Grief Support

A practical guide to supporting children experiencing grief

www.unravelsupport.co.uk
WHAT IS GRIEF?

References:
Information taken from Frazer Consultants Blog: Grief Theories
Series: Continuing Bonds Theory Mar 22, 2018
Information taken from:
https://www.funeralguide.net/blog/the-grieving-process
What is grief?

There are lots of different ‘models’ of grief. This can be confusing and make people wonder if what they are feeling is ‘right’ or ‘wrong’.

The truth is, there is no right or wrong way to feel as everyone’s grief is unique to them.

So, let’s look at some of the different ‘models’ of grief. You might find one that suits your view of grief, or you might not like any of them, and that’s okay! Maybe you could write your own model of grief based on your experience.

The five stages of grief

The Five Stages of Grief is one of the best-known grief theories. Psychiatrist Dr Elisabeth Kubler Ross identified denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance as the key ‘stages’ our minds go through after someone dies.

Some people have said that the five stages of her grieving process are too orderly to reflect just how messy grief can be. Dr Kubler-Ross later said that her theory was never intended as a linear journey, but a series of points we may often revisit, as we adjust to life without someone we loved.

The dual process model

As an alternative to the linear stage-based model, Professor Margaret Stroebe and Dr Hank Schut developed a dual process model of bereavement. They identified two processes associated with bereavement: loss-oriented activities and restoration-oriented activities.

Loss-oriented activities and stressors are those directly related to the death. These include crying, yearning, experiencing sadness, denial or anger, dwelling on the circumstances of the death and avoiding restoration activities.

Restoration-oriented activities and stressors are associated with secondary losses. They may involve lifestyle, routine, and relationships. Restoration-oriented processes include: adapting to a new role, managing changes in routine, developing new ways of connecting with family and friends and cultivating a new way of life.

Stroebe and Schut suggest most people will move back and forth between the two.
Tonkin’s model of grief

Dr. Lois Tonkin’s model of grief is based on the principle that grief is a wound we gradually heal around. Growing around our grief means that the loss of someone will always be a part of us, but that this void and sadness will eventually not dominate our capacity to truly live.

The four tasks of grieving

Dr. J. William Worden’s Four Tasks of Grieving, offers four things we can strive to do, in order to live with the loss of someone:

1. accept the reality of what’s happened
2. process the pain
3. adjust to a life without someone’s physical presence
4. create a new connection with them, in our memory
WHAT IS GRIEF?

What do you think of this picture? What do you think it represents?
So why do we all grieve differently?

We all deal with grief differently and it is likely that even if we have experienced grief before, our grief may feel different than it did previously. The best way to show how and why this is the case, is by looking at all the different factors that play a part in our grieving process.

Here’s a blank copy if you would like to map out your experience and personal journey through grief so far.
LABELLING OUR EMOTIONS

Sort Cards Reference:
This activity was taken from 'Grief Support Groups in the School Setting: A Guide for School Counselors' by Providence Hospice of Seattle Safe Crossings Children’s Grief Support Program. ©
Our emotions

It can be really difficult to express how we are feeling sometimes. Often, when we experience grief, we can feel a lot of different emotions and many of these emotions can be present at the same time.

One common misconception is that when we feel really strong/difficult/uncomfortable emotions, we should avoid feeling them and push them away. This comes naturally to us humans because we don’t like being uncomfortable – think about hunger, being too cold/hot, being tired... whenever we get these sensations we do all we can not to feel them; we eat, get wrapped up when it’s cold, get enough sleep at night-time. etc. So of course we are going to not want to feel sad, angry, upset, frustrated, and of course we are going to try to avoid these feelings.

However, when we push our strong feelings away, ignore them or avoid ‘facing’ them, it backfires!

Here’s a great way to prove it...

If I asked you to imagine a pink elephant, sitting with us now, and then asked you to NOT think about the pink elephant, what happens? You continue to think about the pink elephant because you are trying hard NOT to do so. This is the same with our emotions. The more we push them away, the more energy we are giving to them.

