

THE LONG ECHO PROJECT



THE SECRET OF CHILDHOOD GRIEF

CAREGIVER WORKBOOK



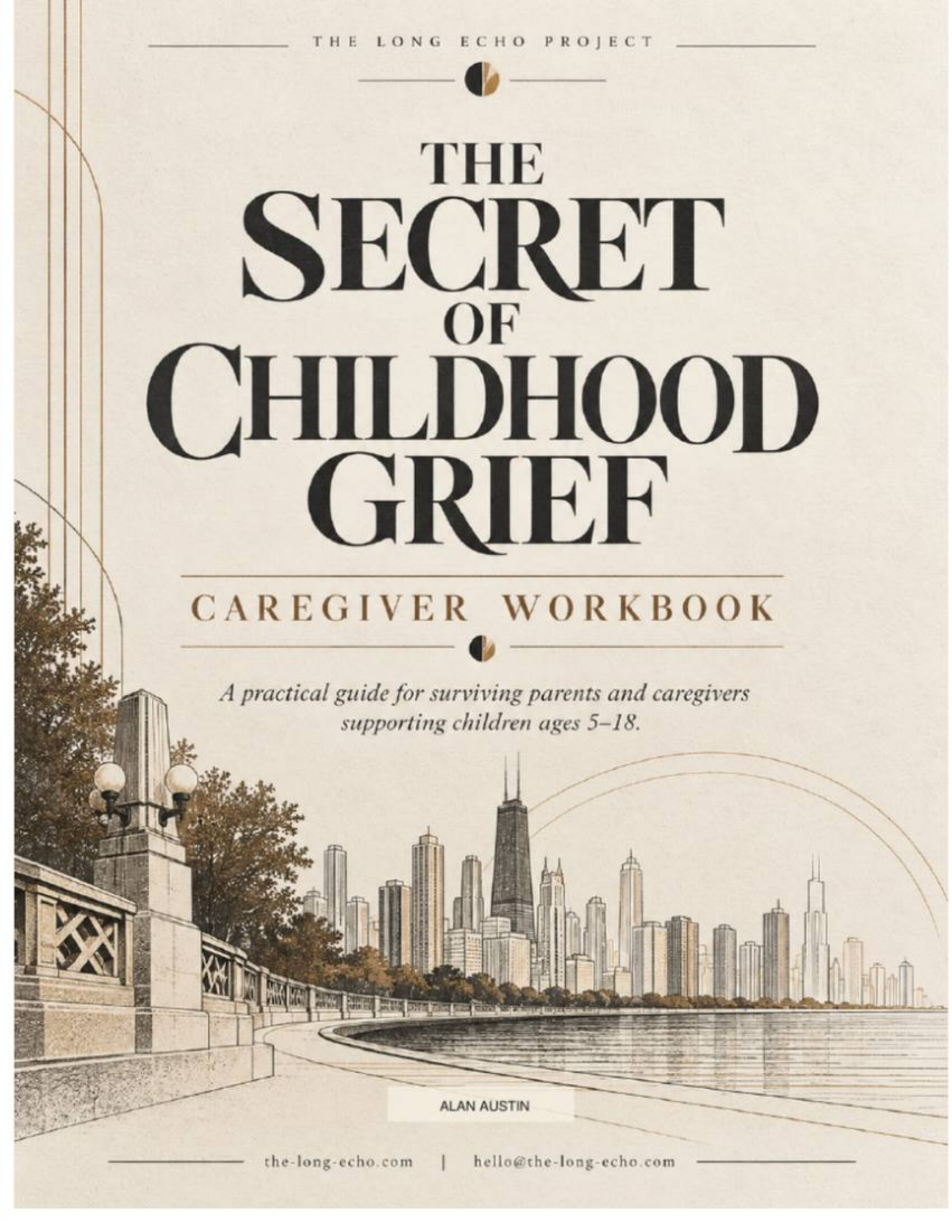
*A practical guide for surviving parents and caregivers
supporting children ages 5–18.*

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Welcome to The Long Echo Project

Giving language to the grief children carry in silence.

