



for sober readers, the first 24 hours, the first week, the anniversary

Grief in Recovery

how to grieve without using — and without pretending you're fine

—

A free guide from Heart of Care.

For the people who got sober and then lost someone — and for the people grieving someone they lost to the disease they survived.





What this guide is for



Grief in recovery is its own beast. The thing that used to take the edge off is the exact thing you cannot use. The thing that killed your person may be the thing you are currently saying no to, one day at a time. That is a particular kind of bind, and it deserves a particular kind of plan.

This guide is short on purpose. It is built to be opened at 2 a.m. on a bad night, not studied. Three windows: the first 24 hours, the first week, the anniversary.

You do not have to grieve well. You only have to grieve sober.





The first 24 hours



Your body will lie to you. It will tell you this is the exception. It will tell you nobody would blame you. It will reach for the old answer because the old answer is the only one it knows.

A small plan for the first day:

- **Tell one person before the day is over.** Sponsor, peer, friend who knows. Out loud, not just text. Their voice is part of the plan.
- **Eat something warm.** Even if it's toast. Cold and hungry is when the old answer gets loud.
- **Move the bottle, the pills, the paraphernalia, the bookmark.** Out of the house if you can. Into a locked drawer if you can't.
- **Plan tonight, not the rest of your life.** Where will you sleep. Who will you call. What will you do at 9 p.m. when the house gets quiet.





The first week



After the first day, the world goes back to work. You may not. You may feel grief and rage at the casseroles, the “let me know if you need anything,” the silence that follows when you actually do.

A week-shaped plan:

- **One meeting more than usual.** Not because you’re weak. Because grief is heavy and you are not meant to hold it alone in a quiet room.
- **Two slow walks.** Outside. Phone in pocket, not in hand. Twenty minutes is plenty.
- **One person on standby.** Tell them: “I might call this week. If I do, just pick up.”
- **One thing you do not do.** Pick the one thing — a person, a place, a website, a song — that you know would unravel you this week. Do not do it this week. You can do it later.

Grieving sober is not glamorous. It looks like soup and walks and answering the phone.





What grief does to recovery (so you can name it)



It is normal, in the first weeks of grief, for the following to happen:

- Old cravings come back loud, even after years.
- Sleep breaks. You wake at 3 a.m. and the dead are louder than they were at dinner.
- You feel furious at the program, at God, at the meetings, at the language.
- You feel nothing for stretches and then everything all at once.

None of this means your recovery is failing. It means your recovery is doing its job — holding you while a real and terrible thing happens to you.





The anniversary



The first anniversary is its own day. Your body will know before your calendar does. You may wake up sad and not know why until lunch.

A small ritual you can borrow:

- **Light something.** A candle. A porch light. Anything that says: I am marking this.
- **Say their name out loud.** Once is enough. To another person if you can. To the room if you can't.
- **Do one thing they would have liked.** Their meal. Their song. Their walk. Not a performance — a small private nod.
- **Call one person before the day ends.** Not to talk about it necessarily. Just so a human voice touches the day.





If you lost someone to the disease you survived



Survivor's guilt is its own grief. Why them and not me is not a question with an answer, but it is a question you are allowed to ask. You did not get sober at their expense. You did not take a recovery that was meant for them. The disease is the disease. It took who it took. You did not negotiate the trade.

Staying sober in their honor is not a betrayal. It is, often, the only honest tribute available to you.

If the grief is making the program feel hollow, that is information — not evidence. It usually means the grief needs a place that is not a meeting: a therapist, a grief group, a peer with the same loss, a long conversation with someone who will not flinch.





a closing word

Grieve sober. That is the whole assignment.

Not gracefully. Not beautifully. Not on a schedule. Sober. Today. And, if you can, tomorrow. The rest will figure itself out in slower time than you want it to.

You are allowed to grieve loud, ugly, repetitive, sober.



Companion guides in The Resource Barn at heart-of-care.life: When the Living Won't Pick Up and The Official Story Was Wrong. The full workbook is coming to the shop.

Written for Uncle David, and for everyone trying. — Briana, the Honey Badger

sit on the porch a moment

What now?

You just finished Grief in Recovery.

Grieving without using is one of the hardest, bravest things a person can do. You don't have to do it in one sitting.

Your Relapse Prevention Plan + Soft Landings

A fill-in plan for tonight, and the tender workbook for the long haul. Both waiting on the porch.

Sit on the porch →

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with care · Heart of Care · written for Uncle David