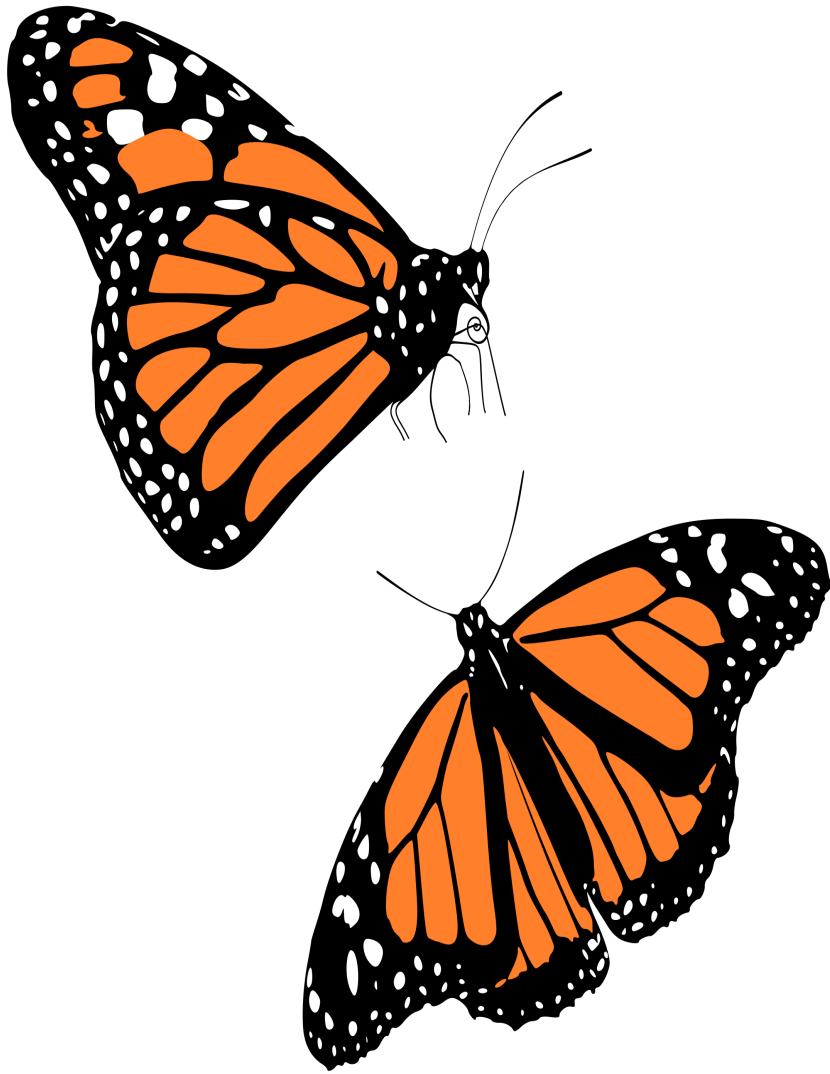


SURVIVING LOSS



The Secret Map of Surviving Loss Workbook

by

Survivingloss.org

For use with *the Secret Map of
Surviving Loss*

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WELCOME

This workbook has been created for use with film **the Secret Map of Surviving Loss**. It contains written exercises to help you explore and express the feelings associated with your grief in your own journal or notebook and in your own time. It is not a substitute for professional therapy. (To find out about professional counseling options for bereavement, please contact your local hospice or visit life-loss.com.)

The workbook offers 8 chapters each corresponding with a chapter in the film. (Chapters in the film are marked by words pertaining to the issues to be discussed shown on a black background.) You may decide you want to watch the film chapter by chapter and work through the corresponding exercises or you may decide you want to watch the film all at once and then come back to individual chapters. There is no right or wrong way to use the workbook. Do whatever is most useful to you and take whatever breaks you may need in the month you are working with the film.

Workbook Chapters

1. Expressing Your Loss
2. Coping with Haunting Images, Guilt and Powerlessness
3. Coping with Shock and Difficulty Functioning
4. Secondary Losses
5. Identity
6. Signs & Dreams
7. Coping with Triggers
8. Making Meaning

Lastly, the vast majority of viewers report that the viewing **the Secret Map of Surviving Loss** normalized their grief and gave them a new and useful perspective on advancing their healing. Please let us know your results.

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CHAPTER 1 | EXPRESSING YOUR LOSS

For many grieverers, it is very important to have people around us to hear our testimony about our loss, to tell our story at least one time. If you do not feel you have had ample opportunity to share your story, please journal in your notebook about what happened at the time of your loved one's death or how you found out about it if you were not present. Tell your story.

CHAPTER 2 | COPING WITH HAUNTING IMAGES, GUILT & POWERLESSNESS

As Diane Brennan says in the film, it is normal after loss to think about our loved one with our most recent memories. Sometimes our brains even conjure up imaginings of their continued suffering. Although we are conscious that our loved ones were very different for most of their lives than they were during their last illness or how they appeared at their wake (if there was one) we can be haunted by painful last memories. Take a moment to finish these sentences:

When I think of my loved one, they were happiest or healthiest or most content when....

Eventually, I would like to think of them as....

The memory that I want to hold upper most in my mind in the long term is....

I think my loved one would want me to think of them as....