You're here because a child you love is living with a loss that changed everything. Maybe it was the death of a parent, sibling, or someone deeply loved. Maybe you're a surviving parent, trying to hold your own grief while supporting your child's. However you arrived, you're not alone — and you're in the right place.

The Long Echo Project exists to help caregivers and surviving parents understand, support, and walk alongside children as they navigate grief. This workbook offers compassionate knowledge, practical tools, and space for reflection — because children's grief is real, it matters, and it deserves a language of its own.

*"Grief doesn't end.
It changes shape — and so do we."*

THE LONG ECHO PROJECT

FIND YOUR PATH

Knowledge. Support. Tools. Hope.



UNDERSTAND

Learn how children experience and express grief, and why it can look different at every age and stage.



SUPPORT

Discover practical ways to show up, have hard conversations, and create space for big feelings.



REFLECT

Pause, process, and explore your own experience as a caregiver or surviving parent.



MOVE FORWARD

Find tools, resources, and next steps for the road ahead — because healing is a journey, not a destination.

How to Use This Workbook

Use this workbook as a steady companion, not a test. You can move in order or return only to the pages that fit the moment you are in. Some pages ask you to observe. Some help you interpret. Others give you language, structure, and room to plan your next response.

WHAT TO EXPECT

- ☐ Short teaching pages that name common grief patterns
- ☐ Reflection prompts for surviving parents and caregivers
- ☐ Tools for anger, fear, repeated questions, milestones, and violent loss
- ☐ Space to write, notice patterns, and prepare responses
- ☐ Permission to revisit pages as grief changes over time

FOR THE SURVIVING PARENT

If you are grieving too, this workbook is for you as well. You do not need to separate your pain from your child's in order to care well. You do, however, need room to notice what belongs to you, what belongs to the child, and what needs support beyond this page.

You are allowed to move slowly.

1

OBSERVE

What do I actually see?

2

UNDERSTAND

What might be happening beneath it?

3

RESPOND

What does this child need from me now?

4

REVISIT

What may have changed with time?

Observe → Understand → Respond → Revisit

This workbook follows a simple movement: notice what is happening, make meaning carefully, respond with steadiness, and return when grief changes shape.



Observe

Begin with what is visible. Notice behavior, changes, questions, silence, routines, and moments that seem small but repeat.

— ASK: WHAT DID I ACTUALLY SEE OR HEAR?

Understand

Do not rush to label the behavior. Ask what may sit beneath it: fear, confusion, guilt, longing, anger, loyalty, or a question the child does not yet know how to say.

— ASK: WHAT ELSE MIGHT THIS MEAN?

Respond

Choose the next faithful step, not the perfect one. A grieving child may need truth, calm presence, structure, room to speak, or room not to.

— ASK: WHAT DOES THIS CHILD NEED FROM ME NOW?

Revisit

Grief returns in new seasons. What helped once may need to be reworked as the child grows, asks more, or meets a milestone the loss touches differently.

— ASK: WHAT HAS CHANGED, AND WHAT NEEDS ATTENTION AGAIN?

You are not being asked to do everything
at once. You are being asked to pay
better attention.



MODULE 1

Before You Begin

SEE THE CHILD WHO IS HERE NOW

“Start with what you can actually observe.”

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Before interpreting grief, establish a baseline.

Think about the child as they are today.

Some changes may be connected to grief. Some may reflect ordinary development. Some may have nothing to do with the loss.

Start with what you can actually observe.

START WITH ONE CHILD

If several children are grieving, complete these pages separately for each child. Children in the same family can experience the same death very differently.



