



GriefSteps for Parents

A Guide for Grief Therapists and Grief Support Organizations

Why use GriefSteps for Parents?

Grief therapists and grief support organizations provide much needed support for bereaved families trying to adapt to a painful loss. GriefSteps for Parents is a web-based program designed to extend this work. This program can be used to introduce topics that therapists want to pursue in person, to reinforce what has been discussed and to encourage families to understand and chart their own grief journey.

We hope you will find GriefSteps for Parents to be a useful tool in your work with bereaved families. We are available both online and by telephone if you have any questions or suggestions. Your feedback is very important. With your help, we can continue to update and improve this digital resource.

The GriefSteps philosophy

Grief is the natural response to the death of a loved one and is never pathological. People we are close to are intertwined in our lives, our minds and our bodies. They have large and small effects on our lives. We are aware of their importance, and they also affect us in ways that are out of our conscious awareness. When they die, the way we think, feel and act changes. Our family roles change and our roles in the larger community are also affected. Grief is the name we give to the lived experience of all of these changes. It changes from day to day (or even hour to hour) depending on what we are thinking about or doing and depending on where we are in the process of adapting to the loss.

One way to think about what it means to be alive is that it means we adapt to change. Usually changes are small and we adapt without noticing we are doing it. When a loved one dies, the change is monumental and adapting takes time. Adapting occurs naturally and will progress if it doesn't run into obstacles. Complicated grief is a form of grief that occurs when there are impediments to the process of adapting to the loss. It is like an infection in a wound. Complicated grief does not mean something is wrong with the grieving person. We know a fair amount about the kinds of things that impede adaptation.

GriefSteps for Parents was designed to help parents reduce bereavement-related parenting stress. We provide ways parents can understand their own grief, increase their confidence in parenting, understand how to support their bereaved children and suggest ways for grieving families to strengthen communication and relationships.

Here is a brief summary of the content of the app and some suggested ways to use it.

1. Supporting parents after loss

Taking good care of the children is the number one priority for most parents. However, it can be difficult for a grieving parent to know how best to help their children. GriefSteps for Parents includes suggestions for building parenting confidence, understanding and solving problems grieving children face and enhancing family communication.

2. Helping families adapt after loss

Even though parents put their children first, their confidence and success in supporting their children depends upon their ability to understand and manage their own grief. Grief therapists know that a first step in this process is to normalize grief. GriefSteps for Parents can reinforce this idea by helping parents understand and accept grief. We provide information about grief and a grief chart to encourage people to observe and reflect on their grief.

Grief is naturally highly emotional and this can be disconcerting. Grief therapists help bereaved families manage the emotional pain. GriefSteps for Parents provides information about emotions and recommendations for managing painful emotions in the short run and also the long run. Grief therapists can use this as a tool to extend or reinforce their own work.

One of the most difficult things about losing a loved one is that it can be hard to imagine a promising future without them. The intensity of pain and the unwanted prospect of moving forward in the world without a loved one can keep parents focused on just getting through the days. GriefSteps for parents includes some gentle encouragement to start thinking about the future, even in early days after the loss.

We all need to feel that we matter and belong in the world. This can be especially important to children. Children are very sensitive to feelings of being different and not fitting in. Losing a loved one sets families

apart. Parents can feel disconnected from their community and uncertain how they can reconnect. Grief support organizations provide a comfortable social space for grieving families and this can be enormously helpful. Again, GriefSteps for Parents includes information and activities that can extend this process of reconnecting to the social world.

3. The Grief Chart

GriefSteps for Parents includes a grief chart that can be completed in just a few minutes each day. We include instructions on how to do this, information on the many ways that charting grief can be helpful and access to a team of grief specialists at our Center who can answer questions about its use. We designed the grief chart to be a tool that grief therapists and other support personnel can use in their work with bereaved families.

4. Our Team of Grief Specialists

We provide a place to message a team of grief specialists if someone using GriefSteps for Parents has questions or wants to share observations. Someone from the team can provide guidance in using the app. These messages are private.

5. The Forum

GriefSteps for Parents also includes a place to share things with other parents. People using the program can ask a question or make a comment and the guide team will post a summary and a response. Everyone using the program can see these posts.

In summary, we hope you will find GriefSteps for Parents to be a useful tool in your important work. We are available both online and by telephone if you have any questions or suggestions.



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Please reach out to us and let us know your thoughts. With your help, we will continue to refine and improve this app.