The best thing we can do is recognise these feelings, observe them non-judgementally and allow ourselves to feel these.
Here’s a list of ways that we can use imagery to help us ‘observe’ these strong emotions ‘non-judgementally’:

We can imagine our strong emotions as an ocean wave. You might have panicked in the wave, fiercely treading water and thrashing your arms against the wave, getting exhausted and feeling close to drowning. Instead when you are being mindful of your emotions you don’t fight the wave, but instead allow the wave to carry you over its crest and down the other side, or you might choose to surf the wave allowing it to carry you into shore.

We could imagine our emotions as clouds in the sky or leaves on a stream. With either image you can’t stop the emotions, but you can imagine each cloud or leaf as your emotions. As such, you can just watch your emotions floating by you in their own time, eventually passing out of sight.

We could maybe think of ourselves as an empty room with a front and back door. Emotions enter through the front door and leave through the back, coming and going. Some emotions may take their time in the room, others may move quickly, and some may re-enter the room a number of times. But, they all eventually leave.

Maybe we could even think of our emotions like a child throwing a tantrum at the supermarket. There is no point trying to stop the child because the tantrum just gets worse, and it would be dangerous to abandon the child in the supermarket. Instead you might just keep a watchful eye over the child from a distance, until they exhaust themselves and settle of their own accord.

The more we manage and cope well through experiencing strong emotions, the more we prove to ourselves that we can manage them and we don’t need to fear and reject them! This in turn reduces our fear, worry and avoidance, and builds our tolerance to feel the huge array of emotions that we feel throughout our lives.

Dr Russ Harris has some great mini videos that help with this: https://thehappinesstrap.com/free-resources/

- The Sushi Train Metaphor
- The Struggle Switch.

Also, ‘The Unwelcomed Guest’ story in Unravel Resources is another great metaphor to link with this.

Reference:
Processing and expressing our emotions

Sometimes, people find it hard to explain how they are feeling. This can sometimes be due to the wide array of emotions that we can feel all at once!

By exploring our emotions through physical sensations, it can help build stronger self-awareness.

Before we start to think about verbalising emotions... can you identify where you feel?
Feelings wheel

This feeling wheel can help to identify our emotions and label them using the core inner circle emotions and branching outwards to choose the most suitable one.

Developed by Dr. Gloria Willcox
Wanting to be alone more
Angry
Lonely
Sick a lot
Guilty
No interest in food
Not able to concentrate
Feeling like I made the person get sick
Fearful
Scared
Constantly thinking about the significant person
Questioning ‘why’ this happened
Anxious
Feeling my friends don't understand
Unable to sleep
Wanting to eat more
Feeling tired, no energy
Tearful, crying
Worried about the future
Sad
Wishing things were different
Things just aren't the same anymore
Having dreams of the significant person
Thankful that the significant person was in my life

Relieved

Missing the significant person

Energised

Overwhelmed

Happy

Out of control

Just want to die

Confused

Irritable

Hopeful

Encouraged
Calm

Try to escape the pain with risky behaviour

Shocked

Stomach aches

Going crazy

Other emotions not mentioned

I don’t feel this

Sometimes I feel this/I have felt this before

I feel this
EXPLORING
OUR
GRIEF

Talk Cards Reference:
This activity was taken from ‘Grief Support Groups in the School Setting: A Guide for School Counselors’ by Providence Hospice of Seattle Safe Crossings Children’s Grief Support Program. ©
At the time of the death, who in your family was most helpful?

What is the most positive thing you remember about the funeral?

What was the most difficult thing for you to handle at the funeral?

How do other members of your family express their grief?

In what ways has this death strengthened or weakened your religious beliefs?

How do you feel when someone says, ‘I know just what you’re going through’?

If you could change parts of the funeral, what would you do differently?

Describe one of the most special sympathy cards you received.

When you feel like expressing your grief, with whom do you choose to be with and why?

What advice have you received that was helpful to you in coping with your grief?

Which feelings surrounding the death are the most difficult for you to deal with now?

Anger is a common response to loss and grief. Give an example of such anger in your life.
How have you coped with the holidays since your loved one’s death?

In what ways have you grown as a person since the death of your loved one?