CHILD'S FIRST NAME OR INITIALS: _____



AGE: _____



AGE WHEN THE DEATH OCCURRED: _____



RELATIONSHIP TO THE PERSON WHO DIED: _____



TIME SINCE THE DEATH: _____



WHAT CHANGES HAVE I NOTICED SINCE THE DEATH?



WHAT SEEMS TO HAVE REMAINED STEADY?



WHAT IS GOING WELL RIGHT NOW?

The Child & Family Snapshot

WHAT HAVE I ACTUALLY NOTICED?

Think about the last four to six weeks. Check only what you have actually observed.

"Careful observation opens the door to compassionate understanding."

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SLEEP

- ☐ Difficulty falling asleep
- ☐ Waking during the night
- ☐ Wanting more light or sound
- ☐ Wanting to sleep near another person
- ☐ Nightmares or distressing dreams
- ☐ No meaningful change I have noticed
- ☐ Something else: _____



CONNECTION

- ☐ Spending more time alone
- ☐ Staying unusually close to caregivers
- ☐ Declining invitations or activities
- ☐ Seeking adults more than peers
- ☐ Maintaining friendships normally
- ☐ Increased conflict with family or peers
- ☐ Something else: _____



EMOTION & BEHAVIOR

- ☐ More anger or irritability
- ☐ Strong reactions to small mistakes
- ☐ More tearfulness
- ☐ Appearing unusually calm
- ☐ Avoiding discussion of the death
- ☐ Talking frequently about the person who died
- ☐ Asking repeated questions
- ☐ No major behavioral change I have noticed
- ☐ Something else: _____



SCHOOL / RESPONSIBILITY

- ☐ Change in grades or concentration
- ☐ Increased perfectionism
- ☐ Taking on more responsibility
- ☐ Trying to take care of adults
- ☐ Difficulty completing ordinary tasks
- ☐ School functioning appears stable
- ☐ Something else: _____



SAFETY / FEAR

- ☐ Wants frequent updates about where I am
- ☐ Worries another person may die
- ☐ Avoids ordinary risks or activities
- ☐ Watches rooms, people, exits, or surroundings closely
- ☐ No unusual safety behavior I have noticed
- ☐ Something else: _____

WHICH BEHAVIOR CONCERNS ME MOST, AND WHY? _____



DEVELOPMENT NOTE

AGES 5–7: Behavior may communicate more than explanation. **AGES 8–12:** Children may understand permanence more clearly while still moving in and out of grief quickly. **AGES 13–18:** Privacy, independence, identity, peer relationships, and future thinking may change how grief is expressed. These are considerations, not rules.

What I Know / What I'm Assuming

WHY THIS MATTERS

Grief makes adults afraid too. Fear can make us interpret quickly.

A child stays in their room: "They are depressed." A teenager refuses a party:

"They are isolating." A child does not cry: "They are suppressing grief."

Those interpretations may eventually prove meaningful. They are still interpretations.



WHAT HAPPENED?



WHAT AM I TELLING MYSELF IT MEANS?



WHAT ELSE COULD EXPLAIN IT?



ONE LOW-PRESSURE WAY I CAN LEARN MORE



WHAT DO I STILL NOT KNOW?



SURVIVING PARENT CHECK-IN

What does this behavior
make me afraid of?
Does it touch something
I am already carrying?

Am I trying to understand
the child, or make my own
fear go away?

What might help me pause
before I assume?

*"I noticed _____. I'm not upset about it.
I just want to understand what's going on with you."*

*Stronger
Communities
Brighter
Futures*

MODULE 2

The Child Who Seems Fine

COMPOSURE CAN MEAN MANY THINGS

Some grieving children struggle visibly. Others keep going.

They do their schoolwork. They help around the house. They follow directions. They say they are fine.

Sometimes they really are managing reasonably well.

The mistake is allowing visible composure to answer every question for you.

A child may also learn that being easy, capable, quiet, or responsible makes life simpler for everyone around them. That deserves curiosity.

