

Self Help Guidebooks for the *REMEMBER, IT'S OK* Book Series.



Remember, It's OK – GUIDEBOOK ONE:

A New Paradigm for Grief

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The *Remember, It's OK* book series:

Remember, It's OK: Loss of a Partner
Remember, It's OK: Loss of a Parent

Remember, It's OK: Loss for Teens
Remember, It's OK: Loss of a Sibling or Friend

Remember, It's OK: Loss of a Pet
Remember, It's OK: Loss of a Child

Creating a healing conversation around grief.



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About the *Remember, It's OK* series of books:

Remember, It's OK are experiential books. You will live these books, not just read them.

Whether you are a man or a woman, these books will support and guide you. Whether you have lost a friend or family member, these books will help you. If you don't know how to help someone you know who is in grief, these books will educate you.

Grief does not know religion, gender or sexual orientation. We are all effected by loss in our lives. Everyone is invited to heal.

There are unique elements to the Remember, It's Ok series. In each book you will find colours, prose and poetry, and blank pages. The guidebooks give you greater understanding about these elements.

Throughout each Guidebook, and your Remember, It's OK book, you will learn about the journey of grief, hear the voice of a grieving person, read the responses of a caring support person and journey into a new paradigm for grief.

Together, we will create a healing conversation around grief.

Key Elements

Colours

Colours have universal themes that have resonated throughout history. The colour choices for Moments were instinctual for us from the beginning:

Red – survival, urgency

Orange – beginning to find self, immediacy

Yellow - coming back to self, growing awareness

Green - learning to balance self, learning

Turquoise - what path am I on now, increased awareness and curiosity

Pale blue - clarity of new path, beginning to move forward, increased openness

Prose and Poetry

The *Remember, It's OK* series are books of Moments. These authentic expressions of grief are in the form of prose and sometimes poetry, written like private journal entries. They give the reader a 'moment', a glimpse into the experience of someone grieving, and an opportunity to observe the response of a caring support person or companion.

Each 'Moment' is a collection of many voices from those we interviewed during our creation process. It is not the voice of one person. We collected information and then created unique journal entries that fit into our colour paradigm and themes. It was an arduous challenge. The result is that each 'Moment' has many voices of those who have felt and suffered and healed, integrated into one.

You are not alone.

Blank Pages

Every Moment in the *Remember, It's Ok* books have blank pages. This is space we gave you to breathe, pause, reflect, before going forward to the next Moment. Some blank pages have a suggestion, giving concrete ways to experience and understand your emotions. These blank pages have been included for you to document your own grief journey.

Guidebook One – A New Paradigm for Grief

This downloadable PDF *Guidebook One* will give you insights into the grief journey and how misconceptions have made us a grief avoidant society. This guidebook will explore myths and truths about grief.

Training your mind to think differently about grief.

What we think about grief will determine how we grieve and how we support others in grief. Sadly, most of our grief-avoidant society have misconceptions about grief that have led us to consider grief as an ‘enemy’ to be avoided, denied, skirted around, or put in a small, manageable package - something to be fixed and controlled. We invite you to experience a paradigm shift about grief. We invite you to learn how to grieve well, support grieving people well, and to find healing, growth and transformation at your own pace.

How did we get here?

We learn about grief and how to grieve from primary sources: our family, our culture and our belief systems.

When we begin to intentionally look at what we have been taught, we will find myths and misconceptions about grief. Perhaps you saw your father shut down at the death of your mother. He took all her pictures down and would not talk about her. What did you learn? That death is scary, that it ends all good things, that it is bad to talk about it, that we carry on, that tears and emotions of grief are a sign of weakness.

