

# Grief Before Loss

Navigating Anticipatory Grief





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## Navigating Anticipatory Grief

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# Foreword

As a psychiatrist, I have witnessed firsthand the profound impact that grief can have on individuals and families. Grief is a complex and multifaceted experience. Among the various forms of grief, anticipatory grief is often an overlooked aspect of the grieving process. This guidebook by Allkin Singapore seeks to illuminate this crucial yet less-recognised facet of grief, providing valuable insights and support to those navigating its complexities.

Grief affects individuals emotionally, psychologically, physically, and socially. Unlike traditional grief, anticipatory grief – which occurs before an impending loss – has a dual focus on the present and future, creating a unique emotional landscape where individuals experience a blend of hope, fear, and sorrow. Its preoccupation with the future leads to anxiety due to the need for preparation and planning, role changes, a need for support that may be misconstrued, and feelings of isolation. This ambiguous nature of loss, while the loved one is still alive, can complicate the grieving process and increase the risk of prolonged grief disorders.

Despite its profound and deep impact, anticipatory grief is not as well recognised or discussed, as we tend to focus on dealing with grief after a loss rather than in anticipation of it. However, there is growing awareness and acknowledgment of anticipatory grief within healthcare and support communities in Singapore. Despite this progress, dedicated resources or structured approaches to anticipatory grief remain relatively new.

As a community-centric social service agency, Allkin believes that grief should not be a lonely battle, but a shared journey that is coped with alongside the community. With the contributions and insights of caregivers, partners, and other stakeholders, Allkin has co-created

a special guidebook featuring their expertise, lived experiences, and collective wisdom. While existing resources primarily address post-loss grief, the guidebook enables people to navigate anticipatory grief by equipping them with the tools and knowledge they need to navigate this challenging time in their lives.

By offering advice and frameworks for managing emotional and practical challenges, this book educates caregivers and loved ones about the nature and impact of anticipatory grief, effective coping strategies, and tools for maintaining well-being. At the same time, it enables individuals to understand their feelings and responses, facilitate better communication with loved ones, and seek help where needed.

This book is designed to guide individuals towards building resilience and finding balance, even in the face of impending loss. More than just a resource, it is a companion for those journeying through anticipatory grief. It is my hope that this guidebook will serve as a beacon of understanding and comfort, helping individuals and families navigate the complexities of anticipatory grief with compassion and resilience.

**- Dr Lim Boon Leng**

Psychiatrist, Dr BL Lim Centre For Psychological Wellness

Chair, Mental Health Sub-Committee of Service Committee, Allkin Singapore



"Anticipatory  
grief is a journey  
best navigated with  
understanding, resilience,  
and the support of a  
compassionate  
community."



# Preface

This is a pilot project by CREST Allkin @ Bishan East-Sin Ming, Kebun Baru SMC, Marymount SMC, and Teck Ghee. The idea of a self-help guide came about after a brainstorming session on bridging possible service gaps in our community. A needs survey was done with a group of 100 peers to find out current views of anticipatory grief. The results revealed low awareness on anticipatory grief and also reported some interest in learning more.

The team embarked on a year-long project to research and ultimately put together this book for caregivers who may face an impending loss of their loved ones. We hope this guide can help to raise awareness and equip readers with knowledge on anticipatory grief to better manage one's emotions when the situation arises.

This book is only possible with the support of our colleagues. We would also like to thank our service partners for contributing their time in validating the content of this book.

**Disclaimer:** This book is written in a first-person perspective of a fictional character. The stories and characters used in this guidebook are fictional. Any resemblance to actual persons or actual events is entirely coincidental.

The information in this book are meant purely for informational and educational purposes only. The information presented here do not replace professional medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. If you have questions about a medical condition, always seek the advice of a doctor or other qualified health professional.

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# Dear Reader



When I first found out that my husband Alex had only 3 months to live, I felt lost and helpless. I was overwhelmed with emotions I did not understand.

Understanding that I was experiencing anticipatory grief and that it was natural helped me to process my emotions.

In this book, I describe my journey and experience with anticipatory grief, in hopes that it can help you on your own journey.

If you ever feel overwhelmed at any point in this book, it is alright to put it down and pick it up again another day.

You are not alone. Let us work through our grief together.

With Love,

*Jamie*



*"One of  
the hardest  
things that you'll  
ever have to do is  
to grieve the loss of  
someone who is  
still alive."*



# Chapter 1

## Introduction to Anticipatory Grief





# Chapter 1

## Grief is Natural



Grief is a natural emotional response to loss. It could be an actual, tangible loss (e.g. loss of a family member, friend, or pet) or perceived loss (e.g. loss of freedom, loss of functions). Serious illness, loss of a limb, an accident, a divorce, or other significant life events can also cause grief.

Being aware of anticipatory grief creates an opportunity for loved ones to grieve together and find reconciliation.



I wanted to make the most of my remaining time with Alex. I wanted to be happy while I still had him by my side. But I found myself grieving. Why was I feeling this way? Alex was still around. Why did I feel like he was gone?

# Anticipatory vs Post-Loss Grief

Unlike post-loss grief where a loved one has already passed on, anticipatory grief is a different type of grief. Anticipatory grief can also result from watching our loved ones age and witnessing the progression of conditions like dementia and terminal cancer.

Being aware of anticipatory grief creates an opportunity for loved ones to grieve together and find reconciliation.

Anticipatory Grief	Post-Loss Grief
Occurs before a loss	Occurs after a loss
It is a reaction to imminent loss, grieving for someone who is still alive	A reaction to a loss that has already occurred
Forward-looking	Backward-looking



I did not know why I was feeling the way I felt. However, when I found out about anticipatory grief, I was better able to identify and acknowledge these emotions inside of me.

# What Happens during Anticipatory Grief?

Anticipating the loss of a loved one can take a toll on our physical, mental, and spiritual health. When this occurs, we may find it difficult to be present with our loved ones even when we are physically with them, or have the time to spend with them.

We may even experience emotional, physical, cognitive, or spiritual changes. For example:

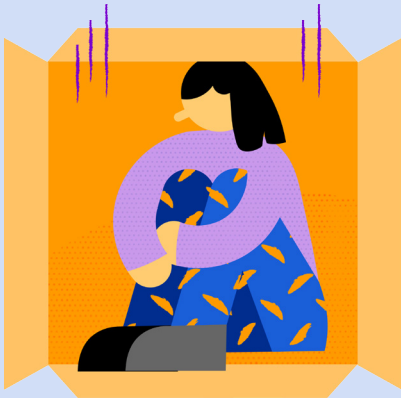
Emotional	Physical	Cognitive	Spiritual
Anger	Exhaustion	Loss of focus	Re-evaluation of spiritual beliefs
Loneliness	Digestive problems	Memory loss or forgetfulness	
Anxiety	Difficulty falling asleep	Difficulty making decisions	
Sadness			
Guilt	Bodily aches		



Even when Alex was still around, I found myself exhausted, anxious, ridden with guilt. I was eating and sleeping poorly, and I could not focus. It was a difficult time in my life.

# Phases of Anticipatory Grief

(for a caregiver)



## 1. Realisation

Sadness often occurs at the beginning when the individual realises that the death of a loved one **cannot be avoided** and has **lesser or no expectation for a cure**.



## 2. Reflection

The individual starts to have **extreme concerns** for the dying loved one. During this phase, the individual may reflect on one's past interactions with their loved one and feel guilty or regretful over one's past actions towards them.

