

Adult Grief Guide During COVID-19



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Advanced Home Care & Hospice for All Ages at All Times

Dear Friends and Families,

Capital Caring Health recognizes that the COVID-19 Pandemic is stressful for all of us! Given our physical distancing requirements, it is easy to feel isolated and alone. We want you to know that we are here for you and have created many new tools to help you cope during this challenging experience.

While we are unable to offer in-person meetings during this uncertain time, we want you to know that we remain available to you. Our grief support team is implementing creative ways of supporting you through **www.Zoom.us**, and telephone support for both individual counseling and support groups. Please continue to check out **www.capitalcaring.org** for the latest offerings.

In addition, we have developed several Grief and Loss Guides that we hope will assist in connecting you to helpful resources. No matter our age or our circumstances we are all affected by this Pandemic, and normal grief reactions can be increased due to current world events. With that in mind, we have developed [this](#) Adult Grief and Loss Guide designed to help you receive some comfort and to help you learn new coping skills to assist you during this turbulent time.

We also recognize that grieving families may have a particularly challenging time dealing with and responding to this crisis. Children (and parents) whose world was radically changed by the death of a loved one now find themselves yet again confronting a world that seems scary, unfamiliar, and ever-changing. Anxiety is a common grief response in children and we hope you will find the Child and Family Grief Guide of use to you and your family. This helpful resource is available on our website.

Should you have questions, additional concerns, or would like to be connected to a local grief counselor, we encourage you to contact us through our website at: **<https://www.capitalcaring.org/get-help/our-services/grief-support/>** or by calling **800-737-2508**.

Warmly,

Marcie Fairbanks, LCSW

Director of Family Services



COVID-19 Resources

Understanding COVID-19

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), coronaviruses have affected humans for years, and are frequently known to be respiratory infections. However, COVID-19 was not seen in humans before now. Therefore, medical professionals across the globe are just starting to understand the virus. Thankfully, they are learning more every day about how it works and how to treat it. We now know, symptoms can appear anywhere from two to 14 days after exposure and can range from mild to severe. The CDC and World Health Organization (WHO) are very clear that most individuals who contract COVID-19 are not likely to exhibit life threatening symptoms. However, individuals experiencing fragile health are at increased risk of succumbing to this disease.

KNOWLEDGE IS POWER! To learn more about COVID-19 visit:

- The U.S. Centers for Disease Control
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>
- World Health Organization
<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>

One thing that is clear about COVID-19 is that it spreads easily from person-to-person. Therefore, physical distancing protocols are in place to help reduce the risk of transmission. Physical distancing requirements are essential to help reduce the number of individuals who become infected. These requirements impact us all to varying degrees. The purpose of this guide is to equip you with coping skills so you can maintain hope as you navigate grief-related emotions amid physical distancing requirements.



Staying Connected to Cope

By remaining at home and observing physical distancing practices, we are empowered to protect ourselves and our communities from avoidable COVID-19 exposure. However, humans are social creatures by nature. We crave personal connection, whether through meeting with friends, gathering at churches or synagogues, or walking through the mall. For many of us, our usual methods for comforting ourselves are not an option at this time. Thankfully, these are temporary adjustments we need to make. At a future point, we will be able return to some normalcy.

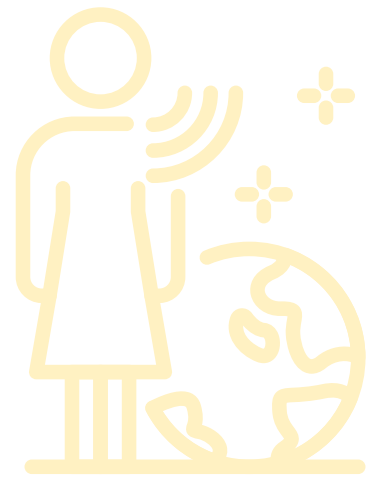
In the meantime, we need to adapt. During this difficult time, we need to do what we can to guard against feelings of social isolation, loneliness and anxiety. Especially, during times of grief, or if you find yourself caretaking for someone with a serious, or life limiting illness. This resource booklet provides ways you can care for yourself and others during this unique time in human history.

Balance

Each person and situation are unique. A good rule of thumb is to attempt to balance your needs and desires to connect with and care for others with the need and desire to connect with and nurture yourself. Below are tips to help you stay connected and to build restoration and healing into your current experience.

