FREE GUIDE

The Grief Companion Kit

Three short guides for getting through the first month after a loss.

Ask Dr. Penny
Comfort, care, hope · askdrpenny.com

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How to use it

There is no right order. Read the part that fits the day you are having, and skip anything that does not help right now. You can come back to it later.

WELCOME

A note before you begin

If you are holding this, you have probably lost someone, and the ground has shifted under you. I am so sorry. This kit will not fix that, and it will not ask you to hurry.

What it can do is give you something steady to hold onto in the first weeks, when even simple things can feel impossible. Each part is short on purpose. Read a page, put it down, and come back when you are ready.

- **Grief is not a problem to solve.** It is love with nowhere to go for a while. It is allowed to take up room.
- **There is no schedule.** Ignore anyone, including yourself, who says you should be further along.
- **Your grief will look like yours.** Some people cry often. Some feel numb, busy, or angry. All of that is normal.

A gentle promise to yourself

For the next month, I will try to do one kind thing for my body each day, and let the rest be good enough.

PART ONE · THE FIRST WEEK

Just get through today.

In the first days after a loss, the future can feel too big to look at. That is all right. You only need to get through today, and sometimes only the next hour.

1. **Make the day small.** Choose one or two things that must happen today. Everything else can wait or be handed to someone else.
2. **Keep a short list by the bed.** Grief makes memory slippery. Write down calls to return and decisions to make so they are not spinning in your head at night.
3. **Let people take tasks.** Meals, school runs, phone calls, the dog. Say yes to practical help, even if you are not used to it.
4. **Step outside once.** Five minutes of daylight and fresh air can soften a long day indoors.

> *You do not have to know how to do the whole year. You only have to do the next small thing.*

PART ONE · THE FIRST WEEK

Taking care of your body

Grief lives in the body as much as the mind. You may feel exhausted, restless, sick to your stomach, or strangely calm. Looking after the basics will not take the pain away, but it helps you carry it.

- **Eat something small, often.** Toast, soup, fruit, a smoothie. If appetite is gone, set a gentle reminder to eat every few hours.
- **Drink water.** Crying, stress and long days dehydrate you more than you notice.
- **Rest, even if sleep will not come.** Lying down with your eyes closed still helps. Keep screens out of the bedroom if you can.
- **Go easy on alcohol.** It can feel like relief, but it tends to make sleep and low moods worse.
- **Move a little.** A slow walk around the block counts. So does stretching on the floor.

If your body is telling you something

Chest pain, not eating for several days, or not sleeping at all for more than a couple of nights are reasons to call your doctor. Grief is hard on the heart, in every sense.

PART ONE · THE FIRST WEEK

What to say when people ask

"How are you doing?" can be a hard question right now. You do not owe anyone a full answer. It helps to have a few honest, short replies ready, so you can choose how much to share.

When you want to keep it brief

- "It is a hard week. Thank you for asking."
- "I am taking it one day at a time."
- "I am not ready to talk about it yet, but I appreciate you."

When you want to let someone in

- "Honestly, not great. Could you sit with me for a bit?"
- "I would love to hear a story about them, if you have one."
- "Could you check on me again next week? That is when it might get quieter."

It is all right to change your mind

You might want to talk on Tuesday and not on Wednesday. You can say so. People who care about you will understand.

PART TWO · THE FIRST MONTH

What the first month can feel like

Around the second or third week, the casseroles stop and the phone goes quiet. For many people, this is when the loss starts to feel real, and harder rather than easier.

- **Fog and forgetfulness.** Losing keys, missing appointments, reading the same page three times. Your mind is working hard in the background.
- **Waves of feeling.** Sadness, anger, guilt, relief, even laughter, sometimes in the same hour.
- **Looking for them.** Reaching for the phone to call them, or expecting them at the door. This is your mind catching up.
- **Feeling out of step.** The world carries on and you are still in the middle of it. That gap is lonely, and it is common.

> *Grief does not move in a straight line. A good day followed by a hard one is not going backwards.*

PART TWO · THE FIRST MONTH

Small routines that help

Routines give the day a shape when everything else feels shapeless. They do not need to be ambitious. Small and repeatable is the goal.

1. **An anchor in the morning.** The same first thing each day: opening the curtains, making tea, a short prayer or a few slow breaths.
2. **One thing that is just for you.** A walk, a shower with no rush, music in the car, ten minutes with a book.
3. **A time to grieve on purpose.** Some people set aside a few minutes to look at photos, write, or visit a special place. It can make the rest of the day feel less ambushed.
4. **An anchor at night.** Screens off, the same simple wind-down, and a note of one thing you got through today.