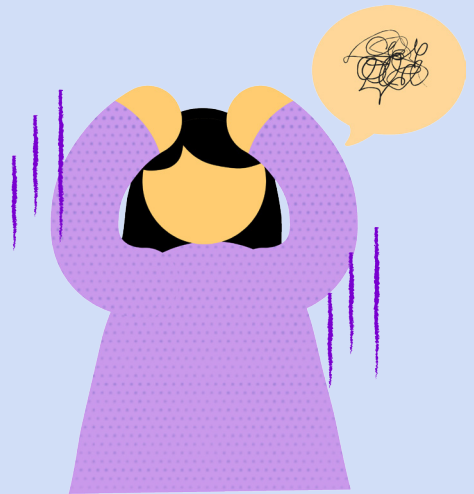


## 3a. Rehearsal

At this phase, the individual may find oneself **rehearsing the actual death of a loved one in one's mind** to prepare oneself for it. This can be mentally and emotionally tiring for the individual experiencing it.

## 3b. Reconciliation

The individual may also seek forgiveness from their dying loved one for past actions and **begin to discuss with them about their wishes for themselves and for the family**, such as arrangements for their funeral, distribution of assets or care plans for the family after their passing.



## 4. Re-imagination

The individual may begin to **imagine how life will be like without their loved one after they have passed on** and envision future events without them around.



Anticipatory grief is not a linear process. I often experienced different phases at the same time. I remember rehearsing for Alex's death and re-imagining a life without him at the same time.

Some days, I moved forward through the phases, some days backwards. I could be doing better one day, and feel much worse the next.

# Reflection

Think about a time when you were about to face a significant loss in your life. How did you feel?

If you find it difficult to put your thoughts in words, you can also draw symbols or images!

A large rectangular area with a thick orange border, containing horizontal dashed lines for writing or drawing.

Looking back, I wished I had known I was experiencing anticipatory grief.

Knowing that it was a natural emotion would have helped me work through my confusion and guilt.



# Chapter 2

## Self-Help





Dear Diary,  
today I...



I should do  
this journaling  
exercise with  
Alex.



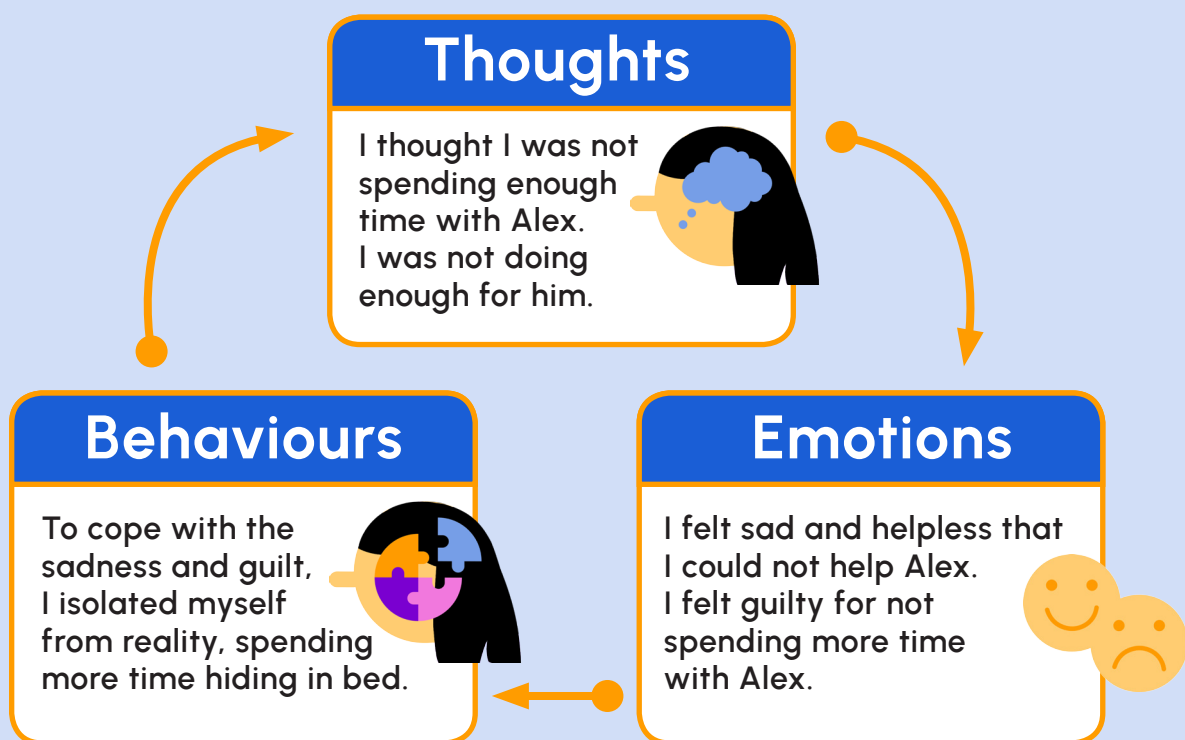
I will  
treasure  
this!



# Chapter 2

## Understanding Yourself

As Alex's illness progressed, I found myself trapped in an endless negative spiral.



My negative thoughts were influencing my feelings and causing me to waste what precious time I had hiding from the world. I would be so disappointed and ashamed of myself for hiding, leading me to have more negative thoughts.

This was not the way I wanted to spend the precious little time I had with Alex. I needed to break out of this endless cycle of negativity.




# Using a Thought Diary

When I encountered negative thoughts or experienced negative emotions, I used the **Thought Diary** below to record and process them.

A thought diary helped me to see how my emotions, thoughts and behaviours affect one another, and how I can change, adapt or cope with them.

## Example of a Thought Diary

What happened?	I forgot Alex's medical appointment as it was an overwhelming week from work and caregiving duties.
What was I thinking?	I am useless. I am not a good caregiver. I've let Alex down.
How did I feel?	I felt angry and disappointed at myself.
What did I do?	I cried and kept apologising to Alex.
How can I think differently?	It is only human to forget things amid such a busy schedule. I am doing my best.



I found myself sorting through all those tangled emotions through the thought diary. I realised that by facing my emotions head-on, I could actually be there for Alex with a clearer mind and lighter heart.

## Template of Thought Diary

What happened?	
What was I thinking?	
How did I feel?	
What did I do?	
How can I think differently?	

# Looking Back at Our Lives

## Self-Help: A Life Review

One morning, Alex told me that he felt he has lost sight of what he has experienced in life due to the attention he has placed on his illness.

I was looking for ways that would help Alex better appreciate and accept what he has achieved in life, when I came across the Life Review exercise.

Together, we went through his life journey, with all its ups and downs, and found that it helped our mental health and well-being.



Alex and I laughed and smiled so much while completing the life review exercise. We reminisced on his life experiences - the good and the bad - and at the end of it, we felt so warm.

This was a fond memory I would treasure forever.

# Life Review Exercise

By doing these exercises with Alex, I have learnt some tips to make the process enjoyable and meaningful for both of us.

## 1. Pace the Questions

It can be overwhelming to look back at our lives. It is okay to take breaks and split the exercise into several sessions.

## 2. Ask Open-Ended Questions

The samples on the next page are questions that facilitate recollection. Talk widely and openly, and do not feel confined to the sample questions.

## 3. Listen Attentively and Show Interest

Encourage your loved one to openly share their milestones and memories.

## 4. Empathise and Relate in a Sensitive Way

Give your loved one time and space to work through complicated emotions. Show that you are there for them, and that they can open up to you.