Think about the high school student who has just lost a classmate to suicide. The school avoids the topic, never using the word “suicide”, just saying someone has passed away in the morning announcements and teachers carry on with classes. Students are expected to do the same. Students are told to just focus on their school work and all will be fine. What does the teen learn? That grief is to be shut down, not felt, avoided and distractions are best. Meanwhile the teen is scared, is dealing with all kinds of feelings they have never experienced before, with no role model or guidance to help them handle this myriad of distressing emotions and thoughts. The ones who need to be guiding them (parents and teachers and administration staff) are afraid to talk about it, thinking that that will heighten their experience when the opposite is true. The ones who need to be guiding them, have not been guided themselves.

All these misconceptions and myths have become our primary structure for grief and the grid against which we measure ourselves and others. And so, our grief avoidant-culture is passed on and perpetuated.

We need to create new models, new approaches, new healing conversations around grief. The good news is, we can shift our thinking about grief.

And we have created that new paradigm!!

THE TRUTH ABOUT GRIEF

1. **Grief and Mourning are not the same thing.**

Grief is the inward experience we have when we experience loss.
Mourning is the outward expression of grief.
Some people grieve, but never mourn.

Take the example above of the father. The father of that family was grieving, but he shut down his mourning, any outside expressions of what he was dealing with and feeling. Mourning is the catalyst for healing in grief. Mourning is authentic expressions of our grief emotions. But we have not been taught how to do that. And we have not been taught how to accept those outward expressions of grief. So, we have chosen to not have any.

Each of the *Remember, It's OK* books gives the reader an invitation to mourn. Every Moment in the book is followed by a Blank Page. A place to pause, to write or draw or paste a picture. Reading the Moment will resonate with the one in grief and interacting with the Moment in a kinesthetic way will allow for that outward expression of feelings. The *Remember, It's OK* books allow for mourning. They allow for healing inside and out.

2. **There is no predictable and orderly stage-like progression through Grief.**

Elizabeth Kubler-Ross' work is often cited as the authority for dealing with grief, mainly because we have had precious little else. But as we try to understand loss, her stages of grief can seem to suggest that progress through this heartbreak is predictable and finite. Unfortunately, it doesn't work that way. Kubler-Ross' work was tremendously important in helping us to understand end-of-life preparation - palliative, anticipatory grief before death. It was not designed for the grief following the passing of one we love, where people are left behind.

For a grieving person, their journey feels nothing like stages. When it is suggested that they are in a certain 'stage' in their grief, they feel like they are being placed in a box. It

just doesn't fit what they are experiencing. It makes them feel like they are not being seen or heard, leaving them to feel all the more alone.

In one of our interviews during the creation of the Remember series, a person told us about the experience she had in a grief group. During the first week, she shared about how angry she was that her husband had passed away and left her with a financial mess. The facilitators of the group corrected her, telling her that she couldn't be in the Anger Stage yet because she had to still go through the earlier stages of grief. She was left feeling that she was grieving incorrectly. So, she shut down, left the group and became isolated and confused in her grief. Reading the *Remember, It's OK* book, *Loss of a Partner*, validated her grief journey, and gave her the message that what she was feeling at that time was "OK". She could be angry. She could be angry any time she needed to.

Grief is like a journey that cycles back and forth, in and out, sometimes feeling like forward movement, sometimes feeling still, and sometimes feeling like a step backwards. This is the grief journey. As the authors of the *Remember, It's OK* series, we wanted to show the swirling emotions in the grief journey in a new and universal way. We created a platform of colours with each colour suggesting the power of emotions that ebb and flow. From intense red to orange, yellow, green, turquoise and pale blue. Hot colours to cooler colours. Each colour section reflects the sips of breath we take as we experience stronger, weaker, raging, gentler feelings in our ever-changing dance of loss. The grief journey. You are validated in what you are feeling right now. At this moment. Because in the next moment, it may shift. And shift again, and again. That is the grief journey. Not linear at all. Ongoing and shifting.