SOME CHILDREN
CARRY A GREAT
DEAL QUIETLY.

A BRIEF ALAN ANCHOR

After my father died, adults often saw a child who behaved well. What they could not see was how much attention I gave to danger, how carefully I watched the adults around me, or how much I kept to myself.

The behavior they praised was real. So was what they could not see.

BEFORE YOU INTERPRET "FINE"

HAS THIS ALWAYS BEEN PART OF THE CHILD'S PERSONALITY?

1

IS THIS BEHAVIOR NEW SINCE THE DEATH?

2

DOES THE CHILD SEEM COMFORTABLE RECEIVING CARE, OR MOSTLY FOCUSED ON CARING FOR OTHERS?

3

DOES THE CHILD STILL PARTICIPATE IN THINGS THEY ENJOY?

4

CAN THEY MAKE MISTAKES, NEED HELP, OR HAVE A DIFFICULT DAY WITHOUT SEEMING ASHAMED?

"Fine" may actually be fine.

A child who is playing, learning, connecting with others, asking for help when needed, and functioning steadily does not need an adult constantly searching for hidden pain. Grief literacy should make you more attentive without making the child feel watched.

*Stronger
Communities
Brighter
Tomorrows*

Beneath the Behavior

WHAT IS THE CHILD DOING WITH "FINE"?

Choose one behavior that has made you think: "They seem fine." or "They are handling this better than I expected."



WHAT AM I SEEING?

- ☐ Rarely brings up the death
- ☐ Says "I'm fine" when asked
- ☐ Helps take care of siblings or adults
- ☐ Seems unusually responsible
- ☐ Rarely asks for help
- ☐ Avoids crying around others
- ☐ Keeps grades, chores, or activities going
- ☐ Declines invitations or ordinary activities
- ☐ Watches adults closely
- ☐ Appears comfortable and genuinely engaged
- ☐ Still plays, laughs, connects, and asks for support
- ☐ Something else: _____



WHEN DOES IT HAPPEN?

- ☐ Someone mentions the person who died
- ☐ An adult becomes emotional
- ☐ The child is asked how they are doing
- ☐ The child makes a mistake
- ☐ The family is under stress
- ☐ A holiday or anniversary is approaching
- ☐ There is no obvious pattern yet



REALITY CHECK

WHAT I OBSERVED:

WHAT I THINK IT MAY MEAN:

WHAT WOULD MAKE ME RECONSIDER THAT INTERPRETATION?



BEFORE I STEP IN

- | | | | |
|---|-----|----|--------|
| ☐ Is the behavior causing distress? | Yes | No | Unsure |
| ☐ Is it interfering with relationships, school, sleep, safety, or ordinary life? | Yes | No | Unsure |
| ☐ Is this a meaningful change from before? | Yes | No | Unsure |

PARENT PROMPT: Would this child still know how to ask me for help if they stopped being the "easy one"?

LOW-PRESSURE RESPONSE: "You've been handling a lot. I don't want you to feel like you always have to be the strong one with me."

MODULE 3

WHEN GRIEF LOOKS LIKE ANGER

— THE OUTBURST IS REAL. SO IS WHAT MAY BE UNDER IT. —

Not every outburst is grief-related.

Loss can still make control, mistakes, frustration, and disappointment carry more weight than they once did.

A missed shot. A bad grade. A lost game. Being corrected. A change in plans. A caregiver saying no.

The immediate event may be small while the feeling it touches is much larger.



A BRIEF ALAN ANCHOR

As a teenager, I could lose a video game and put a hole in the wall. The game was real. The anger was real. But the game was not carrying all of it.

What I could not control was the loss that had already changed my life, so control started mattering in places where the stakes looked much smaller.

LOOK CLOSER WHEN

- reactions regularly seem larger than the trigger,
- mistakes feel unusually threatening,
- correction quickly becomes shame or defensiveness,
- changes in plans create major distress,
- or control appears especially important.