## 5. Use Photographs, Letters, Etc.

Physical mementos are powerful tools for stimulating memory and help your loved one explain their life more vividly.

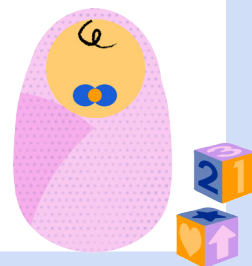
# Life Review Exercise

You may use any of the provided questions for any of the life stages. These questions are provided as a reference and can be adjusted or skipped if the loved one feels uncomfortable.

## Questions

### Childhood

- ◆ When and where were you born?
- ◆ What was your community like growing up?
- ◆ Tell me about your parents/guardians/siblings.
- ◆ How would you describe yourself during your childhood?



### Teenage Years

- ◆ What was your experience like in school?
- ◆ What was it like when you were a teenager?



### Young Adulthood

- ◆ Describe your journey into adulthood.
- ◆ Describe the places you have lived during this period.
- ◆ Share your favourite memories from this time in your life.
- ◆ Tell me about your first job or career.
- ◆ What are the significant relationships in your life (e.g. spouse, close friends)? Tell me more.



# Life Review Exercise

## Questions

### Middle Adulthood

- ◆ How did your responsibilities and priorities shift?
- ◆ Did you have children? Tell me about them.
- ◆ What were some of the most significant challenges you faced during middle adulthood?
- ◆ Who were you close to?



### Seniorhood

- ◆ How have your friendships changed through the years?
- ◆ How do/did you feel about retirement?
- ◆ Describe your current health and your feelings about it.
- ◆ What do you hope to pass on to your family?



### Personal

- ◆ What have you learnt in life?
- ◆ What are three most important things in your life? Why?
- ◆ What about your life would you change, improve or keep the same?
- ◆ What do you appreciate about yourself?





## Teenage Years

What was your experience like in school?  
What was it like when you were a teenager?

**Answer:**

A series of horizontal dashed lines for writing an answer.







## Seniorhood

How have your friendships changed through the years?  
How do/did you feel about retirement?  
Describe your current health and your feelings about it.  
What do you hope to pass on to your family?

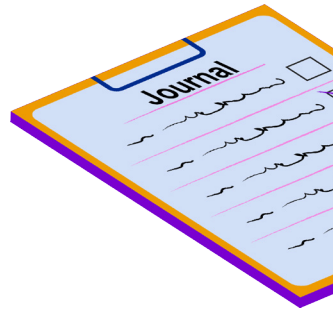
## Answer:

A large area for writing answers, consisting of multiple horizontal dashed lines.





# Journalling



There are times where I felt I had an overwhelming wave of emotions. I started journalling and found it helpful to process my emotions and express myself. It can be done on a daily, weekly or monthly basis depending on one's comfort level.

There is no right or wrong way to grieve. Journalling can provide a safe space for the grieving individual to heal at one's own pace.



Now that I'm reading my past journal entries, I can see how it really helped me to understand myself better by delving deeper into my emotions, thoughts, behaviours and reactions.

# Journal Prompts

I found some journal prompts that may be useful for you to kickstart your journalling journey:



Write a mantra that you can refer to when you feel overwhelmed by anticipatory grief. E.g. "I recognise painful moments but I know it will pass."

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What is one thing you wish your loved ones would understand?

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Whenever I start to feel overwhelmed with anticipatory grief, I will...

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# Journal Prompts

This experience has taught me...

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Here are 3 ways I can be compassionate with myself today...

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3 things I am grateful for today...

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# Chapter 3

## Support during End-of-Life



# Chapter 3

## Support during End-of-Life

When Alex was approaching the end of his life, I felt scared, lost and confused. I hated the feeling of helplessness - not knowing what to do.

I learnt to recognise the things I could control and those I could not. I could not control Alex's illness but I could manage my emotions by learning more about how to manage his condition and help him through this difficult time.

Planning for a future without him was scary, but it gave me a sense of control and reassurance that brought me some comfort.

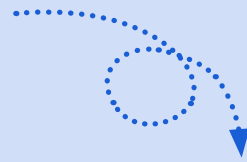


I learnt to focus on what I could do, instead of worrying about things that I could not control.

Preparing for the future allowed me to learn how to better support myself and Alex, emotionally, mentally and physically.

# Resources to Help You Prepare

Here are some resources that I have explored, which helped me to better prepare for the future. Feel free to explore them too! Scan the QR codes below for more information.



Identifying the Signs and Symptoms of End-of-Life



Communicating about End-of-Life Matters



# Having a Sense of Control

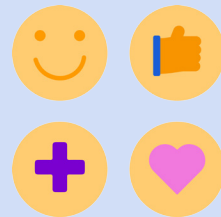
Feeling like you have no control over your life may lead to anxiety, anger or sadness.

Increasing your sense of control over your life helps you to feel more secure and reduces feelings of hopelessness and helplessness.

Here are 3 things you can focus on to increase your sense of control:

## Attitude

I chose to see the positive side of things. Instead of questioning why Alex fell ill, I chose to be glad that we had such a wonderful life together.



## Effort

I chose to focus on the things I can do, and to do them well. The satisfaction of a job well done gave me a sense of control.



## Action

By not shying away from the world and by taking concrete steps towards my goals, I found a sense of progress and motivation to keep moving forward.



As I started to build a routine into my day-to-day life, it helped to increase my sense of control. This helped me to feel more secure and reduced my anxieties.

# What Happens If I Am Not Around?

While caring for Alex, I sometimes worried about what would happen to him if I were not around or if something were to happen to me that prevented me from continuing his care. Leaving Alex in the care of others made me anxious, since he depended so much on me. Others did not know his condition and care preferences as well as I did. What if something went wrong when I was absent?

I started to write down important details about caring for Alex, including details required for other caregivers to fulfil their roles based on my hopes and concerns.

I have included the template that I have used in the next few pages for you to try out.



I was worried that there may be times when I would not be able to take care of Alex. Planning ahead gave both Alex and I a sense of reassurance and security.

# All About My Loved One



**My Loved One,** \_\_\_\_\_  
(Write your loved one's name here.)

**Dear** \_\_\_\_\_  
(Write a message to a trusted individual about the care plan for your loved one below)

## Medical Information

(Include description of your loved one's health condition, medical history, doctors, hospitals and goals of care.)

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## Financial Information

(Include the finances to be managed.)

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## Medication

(Include current and past medication as well as allergies.)

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## Residential Needs

(Include past and present accommodation arrangements and future needs.)

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## Important Relationships

(Include names of trusted persons and why your loved one shares an important relationship with them.)

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# Useful Contacts

Name : .....

Contact Number : .....

Address : .....

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Email Address : .....

Name : .....

Contact Number : .....

Address : .....

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Email Address : .....

Name : .....

Contact Number : .....

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Contact Number : .....

Address : .....

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Email Address : .....

Name : .....

Contact Number : .....

Address : .....

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Email Address : .....

# Resources for Care Planning

Here are some resources that we can explore to finalise our care plans through Advance Care Planning, or through formal legal documents such as Lasting Power of Attorney.

Scan the QR codes below for more information on how to finalise your care plans.

## Future Planning: My Legacy Vault

Plan, store and share your legal, healthcare and estate matters safely with the people whom you trust.



## Future Planning: Trust Services for Persons with Disabilities

Special Needs Trust Company





# Dilemmas: To Tell or Not to Tell?

As a caregiver, I faced the heart-wrenching reality of Alex's poor prognosis. His serious illness shook our family to the core. Balancing hope and honesty, I had to navigate delicate conversations by ensuring his well-being while considering the emotional impact on everyone involved.