3. **Grief is not a Disorder to be fixed.**

We live in a Society of Quick-Fixes, timelines for grief, with messages of 'just keep busy', 'move on', 'just re-marry', 'get another pet', 'aren't you over it yet?'. It tells a grieving person that they are not grieving correctly, that there is something wrong with them, and that people don't want to hear about their pain and loss, leaving them to feel isolated in their grief. It can lead someone in grief to seek ways to end the pain through unhealthy choices like alcohol, drugs, distractions, inappropriate relationships, and becoming a workaholic. All this is done to numb or erase the pain that is not being acknowledged. In order to fit in with their community, they choose to repress their emotions.

Instead, grief is about honouring loss and the one who has lost. It is giving the raw and authentic feelings of the one in grief the *space* needed for expression, the *patience* they need and the *acceptance* they yearn for. The books in the *Remember, It's OK* series give words to this raw grief and bring a reassurance that the one grieving does not have a

disorder, they are on a grief journey. And we are here to help them navigate that terrain.

4. Your belief system will not exempt you from grief.

Some belief systems will give the message that faith is enough and that grieving too long or too much shows a lack of faith. Messages like ‘they are in a better place’, ‘heaven needed another angel’, will only serve to shut out a grieving person. Now, not only do they feel they are not grieving correctly, they feel either their faith has let them down or they don’t have enough faith.

Think about some of the messages after a funeral where a mother has given a eulogy for her child that passed away. She is trying to make it clear that she is strong because of her faith, hiding all her tears, all her fears, all her feelings. She is presenting as the model of the one who has faith. That nothing can shake that faith, not even the death of her child. That same woman, alone in her bedroom, weeps uncontrollably, feeling like she is a failure to her faith, a hypocrite and is now isolated and alone in her grief which is all the more confusing to her. She feels she can never say what she truly feels, not now, not after her show of ‘strength’. Her grief can only deepen as a result of such isolation and misunderstanding.

Our grief is not to satisfy others, it is our own personal journey and needs expression. Grief is not a matter of faith. It is a matter of love and relationship. You will return to your faith if you so choose, once your world of grief has had time to heal. It’s OK to question your faith through times of grief. Heartbreaking loss shakes everything in our world, including our faith system. The *Remember, It’s Ok* books invite you to heal regardless of your faith and religious affiliation. We will show you how in these guidebooks and our books.

You are not alone.

5. There is no comparison of grief.

We have all created a hierarchy of loss. Think about your list: what is the ‘worst’ loss you could imagine – that is at the top of your hierarchy. Now think about a loss that you see as less, perhaps even one that doesn’t make sense to you – that is at the bottom of your hierarchy. This comparison of losses is limiting because everyone’s hierarchy will be slightly different. And yet your hierarchy will inform you about your own grief and about how you will offer support.

Consider how isolating these hierarchies can become. How limiting. The one grieving feels that their loss is overwhelming, it's the one at the top of their list. And yet their loss might be at the bottom of your list which means they will not feel validated when interacting with you. If we eliminated these hierarchies or comparisons, we would be able to see loss as loss. Allow people would feel validated to feel what they feel without judgement.

These hierarchies create damaging comparisons, both for the one in grief and the one trying to provide comfort and support. Where did your hierarchy list come from and is it time to re-evaluate? This is a very important question to ask yourself.

We need to stop comparing losses. It really does no one any good. Instead, we need to come with an open mind to learn from the grieving person about what their loss means to them. Their loss is their loss, one that has shaken their world. The *Remember, It's OK* series includes a book on the loss of a friend, and the loss of a pet, giving voice to these often disenfranchised losses (when grieving a certain loss doesn't fit in with our larger society's attitude about dealing with death and loss). In interview after interview, the ones who had lost a close, dear friend or a pet that felt like a family member to them, were left feeling like their grief didn't matter to others who had created a hierarchy of loss and had possibly put those losses at the bottom. The result? The one in grief feels very isolated.

Grief is about the relationship of the grieving person with the one who has died. Period. That is what we need to observe and respect.