Connect with the World

- Keep communication devices charged.
- Set aside time each day to call, text or email friends and family.
- Send postal mail to friends and family; ask them to send you mail too!—just to say “hello!”
- Share about your progress on a hobby, new recipe, or enjoyable source of entertainment.
- Connect with time and space through setting a basic routine and observing regular mealtimes and bed and wake times.
- Observe weekdays and weekends. Set boundaries between work/school and free time.
- Limit your media exposure to what is comfortable for yourself. If you notice you become agitated or increasingly anxious when watching or listening to the news, then it might be time to turn it off.



Connect with Yourself

- If your responsibilities allow, dedicate an hour or two each day where communication devices are on silent mode, or turned off.
- Keep a written, audio, art/photo or social media journal for expressing your joys, challenges, thoughts and feelings related to your daily and overall experiences.
- Dedicate 10–30 minutes of private, quiet time daily. Sit with your thoughts and feelings and let them settle. What information does your quiet time provide you? (see Wellness, Selfcare, and Mindfulness resource in the next section for more on how to settle your body and mind so you can better connect with yourself and others.)
- Focus on your personal values. What is most important to you during this time? Are there aspects of yourself you would like to spend more time honoring? What are they? How might you incorporate these values in to five to ten-minute practices throughout your day?
- Keep a list of simple ways you are thriving amid this uncertain time (i.e. ate a healthy meal, slept well, organized a junk drawer, mowed the lawn, etc.)

Online Resources for Coping During COVID-19

- Strategies for Thriving During the COVID-19 Pandemic:
<https://elunanetwork.org/resources/eluna-resource-strategies-for-thriving-during-the-COVID-19-pandemic/>
- Stay Connected, Strong & Creative:
<https://www.opentohope.com/stay-connected-strong-and-creative/>
- Taking Care of Your Mental Health During Coronavirus:
<https://whatsyourgrief.com/mental-health-and-coronavirus/>
- Grief and COVID-19: Mourning our bygone lives:
<https://www.apa.org/news/apa/2020/04/grief-covid-19>



Managing Anxiety

Feeling anxiety related to difficult experiences is a normal response to stressful situations where we feel powerless to control the outcome. Each of us responds to and manages anxious feelings in a variety of ways. Sometimes, anxiety can increase our sense of being “alert” to help increase our response time to emergency situations. However, other times anxiety can overwhelm us to the point that we feel immobilized due to heightened fear.

The extent of our anxiety-response can be influenced by many factors—including our personality traits, support systems, underlying mental health status, and coping skills. Feelings of anxiety are common when we are caregiving for ill loved ones and when we have lost loved ones due to death. It is common to have stronger grief reactions when we are experiencing social separation due to social distancing practices.

Symptoms of anxiety can be short-lived or long-term. It is important to note that long-term feelings of anxiety may require professional assistance. Seeking support from a qualified mental health professional may be essential for you to learn helpful coping skills. However, modifying your behavior might offer improvements for short-lived anxiety. For more assistance about coping and dealing with anxiety, contact your local mental and/or medical health care provider.

Suggestions in the box below focus on things you can do now to reduce anxiety. Quoted text is from the article “Do You Live With Anxiety? Here are 11 Ways to Cope” on Healthline.com¹:

1. **“Question your thought pattern**—Negative thoughts can take root in your mind and distort the severity of the situation. One way is to challenge your fears, ask if they’re true, and see where you can take back control.”
2. **“Practice focused, deep breathing**—Try breathing in for 4 counts and breathing out for 4 counts for 5 minutes total. By evening out your breath, you’ll slow your heart rate which should help calm you down.”
3. **“Use aromatherapy**—Whether they’re in oil form, incense, or a candle, scents like lavender, chamomile, and sandalwood can be very soothing. Aromatherapy is thought to help activate certain receptors in your brain, potentially easing anxiety.”
4. **“Go for a walk or do 15 minutes of yoga**—Sometimes, the best way to stop anxious thoughts is to walk away from the situation. Taking some time to focus on your body and not your mind may help relieve your anxiety.”
5. **“Write down your thoughts**—Writing down what’s making you anxious gets it out of your head and can make it less daunting.”