I struggled with the decision to tell our family about Alex's illness. It was another burden on top of all the things I now had to handle. How could I manage my friends' and family's emotions when I could barely manage my own?

# Should I Tell Them?

Whenever I had to decide if I should tell someone, I considered the following.

	Reasons	Reservations
Tell	<p>Is it necessary for this person to know?</p> <p>Can they help in caring for my loved one?</p> <p>Would I regret not telling them?</p>	<p>Will they think differently of me?</p> <p>Would this affect my relationship with this person?</p> <p>Am I able to handle their response without sacrificing my own mental health?</p> <p>Can I properly communicate my loved one's condition to this person?</p>
Not Tell	<p>Will there be any negative consequences if I tell this person about my loved one?</p> <p>Can I spare them the pain and grief from worrying about my loved one's condition?</p>	<p>Will keeping this secret become too much of a burden on my relationship with this person?</p> <p>What lengths would I have to go to, to keep my loved one's condition a secret? Would that become another burden?</p> <p>What situations would make it difficult to stick to my decision?</p>

# Critical Crossroads



# 4

## Chapter 4

### Seeking Help





Please take this test.



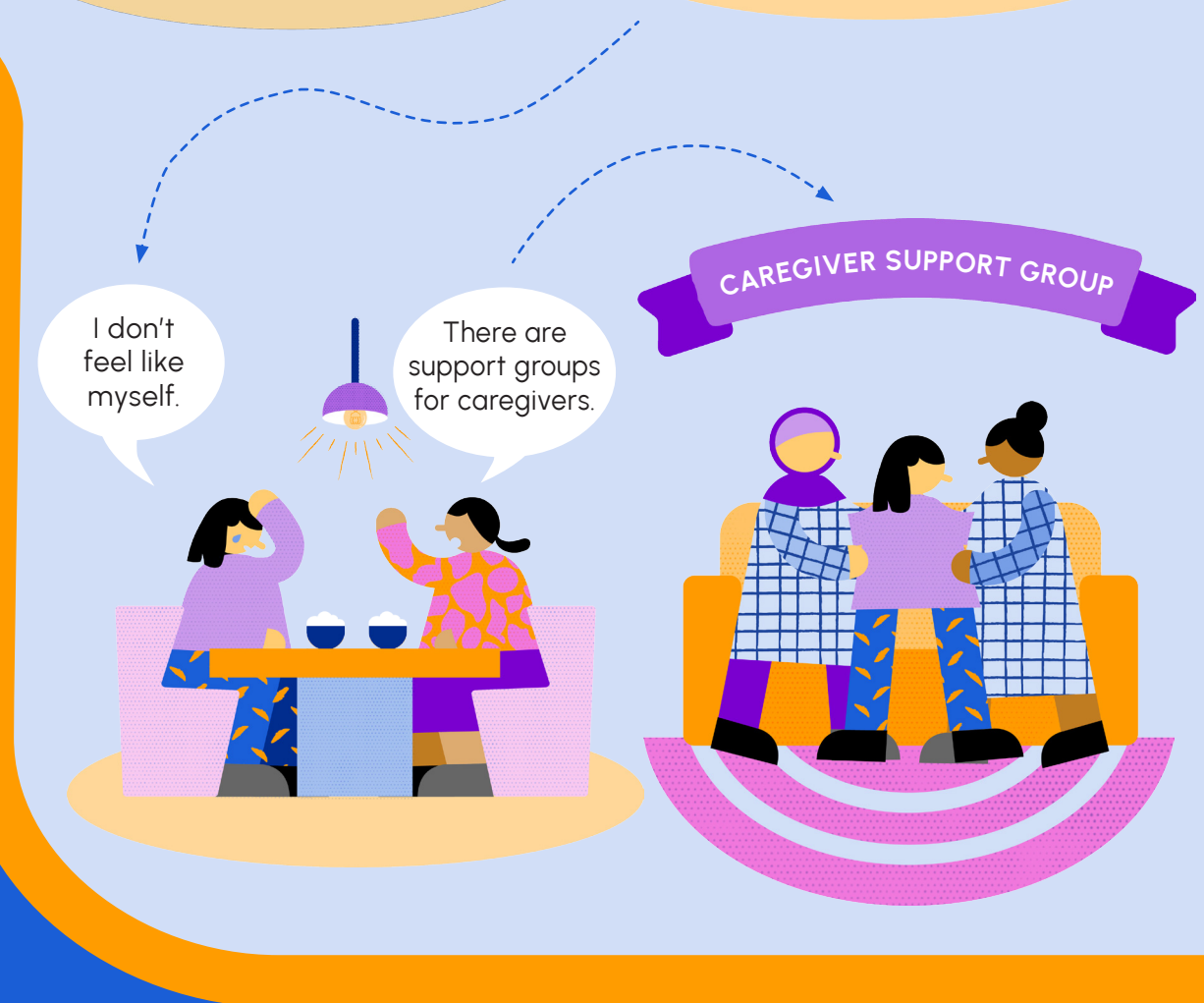
Oh God. What should I do?



I don't feel like myself.

There are support groups for caregivers.

### CAREGIVER SUPPORT GROUP



# Chapter 4

## When to Seek Help

I knew I had to seek help when I noticed myself experiencing the situations below:

1. Facing trouble with daily activities
2. Isolating from others and withdrawing from social activities
3. Excessive sadness, guilt or self-blame
4. Believing that I had done something wrong
5. Persistent thoughts and feelings of being worthless and hopeless
6. Having thoughts of suicide or self-harm

This was not me. I knew something was wrong.



As the toll of caregiving and grieving started to affect me, I experienced physical, emotional and spiritual symptoms. Below are just some of the symptoms I felt.

Grief does not affect everyone the same way. You might not experience the symptoms below, or you might even experience symptoms not listed.

The important thing is to realise that you need help.

## Physical Symptoms

- ◆ Headaches
- ◆ Changes in sleep and eating patterns
- ◆ Nausea
- ◆ Fatigue



## Emotional Symptoms

- ◆ Anxiety
- ◆ Sadness
- ◆ Helplessness
- ◆ Forgetfulness
- ◆ Anger
- ◆ Despair



## Spiritual Symptoms

- ◆ Questioning the existence of god
- ◆ Sense of abandonment by god
- ◆ Feelings of emptiness
- ◆ Loss of direction



With Alex's prognosis, I tried to spend as much time as possible caring for him at the expense of my self-care. There were days when I felt overwhelming sadness and anxiety. This affected my day-to-day life, including my sleep and appetite. That was when I realised I needed to seek help.

# Why Should We Seek Help?

Grief is a universal human experience. Sharing our feelings with someone can help us feel better.

When I was experiencing symptoms of anticipatory grief, I realised how useful it was to talk about it with someone and to seek help early. When I spoke to my loved ones, I was introduced to many community resources and hotlines which helped me greatly. I have included them in Chapter 6 of this guidebook for your reference too.

To better understand how I was feeling, I also attempted a few self-administered screening tools. Feel free to try them out in the next few pages to better understand how you are doing.