Anger can sit alongside helplessness, fear, embarrassment, loss of control, disappointment, perfectionism, grief, or ordinary frustration. The behavior alone cannot tell you which.



BOUNDARIES STILL MATTER

Understanding an outburst does not require ignoring aggression, threats, property damage, or unsafe behavior.

"I won't let you hurt someone. I also want to understand what made this feel so big."

*Stronger
Communities
Brighter
Tomorrows*

TRIGGER REACTION

What Happened Next

TRACE THE PATTERN BEFORE YOU EXPLAIN IT

“Awareness
creates a choice
where there was
only reaction.”

THE LONG ECHO PROJECT

1 WHAT HAPPENED RIGHT BEFORE?

Trace the pattern before you explain it.

2 WHAT DID THE CHILD DO?

- | | |
|---|--|
| ☐ Raised voice | ☐ Became physically aggressive |
| ☐ Cried | ☐ Became very quiet |
| ☐ Shut down | ☐ Tried repeatedly to fix the problem |
| ☐ Left the room | ☐ Blamed themselves |
| ☐ Threw or hit something | ☐ Blamed someone else |
| ☐ Insulted someone | ☐ Something else: _____ |

3 HOW LARGE WAS THE REACTION?

- ☐ About what I would expect ☐ Somewhat larger ☐ Much larger ☐ I am unsure ☐

4 WHAT MAY HAVE FELT OUT OF CONTROL?

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☐ The outcome | ☐ Being told no |
| ☐ A mistake | ☐ Not knowing what would happen next |
| ☐ Being corrected | ☐ Someone else making the decision |
| ☐ Being embarrassed | ☐ A reminder of the loss |
| ☐ A change in routine | ☐ I do not know |



INTERPRETATION CHECK

WHAT I KNOW: _____

WHAT I THINK MAY BE HAPPENING: _____

WHAT I STILL NEED TO LEARN: _____



BEFORE I REACT

What boundary needs to be held? _____

What can wait until everyone is calmer? _____

PARENT PROMPT: Am I becoming harsher because I am emotionally overloaded too?



AFTER THE MOMENT PASSES

“You can be angry. We still have to keep people and things safe. When you’re ready, we can talk about what made that moment feel so big.”

If aggression, threats, property destruction, or severe escalation is frequent or worsening, additional support may be appropriate.

MODULE 4

When Grief Looks Like Fear

SOMETIMES SAFETY BECOMES THE JOB

Fear after major loss does not always sound like: "I'm scared."

It may appear through wanting background noise, sleeping near someone, checking where a caregiver is, avoiding certain places, watching exits, needing frequent reassurance, or refusing activities that once felt easy.

A major loss can alter how safe the world feels.



A BRIEF ALAN ANCHOR

After my father died, darkness and silence became difficult for me. I slept with the television on and kept my back against the wall.

From the outside, that could have looked like a bad sleep habit. For me, the noise was helping me feel less alone with fear.



BEFORE YOU REMOVE THE BEHAVIOR

A caregiver may naturally want to correct the habit.

First ask: What job is this behavior doing for the child?

If a behavior helps a child feel safe, changing it without understanding its function may remove the coping strategy before another one exists.



FEAR CAN LOOK RESPECTABLE

A frightened child may become careful, obedient, responsible, observant, or reluctant to take risks. Sometimes that reflects maturity. Sometimes fear contributes to it.

Look at change, frequency, intensity, context, and interference with ordinary life.



Before you take away a coping behavior, understand what the child believes it is protecting them from.

WHAT IS HELPING THEM FEEL SAFE?

LOOK AT THE BEHAVIOR BEFORE YOU TRY TO CHANGE IT

Choose one behavior that may be connected to safety or fear.