¹ Hirschlag, A. (2018, December 17). Do You Live with Anxiety? Here Are 11 Ways to Cope. Retrieved April 10, 2020, from <https://www.healthline.com/health/mental-health/how-to-cope-with-anxiety#when-to-see-a-professional>

Additional websites for Managing Anxiety:

- That COVID-19 Feeling? It's Called Anticipatory Grief: <https://www.fatherly.com/health-science/covid-19-coronavirus-anxiety-anticipatory-grief/>
- Anxiety in Grief: <https://whatsyourgrief.com/anxiety-in-grief/>
- Anxiety: Mood Juice Self-Help Guide from McGill University, Canada. https://www.mcgill.ca/counselling/files/counselling/anxiety_moodjuice_self_help_guide.pdf
- COVID-19 & Anxiety: <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/18/smarter-living/coronavirus-anxiety-tips.html>
- Basic Relaxation Techniques for All Ages: https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources/pfa_basic_relaxation_techniques.pdf
- Fifteen Anxiety Workbooks & Worksheets for Teens, Kids & Adults: <https://positivepsychology.com/anxiety-worksheets/>
- The Best You: Managing Your Anxiety (this is a large PDF file): https://www.queensu.ca/studentwellness/sites/webpublish.queensu.ca.swww/files/files/Counselling/Anxiety%20Workbook_To%20Print.pdf
- App—Insight Timer: <https://insighttimer.com/>

Grief and Sleep

Beds are symbols of sleep and intimacy. During grief, sleep can become a symbol of sadness or solace, depending on the circumstance. Sleep can be impeded by feelings of guilt, the experience of a racing mind, sadness of getting into an empty bed, the comfort of being surrounded by soft blankets, or the depressed feeling of not wanting to face a world without your loved one.

Quality sleep is a healthy part of individual wellbeing. Regular, quality sleep can reduce stress, contribute to healing, enhance long-term brain health, and potentially provide insight through dreaming. The resources below provide tips on improving sleep quality, even during grief.

- Grief and Sleep: <https://www.sleephelp.org/grief-and-sleep/>
- Sleep and Grief: <https://www.tuck.com/sleep-and-grief/>
- Grief & Sleep: 7 Tips To Cope With Insomnia After Loss [Infographic]: <https://mindfulnessandgrief.com/grief-sleep/>
- Grief and Getting a Goodnight's Sleep: <https://whatsyourgrief.com/grief-and-sleep/>
- Why is my Grief Worse at Night? <https://whatsyourgrief.com/why-is-my-grief-worse-at-night/>
- Why is my Grief Worse in the Morning? <https://whatsyourgrief.com/why-is-my-grief-worse-in-the-morning/>



Wellness and Self-Care

During periods of crisis and loss, our stress levels rise, and it is essential that we create opportunities to rest and restore our mind, body, and spirit. There are many ways that we can be kind to ourselves. The first step is to give yourself permission to take care of you.

Often, it is easier to focus on the needs of others. However, during periods of extreme stress, grief, and anxiety it is critical to create space for self-care. During this COVID-19 crisis we might not be able to enjoy our usual methods of relaxation. Due to the need to remain at home, we need to think creatively about how to nurture ourselves. Self-compassion and mindfulness practices can help.

Self-Compassion

We are not typically comfortable with the concept of self-compassion. Perhaps it makes more sense when we think of giving compassion to others? For example, when you see your friend crying because they suffered a loss of a loved one, you feel a desire to comfort them. You are moved by their emotional pain and you may feel compelled to ease their suffering with kindness and empathy.

Why do we hold ourselves to a different standard? I have heard many a grieving person say, "I don't know why I am crying. I shouldn't be feeling this way," or, "It's been three months and I should be over it by now." Such harsh self-criticism and self-judgment stifle our progress through the grief experience. The silent voice in our head berating us for not having grieved properly, or quickly enough can undermine our ability to grieve.

How would our experience be different if our silent voice instead said, "This is a very hard experience. It is ok and normal to be sad and to cry?" Through self-compassion we recognize that we are struggling and can allow ourselves the time and space to be vulnerable. It's ok to feel how you feel and it is ok to give yourself permission to feel how your feeling. The strong emotions will come and go just like the ebb and flow of the ocean.

Self-Compassion Exercises

Exercise 1: Close your eyes and think of a challenging situation in your life. Can you feel the anxiety and stress? Try to notice where the feelings are in your body.