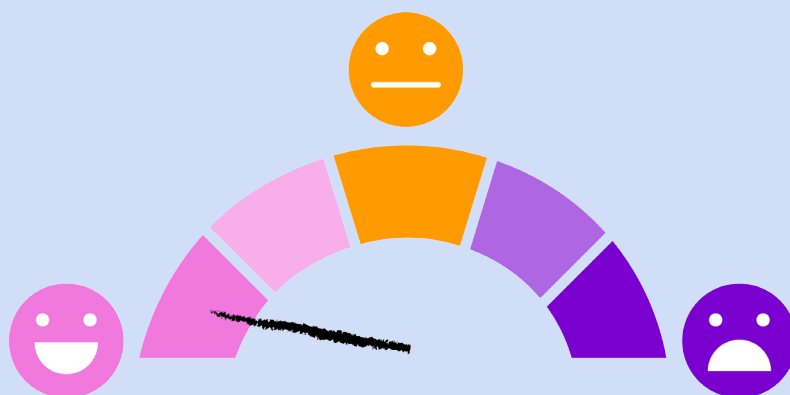
Using the screening tools allowed me to see my current status in the form of tangible numbers. This helped me to visualise how I was doing, and get the help that I needed.

# Assessment Tools

## Assessing Symptoms of Depression

### Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ9)

PHQ9 is a self-administered screening tool used to detect symptoms of depression and can be done on your own. However, diagnosis for depression can only be done by a psychiatrist and this is not to be used as a diagnostic tool by individuals.



### Instructions:

**1** Circle a score between "0 - Not at all" to "3 - Nearly every day" for each question.


**2** After completing all questions, add the total points for each row. This would be your final score.

**3** Based on the total score, you will be able to view the severity and next steps in the subsequent page.

## Template of Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ9)

No.	Statement	0 Not at all	1 Several days	2 More than half the days	3 Nearly every day
1	Little interest or pleasure in doing things	0	1	2	3
2	Feeling down, depressed or hopeless	0	1	2	3
3	Trouble falling or staying asleep, or sleeping too much	0	1	2	3
4	Feeling tired or having little energy	0	1	2	3
5	Poor appetite or overeating	0	1	2	3
6	Feeling bad about yourself - or that you are a failure or have let yourself or your family down	0	1	2	3
7	Trouble concentrating on things, such as reading the newspaper or watching television	0	1	2	3
8	Moving or speaking so slowly that other people could have noticed. Or the opposite - being so fidgety or restless that you have been moving around a lot more than usual	0	1	2	3
9	Thoughts that you would be better off dead, or of hurting yourself	0	1	2	3
Total					

## Score Interpretation of Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ9)

Score	Severity	Recommendation
0-4	Minimal or none	Monitor, may not require medical treatment
5-9	Mild	It is recommended to seek further assessment and treatment.  One may do so through visiting a General Practitioner (GP) or Polyclinic. One can also receive support through Community Outreach Teams (CREST).
10-14	Moderate	For more information on CREST, scan the following link/QR Codes:
15-19	Moderate severe	
20-27	Severe	

<https://supportgowhere.life.gov.sg/services/SVC-COTC/community-outreach-teams-crest>

# Assessing Caregiver Stress

## Zarit Burden Scale (ZBI)

Zarit Burden Scale (ZBI) is a tool commonly used to measure **caregiver stress**. It can be completed at your own discretion to understand the extent to which a caregiver perceives his or her level of burden (caregiver stress) as being a result of caring for a person.

### Instructions:

1

Circle a score between "0 - Never" to "4 - Nearly Always" for each question.

2

After completing the questionnaire, add the total points for each row. This would be your total score.

3

Based on the total score, you will be able to assess if you have caregiver stress and discover next steps that you can take.



## Template of Zarit Burden Scale (ZBI)

	Zarit Burden Scale	0 Never	1 Rarely	2 Some- times	3 Quite Fre- quently	4 Nearly Always
1	Do you feel that because of the time you spend with your relative, you don't have enough time for yourself?	0	1	2	3	4
2	Do you feel stressed between caring for your relative and trying to meet other responsibilities (work/family)?	0	1	2	3	4
3	Do you feel angry when you are around your relative?	0	1	2	3	4
4	Do you feel that your relative currently affects your relationship with family members or friends in a negative way?	0	1	2	3	4
5	Do you feel strained when you are around your relative?	0	1	2	3	4
6	Do you feel that your health has suffered because of your involvement with your relative?	0	1	2	3	4
7	Do you feel that you don't have as much privacy as you would like because of your relative?	0	1	2	3	4
8	Do you feel that your social life has suffered because you are caring for your relative?	0	1	2	3	4

9	Do you feel that you have lost control of your life since your relative's illness?	0	1	2	3	4
10	Do you feel uncertain about what to do about your relative?	0	1	2	3	4
11	Do you feel you should be doing more for your relative?	0	1	2	3	4
12	Do you feel you could do a better job in caring for your relative?	0	1	2	3	4
Total Score:						

A score of 17 or higher reflects high caregiver stress. Please approach a healthcare professional (e.g. Polyclinic or General Practitioner) or Community Outreach Teams for further assistance.

### Community Outreach Teams

Provide a community safety network for people with and/or are at risk of depression, dementia and other mental health conditions, as well as their caregivers.

<https://supportgowhere.life.gov.sg/services/SVC-COTC/community-outreach-teams-crest>



### Caregiver Support Groups

Provide caregivers with a platform to talk about their problems, listen to others, as well as offer help.

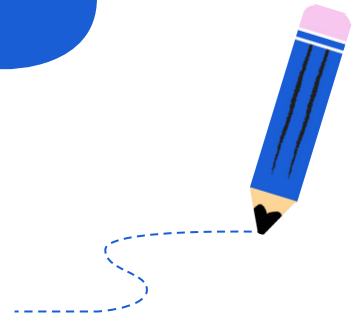
[https://www.healthhub.sg/a-z/support-groups-and-others/caregiver\\_support\\_groups](https://www.healthhub.sg/a-z/support-groups-and-others/caregiver_support_groups)



# Self-Reflection

How do you feel about your scores?

What is one step you can take to improve your well-being?



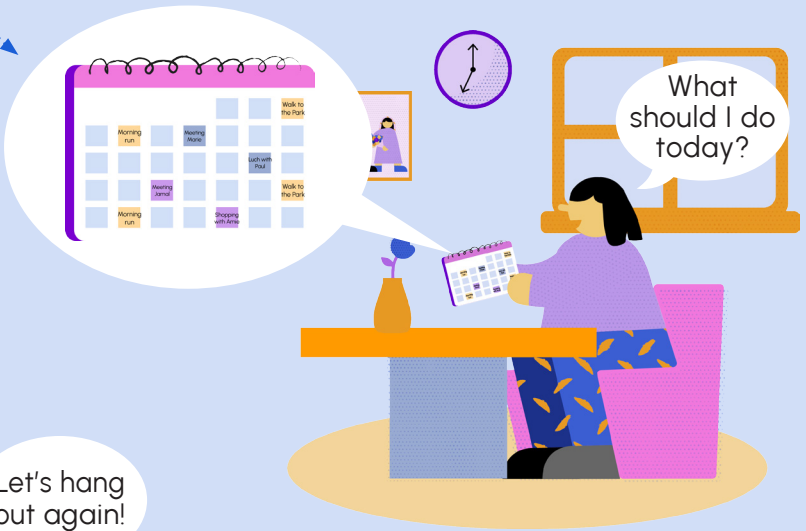
A series of horizontal dashed blue lines for writing.

# 5

## Chapter 5

### Coping with Post-Loss Grief





# Chapter 5

## When My Caregiving Journey Came to an End

As caregivers, sometimes our lives come to revolve around our loved one. When that is taken away from us, some of us may feel lost. When Alex passed on, it felt like the world I had come to be so familiar with collapsed within itself. Some days I am alright, but some days the waves of emotions almost make me feel like I might drown. However, most days I feel an emptiness inside me. It feels like my life is on pause.



