 10 times worse. Loss create change, and more change isn't something you need right now.

Grieving teens tell us that loss is hard because:

- They were already asking, "Where do I belong? How do I fit in?" before the loss. Afterwards, the questions were even harder to answer.
- Loss made them feel different from their friends. It made them stand out in a way they didn't want to stand out. They felt sad but didn't want to cry in front of other people
- Sometimes they just wanted to forget about the loss and have fun again. But then thinking this way made them feel guilty.

Some grieving teens also find they have to give up some of their old friends—another big loss. This can be a really hard time. Make sure you are finding the support you need. Here are four things that made a big difference for many grieving teens:

1. Take care of yourself (regular sleep, meals, and exercise)
2. Stay close to people who care about you
3. Connect with people who have been through a similar loss
4. Ask for help from your family, friends, and teachers

Journal Prompt: Do you feel friends are treating you different or avoiding you? If yes, how so? Give an example. How is that making you feel? Have you been able to do the four things listed above to help find support? If yes, which ones, and has it helped?

Grief Attacks: Everybody Has them

Jenny: A “grief attack” is a time when a wave of grief comes crashing down on you. You suddenly feel like crying when someone says something. It might be a song that sets you off. Or it could even be a smell. This has happened to me a lot since my Dad died.

Sometimes things I’d expect to trigger a grief attack might not trigger one at all (like seeing someone who looks just like my Dad). Other times, really random things would trigger an attack (like the time I cried when my dad’s old microwave broke). I find that my grief attacks can seem really weird, especially because I think differently from all the adults around me.

You don’t need to feel embarrassed when you have a grief attack. Not people who have experienced a painful loss have had them. If you’re in a situation where you’re afraid to show your emotions, hiding them at the time is okay. Just be sure to let it out later. Share your grief with a person you trust or vent in a healthy way.

Words of Wisdom: Grieving teens say they are set off by the smallest things. It can be scary to get so sad, angry, and upset. Some feel like striking out at others or like their bodies are on edge.

This is a normal response to a stressful event. It’s called a fight or flight response or “overdrive”. It’s a burst of hormones that gave our early ancestors energy to face or run away from danger. Fight or flight is helpful...when your life is in danger. But it can be exhausting when it’s triggered again and again while you’re grieving. Since this response always comes by surprise, it’s helpful to have a plan ready.

Journal Prompt: Have you had a grief attack before? If yes, what did it feel like? How did your body react? How did you calm down? In the future, whether you’ve had a grief attack in the past or not, what are some ideas to help you get through it? Look at some sample coping mechanisms below if you need help getting started:

- Breathe deeply
- Yawn or relax your throat if you have a lump that won’t go away
- Drink water or eat a snack
- Wash your hands or face, or put a cold towel on your neck
- Look out a window or meditate
- Listen to music alone in your room
- Go to the Counselors Office if you’re in school
- Exercise. Physical activity helps relax your body and clear your mind
- Shout, scream, or hit a pillow
- Cry. There is nothing wrong with crying and it is not a sign of weakness

One Step at a Time

Jenny: We wish we could tell you that you'll feel a little better every day. But that's not how grief works. It's normal to have setbacks. Don't be hard on yourself when they happen. Just know that the waves of grief will be less intense over time.

Wanting to feel better again is an essential part of healing. That may sound like common sense, but it's still worth saying. When you're under a lot of stress, it can be hard to want to take care of your health. It's important to try to take small steps to care for yourself.

The key is to make the first steps so small it seems ridiculous. Keep taking small steps forward until you're ready for a bigger step. How big or small a step seems is different for everyone.

Words of Wisdom: Below is a list of steps provided by other grieving teens. When feelings of sadness wash over you, try picking one step to start. Cross it off when you're done. Take a minute to give yourself credit for moving forward. When you are ready, try another step. Keep going at your own pace.

Listen to your favorite song ♥ Take a Nap ♥ Buy yourself a present

Play with a pet ♥ Workout/bike/swim ♥ Watch a movie or read

Meditate or do yoga ♥ Start a journal ♥ Try a new sport

Call or text a friend ♥ Eat your favorite meal ♥ Take a bubble bath

Volunteer ♥ Draw or paint ♥ Play an instrument ♥ Dance

Watch the sun rise or set ♥

Journal Prompt: Which one of the above have you already tried? Have they helped? What are some steps you've taken that are not on the list that have helped?

On the Healing Road to Peace

Jenny: An important goal for me on my grief journey has been getting to the point where I feel at peace and happy again. My life won't ever be the same without my lost loved ones (especially my dad). But it was important for me to give myself the chance to heal inside. I needed to come to terms with my grief. This allowed me to find my norm again and get back to everyday life.

I think we can reach this goal gradually by talking about our losses. It helps to share our feelings with someone close. And it helps express ourselves creatively. We can also make remembering our loved ones part of our everyday life, instead of waiting for anniversaries or holidays.

If you're not ready to do a specific activity that reminds you of your loved one, that's okay, too. Try something that feels more comfortable, stretching your comfort zone little by little when you are ready.

Words of Wisdom: You've lost someone you loved. You are not the same person you once were. But you can find a "new normal" by taking one small step at a time. Then one day, you'll start feeling like you can be happy again. You'll start taking healthy steps on your own automatically.

At that point, you may want to find ways of including memories of your loved one in your "new life". Keeping a connection can be as simple or involved as you want it to be. Some people just think about their loved one each day when they wake up. Others create their own special rituals to honor their loved ones. There's no right or wrong way to keep a connection—whatever you choose to do will be right for you.

Journal Prompt: What are some ideas you have to keep you connected with your loved one that passed away? Below are some ideas to get you started. Circle the ones that you might be interested in trying.

- Write a letter or a poem about your loved one
- Create a memorial website
- Pick a special day to celebrate your loved one's life
- Think of something that the person who passed away loved to do. Spend an entire day doing that something.
- Make a playlist of their favorite songs
- Wear or carry an item that was special to your loved one
- Volunteer for a cause your loved one believed in.
- In honor of your loved one, do something you've always wanted to do but haven't yet.