Say to yourself:

- This is stress/grief/anxiety (you name it for what it is to you)
- I'm not alone.
- Stress/grief/anxiety are a part of life
- Everyone struggles in their life

Place your hands over your heart

Say to yourself:

- I can be kind to myself
- I can learn to accept myself
- I can be strong
- I can forgive

You can use this technique whenever you need a reminder to treat yourself with compassion.

Exercise 2: Keep a self-compassion journal for a week or more. Spend a few minutes before going to bed, writing down events that occurred during the day. Were there times during the day that you judged yourself harshly or were there times when you treated others poorly? Did you experience anger or frustration about something and then later regret the way you responded? Journal about your feelings and how those feelings are also felt by all human beings. Include words of kindness for yourself. It might take a couple of days to get used to this kind of writing. However, you may find it to be cathartic. It might even improve your sleep.

Mindfulness

The mental and physical benefits of mindfulness (also known as self-awareness and awareness of others) are widely recognized, for any age. Even if you have never used any of these techniques in the past it might be worth giving them a try to see if you experience any benefits. Here are a couple of exercises that you could easily try.

The 3-Step Mindfulness Exercise

Step 1: step out of “auto-pilot” to bring awareness to what you are doing, thinking, and sensing at this moment.

- Try to pause and take a comfortable and dignified posture. Notice what thoughts that come up. Acknowledge your feelings. Then let your thoughts and feelings pass. Attune yourself to who you are and your current state.

Step 2: bring awareness to your breathing for six breaths, or a minute.

- The goal is to focus attention on one thing: your breath. Be aware of the movement of your body with each breath—how your chest rises and falls, how your belly pushes in and out, how your lungs expand and contract. Find the pattern of your breath. Anchor yourself to the present moment through the awareness of your breath.

Step 3: expand awareness outward, first to the body then to the environment.

- Allow your awareness to expand out to your body. Notice the sensations you are experiencing, like tightness, aches, or perhaps a lightness in your face or shoulders. Keep in mind your body as a whole, as a complete vessel for your inner self;
- If you wish, you can then expand your awareness even further to the environment around you. Bring your attention to what is in front of you. Notice the colors, shapes, patterns, and textures of the objects you can see. Be present at this moment, in your awareness of your surroundings.

When you are ready to finish the exercise, open your eyes slowly and try to carry that mindfulness with you as you go about your day.

The 3-Minute Breathing Space

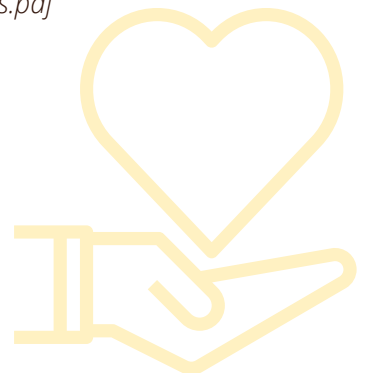
This exercise is quick to perform and useful in getting a mindfulness practice started. It can be the perfect technique for those with busy lives and minds. The exercise is broken into three sections, one per minute, and works as follows:

1. The first minute is spent on answering the question “how am I doing right now?” while focusing on the feelings, thoughts, and sensations that arise, and trying to give these words and phrases.
2. The second minute is spent on keeping awareness of the breath.
3. The last minute is used for an expansion of attention outward from the breath, feeling the ways that your breathing affects the rest of the body.

Keeping a quiet mind can be rather challenging. Thoughts will often pop up. The idea is not to block thoughts, rather to let them come into your mind and then disappear again. Try to just observe them.

Online Mindfulness Resources—Websites and Apps

- Basic Relaxation Techniques:
https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources//pfa_basic_relaxation_techniques.pdf
- Self-Compassion: <https://self-compassion.org/category/exercises/#exercises>
- Dr. Kristen Neff: <https://self-compassion.org/>
- Apps:
Head Space: <https://www.headspace.com/>
Insight Timer: <https://insighttimer.com/>
Stop, Breathe, Think: <https://www.stopbreathethink.com/>





Grief Resources

Grief and Mourning During COVID-19

Times of death, grief, illness and challenge are generally when people come together physically to support one another. However, responses to COVID-19 are placing necessary restrictions on gatherings, health and senior-care facilities, and travel. It is also limiting the numbers of people and locations where people can gather. Society is being asked to shift their expectations of connection and support in ways that can feel unfamiliar and uncomfortable. This shift is especially acute in the case of death and in early bereavement. Many families are not able to be at the bedside of loved ones, to gather in a time of mourning to celebrate the life of their loved one, or to memorialize the deceased in ways that feel full and inclusive. This can add grief on top of grief.