# Coping with Post-Loss Grief

After I lost Alex, it was difficult for me to learn to manage my emotions and grief. It took time, but I slowly learnt how to cope.

I had to go through the process at my own pace. As I grieved, I found that certain actions helped me heal.

## 1 Talk About the Death

- Only when I chose to accept the fact that Alex was gone was I able to start the process of healing.
- I needed time to heal after Alex's death. I learnt to be patient with myself as I healed.
- I understood that Alex's death affected others in different ways, so I learnt how to be sensitive to how others felt.



## 2 Accept Our Feelings

- I learnt to accept that grief is a natural response to loss, and that the sadness I felt did not make me weak or less of a person.
- Writing down how I felt helped me understand what I was feeling and helped me work through my grief.
- Sometimes, I felt like grieving alone, and other times, I wanted company. Learning how to communicate my needs to my loved ones helped me have the space to slowly heal.



### 3 Reach out for Help

- Finding a therapist to help me with my post-loss grief helped me process my feelings and taught me how to cope in a healthy way.
- Turning to religious, social, and familial support groups gave me the support I needed during my grief.



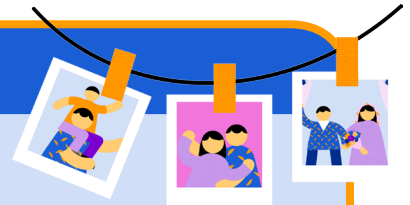
### 4 Spend Time with Loved Ones

- Sharing the memories of Alex with my loved ones brought us great comfort.
- They were the people who understood me best, especially because they were going through the same process as me.
- I felt supported knowing I was not alone.



### 5 Remember the Departed

- During Alex's birthday or our special anniversaries, and especially on the anniversary of his death, I would feel his absence acutely.
- I would take the day to take care of myself. I found time and space to remember him and to grieve.



Our loved ones never truly leave us. I find that sometimes the smallest thing reminds me of Alex. Other times, I would start talking to him, forgetting that he was gone. Those are times I miss him most.

I've learnt to embrace these feelings, and to be patient and kind with myself.

# Take Care of Yourself

Grief can take a toll on our emotional, mental and physical health. Here are some ways that I have tried to take care of myself.

## Physical Health

### 1 Get Sufficient Quality Sleep

- A predictable pattern can help your body adapt. Setting a time to go to bed and to wake up can help your body feel tired around the same time each day.
- Optimise your space for sleeping and remove things from your bedroom that distract you from sleeping. Consider getting blackout curtains, playing white noise in the background and ensuring good ventilation.



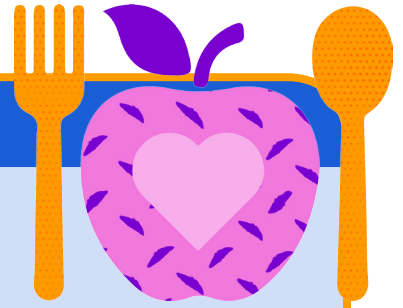
While Alex was still around, I spent all my time and energy with him, not wanting to waste a single moment with him.

However, neglecting my physical and mental health only intensified my anticipatory grief.

Taking care of myself was an important part of preparing myself physically and mentally for Alex's eventual passing.



## 2 Have a Balanced Diet



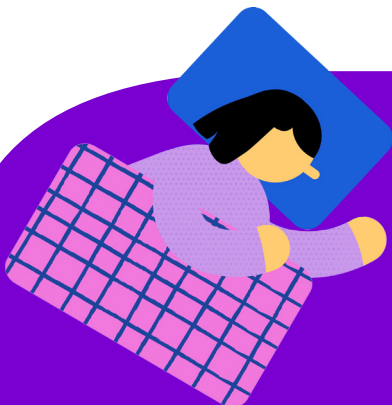
- Have plenty of vegetables, fruits and lean proteins.
- Drink plenty of water.
- If you have less of an appetite, try eating smaller portions more frequently and eventually build up to a normal meal.

## 3 Regular Exercise

- Physical activities help you build up a sense of control and freedom, alleviate feelings of sadness and anxiety, and better express your emotions.
- Group sports also help provide additional social support.



After Alex's passing, I came to understand the importance of taking time for oneself and prioritising both physical and mental health. Recognising this need, I began to focus more on my own well-being and to spend more time with friends and family.



These are some forms of exercise for you to consider:

1

Walking



2

Jogging



3

Swimming



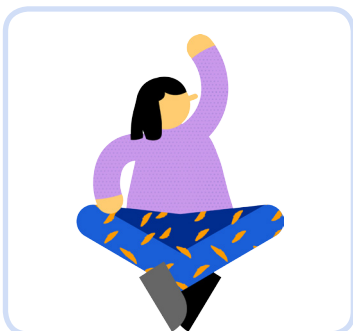
4

Cycling



5

Yoga



6

Basketball



7

Tennis



8

Zumba



9

Jump Rope



## Mental Health

### 1. Give Yourself Time to Grieve

- Healing happens gradually and the grieving process takes time.
- There is no 'normal' timeframe for grieving.
- Be patient and compassionate towards yourself and allow the process to naturally unfold.



# Mental Health

## 2. Express Your Emotions Through Meaningful and Healthy Activities

- Acknowledging and identifying your feelings are the first steps to managing them.
- Do not try to put a positive or negative spin on what you are going through. Take the time to explore what you are feeling and find healthy ways to express them.

Activities you can try include:



### Journalling

Write your thoughts and feelings in a journal or diary.



### Scrapbook Making

Create a scrapbook and personalise it with photos and stickers.



### Arts and Crafts

Do some arts and crafts to express your thoughts and emotions.



### Exercising

Get moving to help regulate your emotions and de-stress.



### Music

Listen to a song that brings you comfort or energy. You can also listen to a song that connects you to your loved one, if you wish. Some also play an instrument or sing. Most importantly, listen to music that suits what your heart needs today.

# Mental Health

## 3. Schedule an Activity That Brings You Joy Every Day

1 Take a walk with a friend.



2 Visit the library and read a new book.



3 Volunteer your time and skills.



4 Take a course and learn a new skill.



5 Watch your favourite shows.



6 Go out for a meal with your friends.



Here's how I kept myself mentally, physically and socially active:

Time	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
0900-1200	Walk at the park	Volunteer at an animal shelter	Walk at the park	Volunteer as a befriender for the elderly	Walk at the park
1200-1800		Meet Marie for high tea	Attend coffee making workshop	Lunch with Paul	
1800-2200			Cook up a storm!		Movie Night

I gave myself a lot of time to sit with my thoughts and emotions, and talked to my loved ones to process them. While it was difficult, putting together activities that brought me comfort helped tremendously.



# Rediscovering Your Identity

After Alex's passing, I found a sense of emptiness within me. The role that I once played in Alex's life was suddenly lost.

I needed to redefine my identity after losing such a significant part of my life.