Have your attitudes towards what is most important in life changed as a result of the death?

Complete this statement: ‘It isn’t easy for me to admit...’

The anniversary of the death may be difficult for the survivors. What was that like for you?

Describe what it is like for you to visit the cemetery.

Complete this statement: ‘One thing I wish teachers understand is...’

In what ways have your hopes and plans for the future changed as a result of the death?

Complete this statement: ‘One of my greatest fears is...’

Give some examples of how you denied the death, either initially or more recently.

What advice would you give a funeral director or minister in terms of helping grieving young people?
My experience

When I experienced the loss of ____________________________

Many people who are grieving benefit by talking or journaling about what happened as well as their individual relationship with that person or event.

Here are some sentence starters to help.

I was __________________________________________________________________________________

The week before __________________________________________________________________________

That day __________________________________________________________________________________

The day after ______________________________________________________________________________

The family __________________________________________________________________________________

The most difficult part was _____________________________________________________________________

My friends __________________________________________________________________________________

I hadn’t expected ____________________________________________________________________________

Other thoughts _______________________________________________________________________________
What I miss...

Regrets and guilt

When someone we love dies, it is normal and common to have regrets or experience feelings of guilt.

Some people regret or feel sad that they were not able to say goodbye or be with their special person before he or she died. Others may regret they had an argument, or cross words or thoughts, before their loved one died.

Talking about our feelings around regrets and guilt with people we trust can help us understand that these thoughts are very normal and most people have them. If we do this, we can then let the regrets go! Think about your regrets. Here’s a few sentence starters to help you begin:

• I wish I had...
• If only...
• I’m sorry that...
• I blame myself for...
Making a memory box

Creating a memory box is a great way to keep everything in one place. It doesn’t have to be called a memory box, you could call it anything you like.

In a memory box you can keep and treasure all kinds of things that remind you of the person who has died. You can customise it to make it more personal, and fill it with photos, letters and objects that remind you of your experiences together.

Here are some ideas you might want to use, you may have lots of other ideas too:

- letters you have written
- your journal
- this booklet/parts of this booklet you’ve filled in
- spray of perfume or aftershave that your loved one wore
- pictures
- their favourite music

- music that reminds you of your loved one (you could make your own playlist and put it on a USB/CD and put in your box)
- poems or song lyrics that remind you of your loved one
- items which belonged to your loved one
- Postcards, letters or cards
- A piece of jewellery
- Inspirational quotes
- Your list of mood-boosters and self-care strategies
SELF-CARE AND SUPPORT
### Are you taking care of yourself?

This mini checklist can be helpful for you to identify how you are taking care of yourself and give you some more ideas to practise self-care.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Yes I’m doing this</th>
<th>No, not yet</th>
<th>This isn’t for me</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Are you eating regularly, e.g. breakfast, lunch, dinner?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Are you eating healthy foods?</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Are you engaging in risky behaviours?</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Are you seeking medical care when you need it, e.g. taking any prescribed medicines, seeing your doctor when needed?</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Are you exercising at least 3 times a week?</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Are you getting 6-8 hours of sleep each night?</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Are you taking time to relax each day?</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Are you being kind to yourself?</td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Do you have some effective strategies that help you feel calmer?</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Are you upholding healthy boundaries when necessary, e.g. saying no to extra responsibilities sometimes?</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Are you giving yourself time to reflect and process your thoughts, emotions, judgements, beliefs, attitudes, etc?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Are you taking some time away from your phone every once in a while?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Are you spending time with supportive friends?</td>
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<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Are you staying in contact with important people in your life?</td>
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<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Are you recognising your achievements and praising yourself?</td>
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<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Are you journaling or expressing your feelings, thoughts and emotions through other ways such as drawing?</td>
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<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Are you asking for help when you feel overwhelmed/when you need it?</td>
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<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Are you communicating your feelings with others in a healthy way?</td>
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<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Are you keeping up with your schoolwork?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Are you spending time in and around nature?</td>
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<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Are you able to recognise things you are grateful for?</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Are you letting others help you when you need support/help?</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Are you recognising things that inspire, interest or amaze you?</td>
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<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Are you visiting places you like to be?</td>
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</table>
Taking good care of ourselves is important. This can feel harder than usual when we are grieving. Sometimes we find that we’re doing an okay job in some domains, but not all. All five domains are equally important and all combine together to help us feel psychologically healthier.