6. There is no right or wrong way to grieve.

Grieving is as personal and unique as a fingerprint. What helps one person may not help another. It's about finding out about yourself as a grieving person. Where are you on your grief journey and what will help you?

The *Remember, It's OK* books helps the griever see where they are on their journey, offers a response and sometimes a conversation, then offers Blank Page Suggestions to allow for a deeper understanding of the emotions and how to embrace them.

7. Grieving is more than just getting over your loss.

At the beginning, when someone has just experienced a loss, grieving feels like basic survival. You will see this in the Red and Orange Moments in the *Remember, It's OK* books. In that place of grief, survival is as basic as making sure you are hydrated, keeping warm, and being kind to yourself. And in those Moments, it may feel like this is

your new 'forever'. It is hard to imagine anything else. All you want to do is 'get over this'. And good intentioned friends will tell you that you will 'get over it'.

If you are reading this and you have very recently lost a family member or friend, the next sentence may be difficult to understand and may even make you angry.

You don't and won't get over your grief, it will be part of you for the rest of your life.

BUT it won't always be as painful as it is in the Red and Orange colours of grief. It will move and shift into Green and Pale Blue. It will move around in the colours. It will soften. You will become better at feeling things 'right now'. This is not your forever, it is your 'right now'. Right now. It will become your new language as you move through your grief journey. You will live well again. The colours show you how, they are your map forward.

This is also what those seeking to offer support need to really understand – it is not about getting over loss, it is about learning how to include it in the new journey. Key support people become able to deal with this truth and so help ones in grief do the same.

8. Grief is unaware of time.

"Time becomes an odd concept when tangled with grief". This quote is from a *Remember, It's Ok* book. Those in grief can resonate with that statement. Time takes on new meaning and has no meaning, especially in the early days after loss. A day can feel like it stretches into much more than 24 hours, the loss can seem like it happened yesterday when it was a month ago, you can wake up and wonder if it is all a bad dream.

In our grief avoidant society, we have allotted time limits on grief. Some places of work allow three days to recover from a certain loss (back to that unnatural hierarchy. For instance, losing a pet will rarely qualify for even one day off), maybe five days if the loss was a spouse or child, maybe one if it was a parent. Of course, the expectation is that the grieving person will pick up their job and carry on, much like the aforementioned students who were supposed to just get back to class and assignments. No consideration is given to the mental health of the one in grief and how they need to heal.

Well meaning friends may begin to encourage a widower to start dating again after maybe six months, saying it's now time to 'get out there again', 'meet someone new'. One widow discovered that a group of her friends had put together a dating profile for her and had posted it online. They never asked the widow how she felt about

any of it. She wasn't ready, but her friends thought she SHOULD be. This pushed the widow further into her grief and loss for her husband.

And then there are what we call "grief bursts", those moments when you might be at a Green in your grief journey and suddenly something triggers you into feeling like you are in Red again. It could be a song, a smell, a movie, a story, anything that calls up the depth of your memory and grief. It can feel raw all over again. This can happen days or years after the loss has occurred. This can scare grieving people. It can make you feel like you haven't moved at all. But you have. Grief bursts can happen at any time, and for a long time after your loss. The thing to remember is that they are OK. You are OK. They are telling you once again how deep your loss is, and for a minute in time, you will feel that pain again. The good news is that grief bursts are not your new forever, you are not 'back there' in your grief, and you have the coping strategies to be kind to yourself and find your way again. Be patient. Grief bursts are 'right now'. The *Remember, It's OK* books encourage you to embrace your grief bursts and let them teach you about your loss and your love. Support people can often be frightened by the grief bursts of the one grieving. There is nothing to be afraid of. Try to acknowledge the burst, not try to stop it or distract them from it, but rather listen and learn from it. It will pass.