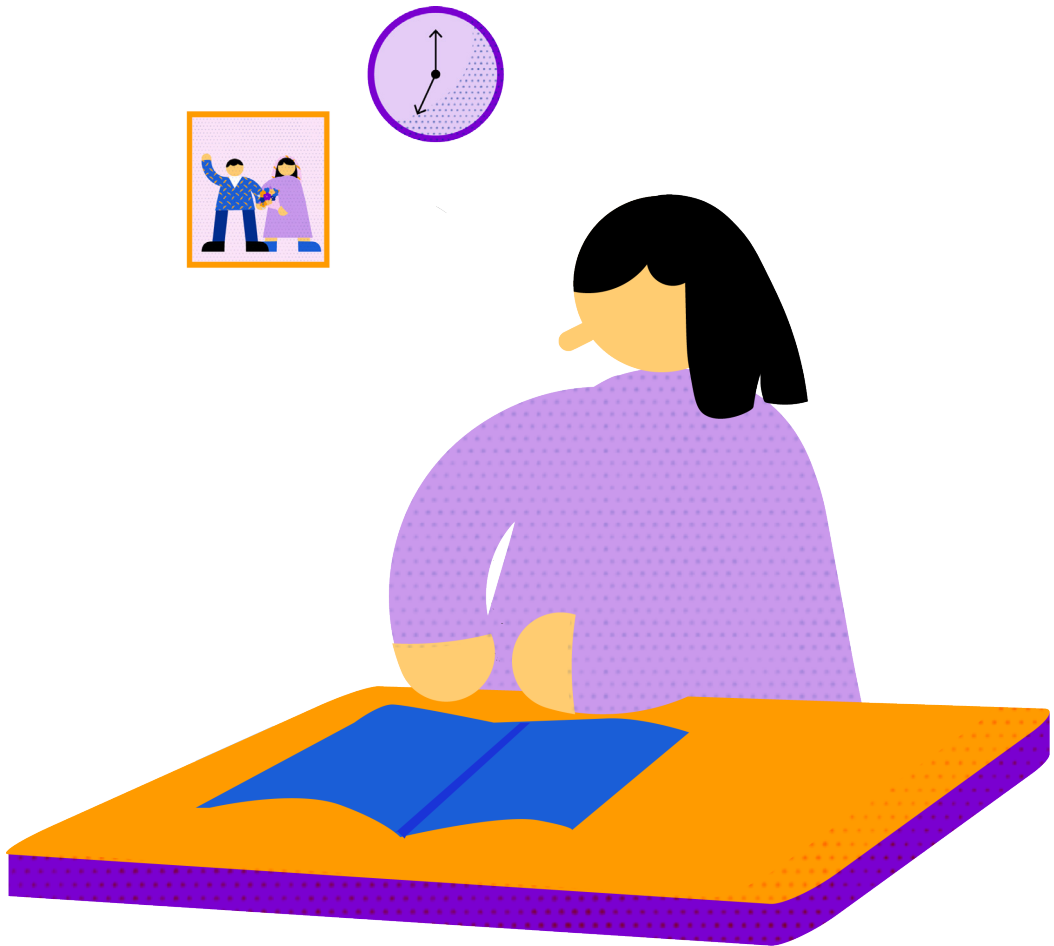
## 1 Rediscover My Interests and Hobbies

- ◆ What did I enjoy doing before my caregiving role?
- ◆ What are some things that I would like to explore but never had the chance to?
- ◆ Some may find it helpful to define themselves according to their interests and what matters to them. It can range from being an outdoors enthusiast to being a creative person. For me, I am an animal lover!



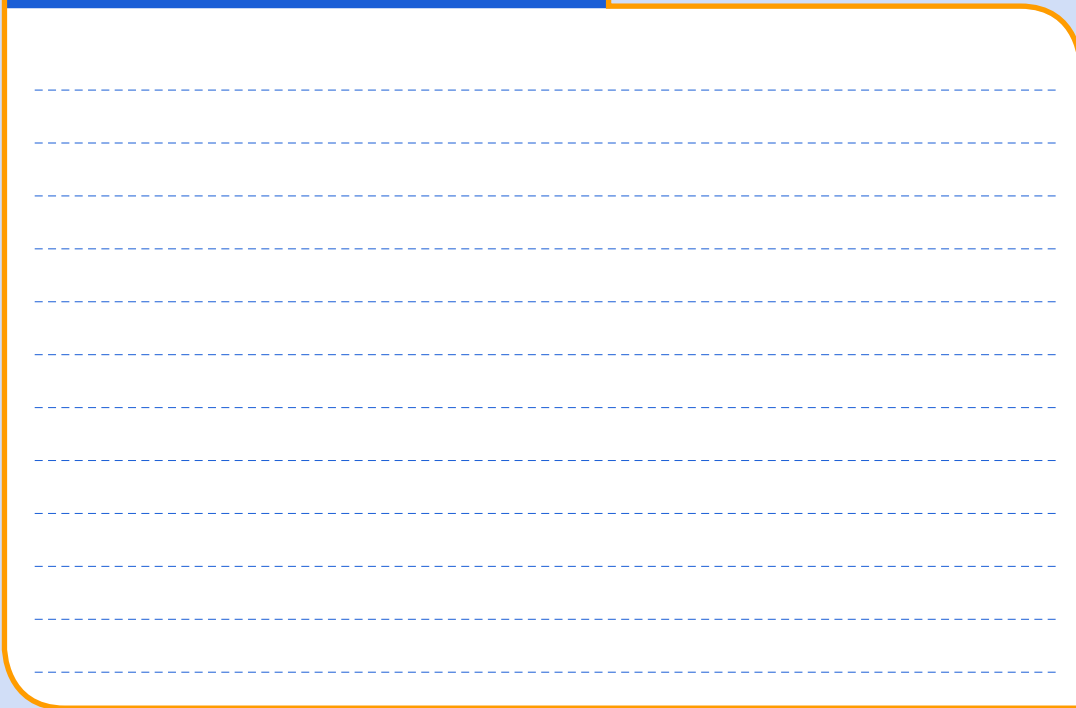
## 2 Spend Time On Myself

- ◆ Writing down my thoughts, dreams and memories.
- ◆ Focusing on my goals, my future and setting priorities to make my dreams come true.



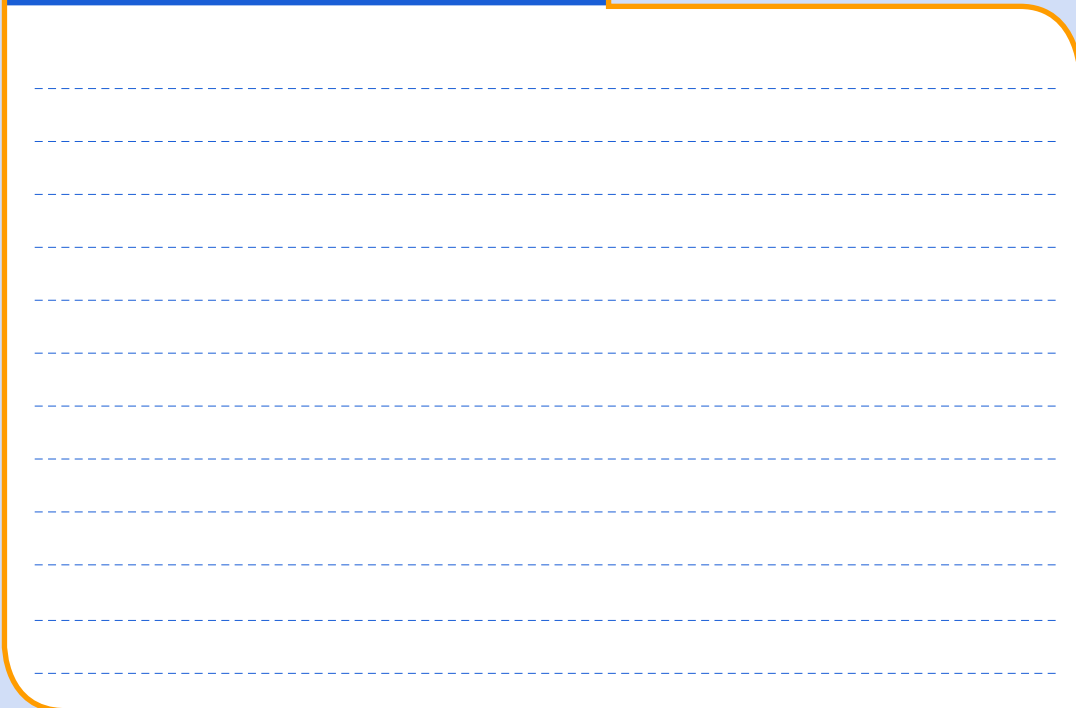


What are my dreams?



