

Grief Resources that Helped Me, Especially Early on

By Jenny Robbins, Kade's mom

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My grief therapist

Immediately after my son, Kade's death, my mom got a referral list of grief therapists from Judi's House, a center for grieving children in Denver, CO. I'm glad she thought to do that because the therapist I ended up seeing from that list was instrumental in my healing. She is a Fellow in Thanatology (FT), the study of death, dying, and bereavement from the Association of Death Education Counseling (ADEC). I have since learned that not all therapists have grief, bereavement, and trauma training, and some who are untrained in this area may perpetuate society's harmful messages around grieving. It may be important to find a grief therapist trained in bereavement by referral of a grief center or hospice.

The Compassionate Friends (TCF) local chapter meetings

I have attended my local chapter of The Compassionate Friends (TCF), nationwide support for grieving parents, grandparents, and siblings since about 7 weeks after Kade died. Some people do not like the idea of a group. I relished it because it gave me something to DO when I felt like I had no idea what to do with myself. compassionatefriends.org

The Compassionate Friends (TCF) national conferences

My mom and I attended the TCF National Conference in Chicago (held each summer in a different city), which was a moving and informational experience. My mom and I have cofacilitated workshops for the national conference for the last 2 years. compassionatefriends.org

GRASP – Grief Recovery After a Substance Passing

This organization offers groups for those who lost someone to a substance-related death. The only meeting in the Denver Metro area is in Aurora. Aurora: grasphehelp.org/southeast-denver-chapter/, National: grasphehelp.org

Grief buddies

For me, some of the best reasons to regularly attend groups were the friendships I made on the side. Early on I had a lot of coffee dates with different moms. I gained a network of friends who are now like family, who "get it."

MISS Foundation Selah Retreat for Traumatically Bereaved

This retreat is offered every spring in Sedona, AZ. It was one of the most healing experiences I've had. Attendees were all bereaved parents, grandparents, and adult siblings. The focus was to "fully inhabit" our grief. MISS Foundation was founded by Dr. Joanne Cacciatore, preeminent researcher, professor, and clinician in child loss. Scholarships are available. missfoundation.org

Spark of Life retreat

Spark of Life offers FREE grief retreats all over the country. Yes, free. For me it was a powerful experience. The exercises helped me set aside some of my guilt. They use the Grief Recovery Method from the book, *The Grief Recovery Handbook* (terrible name, some good content). The founder of Spark of Life is a bereaved grandfather and former pastor, but the retreat was not faith-based and felt welcoming to all. sparkoflife.org

Journaling/writing

In those acute, raw early weeks and months, my therapist suggested journaling to get my feelings out. This has been a helpful outlet for me over the years. I use the first half of my journal to get my thoughts out and the second half to write to my son.

I have a guided journal called *Angel Catcher: A Journal of Loss and Remembrance* by Kathy and Amy Eldon. I use it when I need a prompt to get me going. It's amazing how once I start writing how much I remember.

I created a blog about my grief and healing journey (heworeflannel.com), and I was a member of a writer's group. These writing outlets helped me process my grief and preserve memories.

Workshops/classes

I took comfort in seeking out workshops and classes. I attended workshops at a grief center called *HeartLight Center* in Aurora on guilt and grieving, sudden and traumatic loss, and participated in a healing arts day. Grief centers and some larger hospices have a variety of offerings. heartlightcenter.org

Yoga

I feel as if I practically spent two-and-a-half years on my couch after Kade died. When I felt ready to get off the couch and move my body, I started back up with yoga (something gentle). I preferred an intimate studio and did not want to go to a loud, bright rec center or gym. I often feel connected with Kade on my mat, when I was quiet and attending to my spiritual and physical self. I still prefer intimate yoga studios but can now tolerate a rec center. I mostly do yoga at home. Yoga with Adriene is my favorite (free on YouTube).

Books

Here are some of my favorite grief books:

After the Darkest Hour the Sun will Shine Again: A Parent's Guide to Coping with the Loss of a Child by Elizabeth Mehren

The short passages were perfect when it was difficult for my brain to focus in early grief. I also somehow took comfort in reading about famous people who lost a child.

Healing After Loss: Daily Meditations for Working Through Grief

This daily devotional was also good for my short attention span.

Bearing the Unbearable: Love, Loss, and the Heartbreaking Path of Grief by Dr. Joanne Cacciatore

This is my #1 favorite grief book. I love the work of Dr. Joanne Cacciatore (mentioned above), who lost a child, found there was not sufficient support for child loss, got her PhD to contribute to the field of grief, and founded MISS Foundation. I recommend this book for any clinician or individual to better understand traumatic grief.

It's OK that You're not OK by Megan Devine

This is my second favorite grief book. I connected so much to this book. She touched on subjects I had not heard tackled before. In addition to the griever, it is a good resource for the loved ones and supporters of those who have experienced profound loss.

The Grief Club by Melody Beattie

This is one of the earliest books I read in my grieving, written by Melody Beattie of *Codependent no More* fame, who lost a child. It brought to light how important it is to find a good support group.

Man's Search for Meaning by Dr. Victor Frankl

Where had this book been all my life? The author was a survivor of Nazi camps and created logotherapy, a counseling theory that focuses on finding meaning, even in the most terrible of circumstances. It is a short read and has more passages that are meaningful to me than I could flag with sticky notes (I tried).

The Alchemy of Grief by Dr. Annamarie Fidel-Rice

This book written by my Grief Counseling class professor, Dr. Annamarie Fidel-Rice, is a beautiful and poetic analogy of grief.

A to Z Healing Toolbox: A Practical Guide for Navigating Grief and Trauma with Intention by Susan Hannifin-MacNab

This concise book is packed with resources, stories, and activities. I answered her call for contributors and provided the “healing story” for the letter P: Peer mentors.

GriefLand: An Intimate Portrait of Love, Loss, and Unlikely Friendship by Armen Bacon and Nancy Miller

This book is about two moms' experiences of losing their beautiful young adult children to substance use and spoke to me in my early grief. I took comfort in reading what I, too, went through, and they each wrote eloquently.

Websites

These websites have helped me personally, academically, and professionally:

MISS Foundation – This is the website of Dr. Joanne Cacciatore, one of my favorite mentors in grief. Provides C.A.R.E. (counseling, advocacy, research, and education) services to families experiencing the death of a child. missfoundation.org

What's Your Grief? – Grief education, exploration, and expression in practical and creative ways. This site has a wealth of research-based topics. whatsyourgrief.com

Refuge in Grief – Validation and practical tools for living with grief. refugeingrief.com

The Dougy Center – National Center for Grieving Children and Families. dougy.org

National Alliance for Grieving Children – childrengrieve.org

Camp Erin Denver - Shimmering Wings

This is a weekend camp for grieving children and teens. I heard for years that it was reputable, but when my younger son attended, we were in awe of how well-run it was. My then-9-year-old had a wonderful experience and my husband and I highly recommend it. shimmeringwings.org.

Judi's House

I learned that my younger son would experience grief differently as he reached different developmental milestones, and that is what has happened. Judi's House helped our family, who were all grieving very differently. Judi's House offers groups, individual, and family therapy and is a phenomenal research-based free resource. Look for a center for grieving children in your area. judishouse.org.