Your pace is your pace. Your timing, your movement is yours. It will be unique to you and to your loss. Be kind to yourself, allowing yourself to discover what your pace is. One of the beautiful things about the *Remember, It's OK* books is that, as the grieving person begins to identify with the Moments, they begin to see their movement in grief. It doesn't matter how long it has taken, as that is the unique part. It matters that you can begin to feel movement and that your 'right now' doesn't last as long. Support people will learn this just from being still and watching someone in grief.

You will witness how time changes along the grief journey.

9. Grief is fatiguing and can make it difficult to focus.

Grief takes energy. Grieving people are often surprised by how tired they are. How difficult it is to focus and concentrate. They will try to push forward, getting back to the way they were before the loss, but they just can't do it. Grief is work, it's like having a full-time job in and of itself. So, when added to what was going on before the loss, it's like you now have two full-time jobs. Yes, you are exhausted. Yes, your energy is being used up in your grief. And yes, you can't focus. Grief-brain is another word that resonates with grieving people. Not being able to concentrate for any length of time, can leave you feeling like there is something wrong. Nothing is wrong. You are experiencing the fog of grief.

Think about that example earlier of the teens in high school or university. They are expected to get back to their papers, exams and homework after a major loss. They simply cannot. The expectations do not match the capacity, and so many of these teens begin to fail and perhaps drop out of school.

Or remember the mother who lost her child. Possibly she has other children at home to care for, a husband, a job, and all the other things that come with a family. But she is struggling. Her ability to be there in the same way in all those capacities is limited. She needs someone who knows that to help her.

Making accommodations at school, work, and home is critically important as we care for grieving people.

10. Grief has little time for old pleasures.

“Come on, let’s go to your favourite place for dinner. You’ve always loved that place.”, can seem like a caring invitation, but it does not understand that, for a grieving person, right now, the things that used to bring them pleasure and joy, just don’t. The word for that is Anhedonia; the inability to feel pleasure. This won’t be forever but right now, it can be very real.

For a time, the grieving person may *not* want to do things that previously brought them pleasure, and that’s OK. They simply have no capacity for that emotion ‘right now’. They would rather be asked what it is they would like to do. Let them choose. Perhaps it’s to go for a walk, or sit quietly under a tree - they know what matches their need and their energy level. Reading, watching movies, TV all require concentration and focus, something a grieving person has precious little of. Be patient with a grieving person. They will feel pleasure again. But during that time of deep sorrow, neutral is fine. Quiet is fine. Gentle is fine. It is enough.

For support people, it needs to be enough too.

11. Grief does not just disappear, it must be mourned.

Sometimes the fear of feeling grief will push a grieving person to avoid it at all costs, with the hope that it will just disappear. Nothing is further from the truth. Grief needs expression, and, when it’s not expressed it is like trying to push an air-filled beach ball under the water. At first, it seems like it can be done. But after a while, grief will come

to the surface. And now, instead of being expressed as grief, it can come out as aggression, fracturing relationships (why would I want to get close again if you could just leave me), by becoming addicted to substances (these feelings aren't leaving so now I need to drink/take drugs to keep them numb), through health issues (the anxiety is now manifesting itself in your body through stomach issues, heart issues, and more), mental health issues (the constant battle with your repressed authentic emotions will have an impact on your emotional and mental health wellbeing).

Moving intentionally towards your grief is the way you will find your way through your grief. Moving toward your pain, rather than away from it, will begin to have your pain soften.

The *Remember, It's OK* books will show you how and will show the support person how to offer assistance.

12. The Support Person.

The support person is not there to fix the one in grief, but to 'companion' them, support them.

One of the reasons we wrote the *Remember, It's OK* series was to show the responses of a support person. We created dialogue between the grieving person and a caring support person, as a roadmap for someone seeking to help. You will notice that the responses are very different in the early Red Moments, than the ones you see in Pale Blue. As the griever moves in their journey, so too do the responses of the support person. We modeled this in every book, every Moment. In some Moments the response will be a simple word or two, sometimes it's an interactive dialogue, sometimes there are no words needed. This is how we suggest a support person learns to work *with* a person in grief rather than pushing against them. A person in early grief will often not be able to say what they need. We provide an insight into the thoughts of someone in grief in the Moments. This can help a support person understand more keenly what is happening inside a person in grief.

