

# FAQs: GriefSteps for Parents



## 1. Why was the program created?

We created this program to share what we learned in our grief research. Children grieve and adapt to loss best when they are supported and guided by a parent. Parents who are grieving are under stress. Bereavement can undermine their own confidence in parenting. Grieving children struggle with behavioral and emotional changes that can be stressful for parents and loss can affect a parent's relationship with the child. Parents can be most helpful to their children if these sources of parenting stress can be addressed effectively. Our aim is to do this by supporting and guiding parents in their grief, helping them feel confident in their ability to parent and helping them communicate effectively with their grieving children. We wanted to provide busy parents with simple, useful information and suggestions for things to do that they can access whenever and however they want.

## 2. What are the practical uses?

The digital resource can be used on an iPhone (iOS) or computer and can be downloaded free of charge.

### Practical ways parents can use this program

- As a grief support program for parents - they can start at the beginning and work their way through the information in the program, spending just 5-10 minutes a day
- As a resource for parents – they can scan the various components and get information about something that is troubling them at the moment
- As a way of connecting to our grief specialist team to ask a question, share observations or reflections or request more resources
- As a way of communicating with other bereaved families by suggesting questions or topics that might be helpful to others or by reading what others have suggested
- As a simple tool to track grief on a day-to-day basis and get to know their own grief
- As a way to get information about other grief support resources

### Practical ways grief support organizations, grief therapists or counselors can use the program

- Extend their own work with parents by providing a resource for times when they cannot be present themselves
- Encourage parents to monitor grief and work with them to review and reflect on their entries
- Encourage communication with other bereaved parents in a simple, easily available way

### Practical ways health and mental health professionals can use the program (assuming they are not grief therapists)

- As a resource to learn about grief themselves
- As a resource to introduce to their patients
- As a way to get information about other resources

## 3. Who's is the target audience(s)?

### Primary target audience

- Bereaved parents with grieving children at home (i.e. birth to age 18)

### Secondary target audiences

- Grief therapists, grief counselors and grief support agencies – the program can be a support-extender
- Health and mental health care clinicians who don't have skills to work with bereaved families – the program can be a "primer" for them and a resource for their patients
- Others in the natural support system for the family (e.g. friends, more distant family, clergy, funeral directors, workplace supports, etc) - the program can be a primer and/or support extended

## 4. How did we develop this program?

We partnered with New York Life Foundation and an app development company to plan and design a program to provide information and activities to minimize parenting stress in grieving families. We used a way of thinking about grief and adaptation to loss that has been

helpful to grieving people and grief therapists around the world. It was derived from knowledge gained from more than two decades of work with grieving people. The simple message is that people are built to respond adaptively to loss; we all have the capacity to do so. Although everyone grieves in their own way, we all need to accept the reality of the loss and restore our capacity to live fully again. There are some typical things that can get in the way of adapting and things that can facilitate it:

#### Four things that can help people adapt to loss

1. Understand and accept grief as the natural response to a loss and the form love takes when someone we love dies
2. Develop the capacity to live with reminders, to be able to move forward in your life without restrictions on what can be done or thought or felt
3. Tell the story of the death and reflect on it – make the unthinkable thinkable
4. Reconnect with genuine interests and values and find things to do that are guided by these

We used these basic principles in developing a program to

- 1) enhance confidence in parenting through promoting self-understanding, adaptation to loss and a review of parenting needs of grieving children, 2) help parents understand and guide children through the naturally disruptive period of acute grief, and 3) suggest ways to optimize communication and strengthen family relationships.

#### 5. Who developed it?

The Center for Complicated Grief and a team at Robots and Pencils. We also engaged in extensive discussions within our group at the Center for Complicated Grief and outside of it with colleagues, grief counselors and grief support agency administrators and grieving parents to create, test and modify the program.

#### 6. Feedback/Testimonials

##### • Therapist

*The app is very user friendly, easy to find technical support and choose which part of the app you would like to use. I feel like grieving clients need easy to spot resources, which this app provides. Very simple to follow.*

*I absolutely LOVE that you can set reminders on the app. As a previous grief therapist, as well as with my own grief, I know that at times you need reminders for even basic tasks.*

##### • Bereaved Users

*It was easy to use and made me think about where I am in my journey with grief. I also think the ability to text questions and get a timely response is great.*

*This App made it easy to journal or read about grief. Very helpful.*

#### 7. Five tips for using the program

##### 1. Make GriefSteps a part of your daily routine

We suggest you use GriefSteps for Parents for a short time every day. If you spend just 10- 15 minutes a day, you can move through the program at a comfortable pace. Each step has 7 or 8 sections. You might do one each day. Of course we are not suggesting that it's bad to skip a day or to do a little more if you have some extra time. In general, we think it's best to move through the program at the pace that works best for you. There is no need to rush.

##### 2. Take advantage of ways to apply what you learn in your daily life

As you move through the digital resource, we hope you'll see ways it can be useful to you. The different topics we introduce are intended to be helpful in your everyday life. We hope it will help you reflect on your loss and your grief and also that it will give you some useful ideas about things to do with your family.

##### 3. Use the grief chart

Completing this simple chart takes only 5 minutes a day and it's remarkable how helpful it can be. Many people feel reluctant about this at first, yet after they try, they find it simple, interesting and valuable. You can read more about this in Step 3.

##### 4. Look for opportunities to do suggested activities

GriefSteps for Parents is designed to get you thinking and doing things a little differently in your everyday life. We suggest activities to help this happen. Focused, reflection activities can help you learn about yourself, your family and your friends. Doing simple pleasant activities can make a surprising difference to you and your family. Deciding to try activities you avoid will help your family move forward. Reviewing and organizing pictures of the person who died can help your family connect to important memories even if they're bittersweet. We want you to go slowly and move at your own pace. In doing so, we encourage you take advantage of these tools.

##### 5. Contact our team of grief specialists

We want you to have the best experience possible and to do so, you might want to take advantage of our grief specialists. If you have a question or want to share your thoughts as you work through this program, try reaching out to the team. They can clarify things and help you think about ways to use GriefSteps for Parents in your life. You can interact with them privately or you can ask them to respond in a section other people using this resource can see. Let our grief specialists know how you think we could make this resource more useful. GriefSteps is the first digital program of its kind. Your feedback will help us improve the program.



NEW YORK LIFE  
FOUNDATION



The Center for  
Complicated Grief

www.complicatedgrief.org  
info@complicatedgrief.columbia.edu  
212.851.2107