A large white rectangular area with a blue border and horizontal dashed lines for writing, intended for the student to write their dreams.

What are my goals?



A large white rectangular area with a blue border and horizontal dashed lines for writing, intended for the student to write their goals.

### 3 Remind Myself of My Other Roles

- ◆ What are some social connections (e.g. friends) and roles that I had but lost over the years? I can take small steps to reconnect with people who are important to me and my happiness.
- ◆ Re-establish positive social connections within my community. Such connections remind me that outside of caregiving, I am also a friend, a mentor, a neighbour, a member of a club, etc.



As I slowly started to reconnect with my friends and family, it reminded me of the social interaction that I missed and my other identities as a friend, daughter and sister. With their love and support, I am slowly learning to rebuild my life beyond the grief and loss.

# Who Can I Reconnect With?

Think about relatives, friends, or colleagues whom you can reconnect with in the space provided below.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Who is this person to me? \_\_\_\_\_

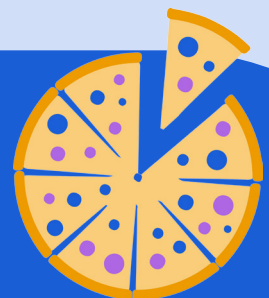
What are some activities that we can do together? \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Who is this person to me? \_\_\_\_\_

What are some activities that we can do together? \_\_\_\_\_

I remember trying new food places and going on hiking trips with my colleagues. Maybe I can look at inviting them to try out this new restaurant with me?



# Creating a Weekly Schedule

I find that planning activities weekly instead of daily helps me a lot to look forward to my upcoming week.

I can schedule different activities each day to keep me active. I included a template of a weekly schedule on the next page. You can try it out!



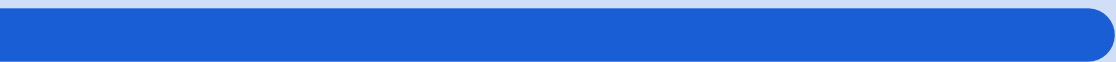
After planning and sticking to a routine, I started to gain a sense of control in my life again. I even started to look forward to certain days where I had fun things scheduled!

I am rediscovering my zest for life!



## Template of Weekly Schedule

Time	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday



Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday

# Notes on Taking Care of Myself

A series of horizontal dashed lines for writing notes.

# Moving Forward



# Dear Reader

It is only human to grieve. I hope that through my journey, you understand that anticipatory grief is a natural part of the grieving process. There is no need to feel guilt or shame for your grief. I hope that this guidebook has helped you understand the anticipatory grief you might be experiencing and how to cope with it in a healthy way.

Thank you for coming on this journey with me.

I hope that my story gives you hope and comfort during a difficult time of your life. I wish you may find happiness.

With Love,

*Jamie*





# Chapter 6

## Other Resources



## Other Resources

### Singapore Hospice Council

An umbrella body representing organisations that actively provide hospice and palliative care in Singapore.

**Helpline: +65 6277 8222**

Mon - Fri : 9 am - 9 pm

Sat, Sun & PH: 9 am - 6 pm

**Email: [info@singaporehospice.org.sg](mailto:info@singaporehospice.org.sg)**



### Agency for Integrated Care

Supports caregivers and seniors with information on staying active and ageing well, and connects people to services they need.

**Hotline: 1800-650-6060**

Mon - Fri : 8:30 am - 8:30 pm

Sat : 8:30 am - 4.00 pm

**Email: [enquiries@aic.sg](mailto:enquiries@aic.sg)**



### Institute of Mental Health

An acute tertiary psychiatric hospital offering a comprehensive range of psychiatric, rehabilitative and counselling services for children, adolescents, adults, and the elderly.

**Hospital Address: [Buangkok Green Medical Park, 10 Buangkok View](#)**

**Singapore 539747**

**24-hour hotline: +65 6389 2000**



## Other Resources

### Samaritans of Singapore

Dedicated to providing confidential emotional support to individuals facing a crisis, thinking about or affected by suicide.

**General Enquiries : +65 6221 2122**

**24-hour Hotline: 1767**

**24-hour CareText: 9151 1767 (via WhatsApp)**



### Singapore Association for Mental Health

Aims to improve the lives of persons with mental health issues through rehabilitation and reintegration.

**Helpline: 1800-283-7019**

**Email: enquiries@aic.sg**



### SAGE Counselling Centre

Aims to enhance the well-being of older persons, their family members and caregivers with a focus on psychological and social health.

**Hotline (for anyone aged 50 years and above): 1800-555-5555**

**Mon - Fri : 9 am - 7 pm**

**Sat : 9 am - 1 pm**



## Other Resources

### Singapore Cancer Society

A society that facilitates support groups for survivors of different types of cancer.

**Hotline: 1800 727 3333**

**Mon - Fri : 8.30 am - 6 pm**

**Email: [supportgroup@singaporecancersociety.org.sg](mailto:supportgroup@singaporecancersociety.org.sg)**



### Caregiver Alliance Limited

A non-profit organisation supporting the needs of caregivers of persons with mental health issues through education, support networks, crisis support, tailored services and self-care enablement.

**General Enquiries: +65 6460 4400**

**Email: [general@cal.org.sg](mailto:general@cal.org.sg)**



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# All About Allkin



Founded in 1978 as Singapore's first family service centre, Allkin Singapore is a community-centric social service agency that believes everyone has the potential to create positive change, regardless of age, race, or background.

Through our service offerings, strategic partnerships, and community initiatives, we unlock opportunities for vulnerable individuals and families to overcome life's challenges, build a brighter future, and inspire others to do the same.



[www.allkin.org.sg](http://www.allkin.org.sg)



# Grief Before Loss

## Navigating Anticipatory Grief



"Everyone will experience grief at some point of their lives. It can be overly simplified and categorised as a process we feel after we lose something/someone close to our hearts and we will 'get over' it. No one told us grief could happen before we actually experience the loss and no one told us how complicated and messy and nonlinear it can be. This is a wonderful initiative and resource to help us walk through this journey of loss."

- *Dr Evelyn Boon*

"This self-help guide offers compassionate insights and practical strategies for preparing for the impending loss of a loved one. This guidebook helps caregivers understand and cope with the complex emotions of anticipatory grief, providing support and solace during this challenging journey, and empowering them with knowledge and empathy."

- *Dr Shawn Goh*

"This self-help guide on anticipatory grief offers several thoughtful insights and practical resources for caregivers who are supporting their loved ones through end of life. With a heartfelt and personal touch, it provides useful tips to help caregivers find strength and support during this challenging phase."

- *A/Prof Tan Bhing Leet*



A pilot project by Allkin Singapore