For each domain, list the activities you are doing to take care of yourself. To start, you could make a list of all the things you are doing to take care of yourself now, and then see where they fit. Maybe they fit in more than one section.

For example: ‘exercising’ might fall into:
- physical because it is good for your body and health
- social because you exercise with friends or family
- emotional because you release some anger/frustration when you exercise

Reference:
SELF-CARE AND SUPPORT

**Taking time to notice the positives**

At certain times, particularly when we are grieving the loss of a loved one, it is so easy to focus on the negatives and overlook or ignore what we have to be grateful for, and the positives that are around us.

It is okay to allow ourselves to be sad when we are grieving; it is also okay to allow feelings of happiness, joy and gratitude too.

At Unravel, we have a great blog ‘Negativity Bias’ which may be worth a read to help you understanding why, as humans, we are more ‘tuned in’ to negatives over positives. Researchers are even saying there could be a ratio of anywhere between 3:1 and 5:1, for the number of positives needed to balance out negatives! That’s at least three positives for every one negative.

When we are grieving, we experience lots more ‘negatives’ than normal, increasing feelings of sadness, worry, fear or anger.

So, what can we do? By actively seeking out the positives, no matter how small, we can help balance out some of the negatives and make ourselves feel psychologically healthier.

Let’s practise with gratitude. List things you are grateful for. This can be ‘big’ blessings such as family, good health etc. or could be ‘small’ blessings such as seeing a lovely flower on the way to school or someone holding the door for you.

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**Top tip:** Embed this as a strategy to add to your self-care domains! Before bed each night, log 3 things you are grateful for each day. This will then become a natural habit that you will do throughout the day without realising – you will be more ‘tuned in’ to the positives.
LOOKING AHEAD
Core values

A broad core values definition is: ‘what one considers important or worth seeking’.

More specifically, your personal core values are the select values that you hold most dear in the world. Some examples of personal values include wisdom, family, freedom, adventure, and authenticity.

They are your core beliefs about what is essential. These personal core values make up the heart of who you are and what is important in your life.