Instead of our historical customs of society adjusting to the dying and bereaved, the dying and bereaved are being required to adjust to the needs of the larger public health needs of society.

This major adjustment and involuntary act of selflessness are not chosen. As such, the grief, pain and sense of a lack of control that normally accompany times of loss may be further compounded. It may take extra time, attention and processing for those grieving during the COVID-19 pandemic to accept, acknowledge, process and honor their loved ones and to fully express their emotions related to their unique and complex grief experiences.

The field of grief counseling is familiar with the concepts of complicated, delayed and disenfranchised grief. Specialized resources and techniques can help those whose natural grief process is being impacted by COVID-19. In certain situations, people may experience post-traumatic stress related to death and grief during this time. There are specialized mental-emotional health care providers who can best support complex grief expression. Our goal is to connect you with the most appropriate resources and professionals for your specific needs.

Related Online Resources

- Grieving in Isolation: <https://www.cruse.org.uk/coronavirus/grieving-and-isolation>
- That Discomfort You're Feeling Is Grief: <https://hbr.org/2020/03/that-discomfort-youre-feeling-is-grief>
- Health & Wellness Post-Loss: <https://mindfulnessandgrief.com/healthy-lifestyles-fter-loss-grief/>

What Does Hope Look Like Amid COVID-19?

Even amidst what can feel like the chaos of COVID-19 there are still many rays of hope. Connection, possibility, compassion, understanding, empathy and love are not only present, they are even being birthed through our apparent limitations. People are finding new strengths they did not know they had. Others are allowing or finding themselves to be vulnerable in ways they could not have imagined. Many of these same people are being met gently in their vulnerability and comforted by the love and compassion of strangers, healthcare workers and their local and online communities in ways that speak to the strength and untapped potential of the human family. In many cases the sources of love and support people are receiving are coming from places, people and pathways they may have never imagined.

The stress of living through a Pandemic also draws attention to the wellbeing and challenges within systems, society, families and communities. Some people are paying more attention to environmental health. One additional opportunity is to grow in our awareness of our own needs and wellbeing and to take steps to treat ourselves with tender love and care. There are many potential positive outcomes of COVID-19 for individuals and society. However, the biggest source of hope is in knowing this Pandemic experience is a temporary state. We will reach the end of this tunnel and we will return to life where we can have contact with our friends and family again.

10 Things Grief Counselors Want You to Know

- 1. Grief impacts focus, patience, energy and sense of time.** People can describe grief as a slowing-down (feeling heavy and low-energy), speeding up (using business to cope), space within a space, and on a different timeline than “regular” life. If you find it hard to slow down or hard to get going, you are very likely experiencing normal symptoms of early grief specific to your baseline personality. If the degree of change in your mood and behaviors is highly unfamiliar or unsettling, let your counselor or family doctor know.
- 2. Grief—like life—is a process.** Allow yourself and your grief to unfold. Just like trees grow without being in total control, so do humans. Try to lean into the fact that you and your grief are part of a natural process. Viewing grief as natural part of a full life can help you accept your loss, which will in turn provide you with options for coping and eventually, healing.