Remember, you can't fix their grief. In fact, there is nothing to 'fix'. Grieving people have told us they don't want to be fixed, they just don't want to be alone in their grief. The grief they are feeling is still a link to their loved one - they don't want you to take that away. Just help soften it by your presence.

The basis for your support needs to come from a place of being open to learning about the grieving person's loss, seeing your role as 'walking alongside', honouring their pain, confusion and questions.

Guidebook Three is written specifically for the support person. Please turn to that guide for a greater understanding of your role in the grieving process. *Guidebook Four* offers a structured training program for those in a support role (friends, family members, health care providers, funeral staff, clergy, veterinarian staff, educational staff).

13. Don't assume you know how someone feels in their grief.

If you have experienced loss yourself, you may have empathy, but remember that this is not your journey. You truly don't know how the grieving person is feeling.

It is really hard for a grieving person to hear, 'I know how you feel'. Actually, you know how *you* felt, but you cannot know how they feel. Think about that. How could you know about their story of loss, all the intricacies, the private elements, the butterfly effects. Relationships are so intricate we can't begin to assume we know anything.

Instead, use your own loss experiences as a reference. The grieving person finds comfort in knowing that you have experienced loss. That is all that needs to be said until more is asked for. Your loss has made you open to grief. That is the perfect place to begin.

If you have not experienced the loss of someone but want to support, that's OK too. Rather than trying to figure out what they must be feeling, come to them with a "teach me about your loss" attitude. The grieving person is the expert on their loss. Let them teach you and take the lead. Your open heart will be the biggest gift you can offer them.

Please refer to *Guidebook Three* or *Four* for more strategies on becoming a support person for someone in grief.

Closing Thoughts

Take a big breath. That's a lot of information you've just consumed. Let it percolate a bit and then come back and read it again, and again.

If you are in the role of a support person and have just read Guidebook One, you may be feeling that you have done a poor job in responding to those in their grief in the past. Remember, be kind to yourself. You were working from the only system of grief you have been exposed to. This is your opportunity to shift and come alongside the grieving person in new and helpful ways. You will discover that you can make a difference in their grief journey, and that by doing so, you are also changed. You will learn and grow. You will be humbled to be invited into the sacred space of their grief. You will become a safe person, one of a very few, for your grieving friends. The Remember, It's OK books are for you, to support you as you support grieving people, as are Guidebooks Three and Four.

If you have suffered a loss and have just read Guidebook One, you may be feeling relief and affirmation. This is how you feel and what you have experienced. Perhaps there is a part of you that intuitively knew that these truths are indeed what grief is about and you feel validated. Wouldn't it be wonderful if your friends knew some of these things as they strive to support you in your grief. Feel free to share this document with them. It may open up some good conversations and lead to more informed support for you in your grief. And if you would like more guidance on your grief journey, please download Guidebook Two, that we wrote just for you. May you find supportive people and healing on your grief journey.

Bravo!!!

**You have entered a new paradigm for grief.
You are now part of the healing conversation around grief!!**

NOTE:

If you would like to know more about our books (how we created them, about the colours we chose, what was our process etc) please go to our websites. There you will find podcasts, articles and pages that will give you more in-depth information about the books and how to care for yourself, as one in grief or as a support person. Each website offers something unique.

RememberItsOk.com MarinaLReed.com

PLEASE CONTINUE AND DOWNLOAD....

Guidebook Two: For the One in Grief

Guidebook Three: For the Support Person

Guidebook Four: The 8 Session Program for Grief

Let's all begin to create a healing conversation around grief.

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