Here’s a really long list of some core values… highlight some that resonate with you.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acceptance</th>
<th>Development</th>
<th>Good Health</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accomplishment</td>
<td>Challenge</td>
<td>Gratitude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accuracy</td>
<td>Change</td>
<td>Greatness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achievement</td>
<td>Cheerfulness</td>
<td>Growth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adaptability</td>
<td>Cleanliness</td>
<td>Happiness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adventure</td>
<td>Clever</td>
<td>Hard work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affection</td>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td>Health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affluence</td>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Helping others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alertness</td>
<td>Community</td>
<td>Honesty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambition</td>
<td>Compassion</td>
<td>Hope</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amusement</td>
<td>Competence</td>
<td>Humility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art</td>
<td>Concentration</td>
<td>Humour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assertiveness</td>
<td>Confidence</td>
<td>Improvement</td>
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<tr>
<td>Attentive</td>
<td>Connection</td>
<td>Independence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authority</td>
<td>Consciousness</td>
<td>Individuality</td>
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<tr>
<td>Awareness</td>
<td>Consistency</td>
<td>Influence</td>
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<tr>
<td>Balance</td>
<td>Contentment</td>
<td>Innovation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Beauty</td>
<td>Contribution</td>
<td>Inquisitive</td>
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<tr>
<td>Belonging</td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>Insightful</td>
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<tr>
<td>Be of service</td>
<td>Creativity</td>
<td>Inspiring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boldness</td>
<td>Credibility</td>
<td>Intelligence</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bravery</td>
<td>Curiosity</td>
<td>Intensity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brilliance</td>
<td>Decisiveness</td>
<td>Justice</td>
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<tr>
<td>Calm</td>
<td>Dedication</td>
<td>Kindness</td>
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<tr>
<td>Capable</td>
<td>Democracy</td>
<td>Knowledge</td>
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<tr>
<td>Careful</td>
<td>Determination</td>
<td>Lawful</td>
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<tr>
<td>Certainty</td>
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<td>Leadership</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
**LOOKING AHEAD**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning</th>
<th>Reflective</th>
<th>Sincerity</th>
<th>Thoughtful</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Love</td>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>Skill</td>
<td>Tolerance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loyalty</td>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>Smart</td>
<td>Trust</td>
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<tr>
<td>Motivation</td>
<td>Resourcefulness</td>
<td>Solitude</td>
<td>Truth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Openness</td>
<td>Respect</td>
<td>Spirit</td>
<td>Understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Optimism</td>
<td>Responsibility</td>
<td>Spirituality</td>
<td>Uniqueness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organisation</td>
<td>Risk</td>
<td>Spontaneous</td>
<td>Versatility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passion</td>
<td>Safety</td>
<td>Stability</td>
<td>Victory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patience</td>
<td>Satisfaction</td>
<td>Status</td>
<td>Vision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peace</td>
<td>Security</td>
<td>Strength</td>
<td>Vitality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perfection</td>
<td>Self-reliance</td>
<td>Structure</td>
<td>Warmth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance</td>
<td>Selfless</td>
<td>Success</td>
<td>Wealth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persistence</td>
<td>Sensitivity</td>
<td>Support</td>
<td>Welcoming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Growth</td>
<td>Serenity</td>
<td>Sustainability</td>
<td>Well-being</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Popularity</td>
<td>Service</td>
<td>Talent</td>
<td>Winning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potential</td>
<td>Sharing</td>
<td>Teamwork</td>
<td>Wisdom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power</td>
<td>Significance</td>
<td>Thorough</td>
<td>Wonder</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Which are your top chosen ones?

1. ____________________________  
2. ____________________________  
3. ____________________________  
4. ____________________________  
5. ____________________________  
6. ____________________________

It is good to revisit your core values and remember what is important for you in your life.

At difficult times, it can be helpful for us to remember what we value and to check in with ourselves to ensure we are still upholding these views.

When we are experiencing a stressful time or life event, it can be easier for us to act impulsively (doing things without thinking first).

By checking in with ourselves, we can ensure we reduce the impulsive decisions and continue to strive towards our life goals and be the person we want to be.

Reference:
List of core values taken and adapted from https://tomillama.com
What makes me unique?

You are unique. What are your talents? What makes you special? What do you receive compliments on?

Mind-map them here:
LOOKING AHEAD

Hopes, dreams and goals

What are your ultimate hopes, dreams and goals for the future? (It is fine to not be 100% sure yet!) It’s also fine if your dreams seem extravagant and ‘out of reach’ right now.

Mind-map them here:
Bucket list

A bucket list is a number of experiences or achievements that a person hopes to have or accomplish during their lifetime. Have you got a ‘bucket list’? What things would you like to achieve in your lifetime? The items on your list are completely personal to you and can be ‘small’ things or can be ‘big’ things.

Examples: see a giraffe in its natural habitat, see the pyramids in Egypt, learn how to play the saxophone, get married and have a family… etc.

What would your loved one think to your list?

Is there anything they’d add for you?

My Bucket List

...
Affirmations

Affirmations are positive phrases or statements used to challenge negative or unhelpful thoughts. Practising positive affirmations can be extremely simple, and all you need to do is pick a phrase and repeat it to yourself.

You may choose to use positive affirmations to motivate yourself, encourage positive changes in your life, or boost your self-esteem.

Here are some examples of positive affirmations:

- I have the ability to handle this
- I ask for help when I need it
- I feel happy at times
- I am hopeful
- I gain emotional strength each day
- I am taking care of myself
- I am loved

Do you have any that you would like to embed?
Unravel is an organisation dedicated to the promotion of positive mental health and well-being in children and young people. To contact Unravel or to find out more please visit the links below.

Contact and Links

- hello@unravelsupport
- unravelsupport.co.uk
- www.facebook.com/Unravelsupport
- twitter.com/Unravelsupport