Try this

Write tomorrow’s morning anchor on a sticky note tonight and put it where you will see it first thing.

PART TWO · THE FIRST MONTH

Grief that comes in waves

A song in the grocery store. Their handwriting on an envelope. The first Sunday dinner without them. Grief often arrives without warning, and it can take your breath away.

When a wave hits

1. **Pause and breathe out slowly.** A long exhale tells your body it is safe enough to ride this out.
2. **Name it.** "This is a grief wave. It will pass." Naming it can take away some of its power.
3. **Give it a few minutes.** Step outside, sit in the car, or find a quiet room. Waves crest and fall.
4. **Do one small kind thing after.** Water, a text to a friend, a few minutes of fresh air.

First-time moments

Birthdays, anniversaries, holidays and ordinary firsts can be hard. Plan them a little ahead: who you want with you, what you want to do, and what you would rather skip this year.

PART THREE · ASKING FOR HELP

Why asking is so hard

Many of us were raised to be the helper, not the one being helped. In grief, that habit can leave us carrying far more than we need to.

- **"I don't want to be a burden."** Most people who offer help truly want to be useful. Giving them a task is a kindness to them, too.
- **"I don't know what I need."** That is normal. The list on the next page can help you name it.
- **"They should already know."** Even people who love us cannot read our minds, especially when they are grieving as well.
- **"I should be able to handle this."** Strength in grief often looks like letting people in.

> *Letting someone help you is not weakness. It is how we were made to carry heavy things.*

PART THREE · ASKING FOR HELP

Specific asks people can say yes to

"Let me know if you need anything" is kind, but it puts the work back on you. A specific ask is easier for everyone. Circle a few that would help this month.

- Bring a meal on Thursday, or set up a meal schedule with friends.
- Pick up groceries or prescriptions when you are already going.
- Take the kids to the park for an afternoon so I can rest.
- Help me sort the paperwork, bills or phone calls I keep putting off.
- Sit with me while I go through their things.
- Come with me to the first appointment, service or gathering.
- Text me on the hard dates: their birthday, our anniversary, the holidays.
- Take a walk with me once a week, even if we do not talk much.

Try this

Choose one person and one ask from this list. Send the message today, even if it is short.

PART THREE · ASKING FOR HELP

Accepting help without guilt

Saying yes to help can stir up guilt, especially if you are usually the one who holds everyone together. Here are a few reminders for the moments when that guilt shows up.

- **This season will not last forever.** There will be time to return kindness later, and many chances to show up for others.
- **Help is a way people grieve too.** Cooking, driving and fixing things are how many people express love they cannot put into words.
- **You can say thank you simply.** "This really helped me today" is enough. No gift or long note required.
- **You can also say no.** If help feels like too much, it is fine to say "not right now, but maybe next week."

Professional help counts too

Talking with a grief counselor is not a sign that you are grieving badly. It is a place to say what you cannot say anywhere else, at your own pace, with someone whose only job is to listen.

WORKSHEET

My first-month plan

Fill in what you can. Leave the rest blank. You can change any of it at any time.

The one or two things that must happen this week:

People I can call or text when it gets hard:

One ask I will make, and who I will ask:

My morning anchor and my evening anchor:

First-time moments coming up, and how I want to spend them:

WORKSHEET

Weekly check-in

Once a week, take two minutes to notice how you are doing. Short words are fine. This is for you, not a test.

	Sleep	Eating	Hardest moment	A moment of relief
Week 1				
Week 2				
Week 3				
Week 4				
Week 5				
Week 6				

YOUR SPACE

Notes

Thoughts, questions for your counselor, things you want to remember. Nobody needs to see this page but you.

WHEN YOU NEED MORE

You do not have to do this alone.

A guide can help you take the next small step. Sometimes the next step is talking with someone. Consider reaching out to a counselor if:

- Day-to-day life has felt hard to manage for more than a few weeks.
- Sleep, appetite, work or school have changed in ways that worry you.
- You feel numb, hopeless, or cut off from the people around you.
- Someone close to you has said they are worried about you.

If you are in crisis, reach out now

Call or text 988 to reach the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline (US), or call 911 if you or someone else is in immediate danger. Outside the US, contact your local emergency number.

About Ask Dr. Penny

Ask Dr. Penny Counseling offers individual, grief, family, and faith-based counseling, in person and by video. Sessions move at your pace, and most first appointments happen within a week.

Book a session at askdrpenny.com

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