If my loved one were privy to my thoughts today, they would say....



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CHAPTER 2 | COPING WITH HAUNTING IMAGES, GUILT & POWERLESSNESS (CONTINUED)

Willis Partington says, “Grief and guilt go together like a cold and a runny nose,” and points out how guilt is related to a misunderstanding that our loved one’s death was somehow preventable by us. In this way, guilt puts us deeply in touch with our powerlessness and helplessness as human beings. Take a moment to finish these sentences and answer these questions:

In particular I feel guilty or helpless about....

What I wish I could have done differently is....

How were you blocked from making things different? Did you not have information at the time? Were you not physically present? Would you have needed help from others that you did not receive in order to make things different? Were you normally well-rested and healthy during the time you feel guilty about?

If another loved one of yours was in the same position you were in at the time, would you judge them the way you are judging yourself?

CHAPTER 3 | COPING WITH SHOCK & DIFFICULTIES FUNCTIONING

It has been said that in times of crisis, we should eat as much as we can, sleep as much as we can, and be around people as much as we can. Whether you can eat properly or sleep through the night or not, some version of self-care is essential. Your time of grief is a crisis and during this time in your life is not likely to be of high outward functioning. You are coping with something that your rational mind can understand but may continue to surprise you for a period of time as you are doing the physiological work of healing and incorporating change. Take a moment to answer these questions:

survivingloss.org

resources for grief healing for groups and individuals

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CHAPTER 3 | COPING WITH SHOCK & DIFFICULTIES FUNCTIONING (CONT.)

What are your symptoms? What might be inside you that can help you with your healing?

How have you found your priorities suddenly shifted? What is more important to you? What less?

What questions do you have about the nature of life that you did not have before?

In what ways, no matter how small, can you practice self-care?

CHAPTER 4 | SECONDARY LOSSES

As Sam says, “When the tide goes out, much of the family dysfunction is revealed.” This can happen in friendships as well. When someone we love dies, it is extremely common to experience secondary losses. Secondary losses are a part of grief that no one tells you about in advance. Sometimes it is as simple as a “dismissive condolence” that seems shallow or inappropriate for our situation and sometimes it is outright betrayal or abandonment. Secondary losses, while a normal part of the grief phenomena, can certainly add to our grief and our shock.

What was the most unwelcome advice, judgment, or comment you received?

What were the most surprising words or acts of comfort you received?

What comfort or words would you like to receive?

What have you learned about what grieving people need that you did not know before?

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CHAPTER 5 | IDENTITY

Willis Partington speaks of identity like a stained glass window that may be broken but all the pieces are still there. Similarly, when we lose a loved one, our relationship with them undergoes a metamorphosis. It is often difficult to see how we can put our relationship with our loved one on new footing and put ourselves back together again. Take a moment to answer these questions:

How has the death of your loved one changed how you think of yourself?

What assumptions did you have about the nature of life or your life in particular that have since been shattered by your experience of losing your loved one?

In what ways are you possibly stronger than you thought you were before?

In what ways do you feel less confident?

In what ways did your loved one see you that you enjoyed? Do you still have those qualities? Can you continue to appreciate them in yourself?

CHAPTER 6 | SIGNS & DREAMS

As Fr. John Anderson says, “Some people have signs and dreams. And some people don’t.” Not having any signs does not lessen the depth of connection you have with your loved one. Whether you have them or not, there are things you can do to keep the comfort of your connection with your loved one.

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CHAPTER 6 | SIGNS & DREAMS (CONTINUED)

What would you like to hear from your loved one?

What signs or dreams, if any, have you had?

What, if anything, are you doing to keep your connection with your loved one? Do you carry a memento? Do a daily ritual?

Write a letter to your loved one and say all the things you'd like to say if they were here. Then on a separate sheet, write a letter from your loved one back to you in response.

CHAPTER 7 | COPING WITH TRIGGERS

As Roselle says of triggers, they just bring up everything! But these grief bursts are normal. Some things that tweak our grief can be anticipated like holidays, special occasions, visiting certain places, or seeing certain people. Other triggers are random and come seemingly out of the blue to overwhelm us. When a flood of emotions comes, it is often more useful to try to float than swim, letting the wave pass through us and waiting until the intensity subsides.

What old wounds or losses has your current loss brought up for you?

What coping strategy can you put in place when the next trigger occurs? Could you take ten deep breaths? Have a friend on call to reach out to? Write in a journal? Go for a walk?

What can you plan or change in order to cushion yourself for the next date-oriented trigger?

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CHAPTER 8 | MEANING

Making meaning of our loss and our relationship with our loved one can be a lifelong process. It will change and evolve over time. Sometimes making meaning involves understanding and telling our story. Sometimes it involves acts of memorializing. Sometimes it's the evolution of ourselves and our connected stories.

Are you willing to extend yourself the patience to know that today you may not have all the understanding of your loss and your grief that some day in the future you may have?

In what ways do you believe you can “move forward”? Are there any new or familiar activities you have been putting off because of your grief that you feel you can pick up in the near future? Any trips or places to see?

Knowing that letting go of grief does not mean letting go of love, is there anything you can give yourself permission to stop doing now or possibly in the near future?

What would your loved one want for you? In the immediate future? In the long-term?

What do you want for yourself? In the immediate future? In the long-term?