- 3. Death and grief are not faults.** Death is a natural end-point of all life. Each living thing will die in its own time. That is a law of the material world. Grief results from having something or someone that you value deeply taken away or changed to such a degree that it is no longer recognizable. The pain and discomfort that results from death is grief. They go hand in hand.
- 4. It's OK to not be OK.** Humans are dynamic creatures and grief is a dynamic experience. You will have ups and downs and that is normal and expected. Grief is a holistic experience impacting all aspects of life. It takes time to adjust to life with grief. Be gentle with yourself.
- 5. Be honest.** You do not need to protect anyone from your grief. It is ok say, "I am in so much pain right now that talking to anyone else or thinking about anything else overwhelms me. I just need to feel my grief." It is also ok to say, "I do not know how or what I am feeling. Things feel so jumbled up." It ok to say, "conversations and activities that used to interest me seem silly and shallow now. I am not sure if or when I will want to join in that again." Being honest with yourself allows you to express your needs. That is important.
- 6. You are not alone.** Some aspects of life can feel isolating, yet the experience of grief is something all people experience in their own way and time. Try to allow your grief experience to soften your heart and open your mind so that you can receive and invite connection and healing from multiple angles. List five groups or circle of connection of which you are a part (school, faith, work, family, social, sport, hobbies, online) and practice inviting love and support from these places and people.
- 7. People grieve in their own way in their own time.** Even if you have experienced loss in the past, the nature, timing and response to death and losses are all unique. You are a unique person each day. Your life and experiences change you. Be aware that grief can be a lot like the weather—it is affected by many variables and conditions and can present itself in various forms, all of which are natural, even if they are scary or soothing.
- 8. Counseling.** In the early days, weeks and sometimes months, the impact of grief can be so acute that people find it necessary to focus first on their basic physical needs. As such, higher-level cognitive processing that takes place in counseling and/or grief group support is often recommended three or more months after a death. At that juncture, the fog of grief can clear a bit so that emotions and thoughts become stronger and people are better able to express themselves and be open to the potential input of others.
- 9. Hidden Potential.** Grief can uncover parts of yourself you may have forgotten, or with which you are not familiar. Some people who are bold become timid. Some people who are timid become bold. You may find concerns you used to grapple with are now more easily let go and/or historical challenges are met with greater acceptance. In time, you may find a new or renewed energy to face challenges within yourself or society. Try to allow yourself to be curious about what your grief experience is teaching you about you each step of the way.
- 10. Grief is not a problem to be solved.** Each grief you experience is part of your life. In time, you will incorporate the meaning, learning, growth, love and pain into a changed version of yourself. For now, try to be with what is in the moment, without an agenda, and know that is enough.

Grief Books

General Grief

Bidwell-Smith, Claire. Anxiety: The Missing Stage of Grief: A Revolutionary Approach to Understanding and Healing the Impact of Loss. 2018. DaCapo Press. New York, New York. *Explores the relationship between anxiety and grief and how addressing one of these facets of human experience often provides insight into the other.*

Bonanno, George, A. The Other Side of Sadness: What the New Science of Bereavement Tells Us About Life After Loss. 2019. Hatchett Book Group, New York, New York. *Examines how our inborn emotions—anger and denial, but also relief and joy—help us deal effectively with loss.*

Davis-Prend, Ashley. Transcending Loss: Understanding the Lifelong Impact of Grief and How to Make It Meaningful. 1997. Berkely Books. New York, New York. *A guide to facilitate long-term adaptation to a significant death.*

Adults Grieving a Parent

Alexander, Ty. What I Wish I Had Known Before My Mom Died: Coping with Loss Every Day. 2016. Mango Publishing Group. Coral Gables, Florida. *Mourners can find meaning and wisdom in grief and enduring love.*

Harris, Maxine. The Loss That is Forever: The Lifelong Impact of the Early Death of a Mother or Father. 1995. Penguin Books. New York, New York. *Illuminates themes of loss and survival that are woven into the lives of those who have lost a parent in childhood.*

Levy, Alexander. The Orphaned Adult: Understanding and Coping with Grief and Change After the Death of Our Parents. 1999. Perseus Publishing. Cambridge, Massachusetts. *Understanding and coping with grief and change after the death of our parents.*

Grieving a Child

Hood, Ann. The Knitting Circle: A Novel. 2007. W. W. Norton and Company. New York, New York. *A mother learns to cope with the death of her child.*

Rosof, Barbara D. The Worst Loss: How Families Heal from the Death of a Child. 1994. Owl Books. New York, New York. *Helps families who have experienced this loss to know what they are facing, understand what they are feeling, and appreciate their own needs and timetables*

Zenoff, Nisha. The Unspeakable Loss: How Do You Live After a Child Dies? 2017. Da Capo Press. New York, New York. *Offers support, guidance and wisdom from people and families who have also lived through the death of a child.*

Grieving a Spouse or Life Partner

Lewis, C. S. A Grief Observed. 1968. Faber & Faber. London. *A powerful portrayal of the author's own grief after the death of his wife. In this journal, Lewis struggles with life's meaning and his relationship to God.*

Ginsburg, Genevieve, Davis. Widow to Widow. 1997. Da Capo Press. Cambridge, Massachusetts. *Thoughtful, practical ideas for rebuilding your life after the death of a spouse.*