1 WHAT HAVE I OBSERVED?

- ☐ Wants lights left on
- ☐ Wants television, music, or background noise
- ☐ Has trouble sleeping alone
- ☐ Checks where caregivers are
- ☐ Calls or texts repeatedly when separated
- ☐ Avoids certain places or people
- ☐ Avoids activities
- ☐ Watches doors, rooms, or exits
- ☐ Becomes uncomfortable when plans change
- ☐ Frequently asks whether someone will die
- ☐ Appears unusually alert in public
- ☐ No significant safety behavior noticed
- ☐ Something else: _____

2 WHEN DOES IT HAPPEN MOST?

- ☐ At night
- ☐ Before separation
- ☐ When someone is late
- ☐ In unfamiliar places
- ☐ Around reminders or anniversaries
- ☐ After hearing about another death
- ☐ When plans change
- ☐ In crowded places
- ☐ No clear pattern yet



INTERPRETATION CHECK

WHAT I OBSERVED: _____

WHAT I THINK IT MAY BE DOING: _____

WHAT I STILL NEED TO LEARN: _____



BEFORE I CHANGE THE BEHAVIOR

Is it unsafe? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Is it significantly interfering with sleep, school, relationships, independence, or ordinary life? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Unsure

Does the child have another way to feel safe if this behavior changes? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Unsure



PRACTICAL RESPONSE PLAN

BEHAVIOR I WANT TO UNDERSTAND: _____

WHAT MAY HELP THE CHILD FEEL SAFER: _____

WHAT I WILL CONTINUE WATCHING: _____



SURVIVING PARENT CHECK-IN

Does the child's fear intensify my own fear about safety or loss? _____

Can I offer reassurance without promising something I cannot guarantee? _____

MODULE 5

THE TRUTH A CHILD CAN BEAR

CLEAR LANGUAGE CAN FEEL HARDER TO SAY. IT IS OFTEN EASIER TO UNDERSTAND.

Adults sometimes soften death because we want to protect children.

We say: "He went to sleep." "She went away." "They are in a better place." "We lost him."

A child may hear those phrases literally.

Before metaphor, faith, or explanation, help the child understand the physical reality:

"The person died. Their body stopped working. They cannot come back physically."

The details beyond that should depend on the child's age, what happened, what they already know, and what they are asking.



A BRIEF ALAN ANCHOR

When I was five, my mother told me my father had died and that he was not coming back. I asked if he was in heaven with God. She told me yes.

I needed both pieces.

CLEARER LANGUAGE



Instead of "Daddy went to sleep."

"Daddy died. His body stopped working, so he cannot wake up."



Instead of "Mommy went away."

"Mommy died. She cannot come back home the way people do when they travel."



Instead of relying only on "She is in a better place."

"She died, which means her body stopped working and she cannot come back to us physically. We believe she is with God now."



DEVELOPMENT NOTE

AGES 5–7: Use simple, concrete language.

AGES 8–12: Children may ask for more specific information about cause.

AGES 13–18: Adolescents may want more context and may have access to information outside the family.

MODULE 5

FAITH AND FACT

GOD CAN HOLD THE COMFORT. THE CHILD STILL NEEDS THE CONCRETE TRUTH.

For Christian families, heaven, prayer, Scripture, church, and trust in God may become part of how the family carries a death.

Faith language can coexist with direct language.

A child can hear: "Your father died." and "We believe he is with God." in the same conversation.

One addresses physical reality. The other expresses spiritual belief.



FAITH LANGUAGE THAT MAY CONFUSE

"God needed another angel."

A child may hear that God takes people because He needs them.

"It was God's plan."

A frightened or angry child may hear that God deliberately chose this pain for the family.

"Don't be sad. They're with God."

Belief in heaven does not erase missing someone.

FAITH AND FACT WORKSHEET

WHAT DOES OUR FAMILY BELIEVE ABOUT WHAT HAPPENS AFTER DEATH?

WHAT DOES THE CHILD NEED TO UNDERSTAND PHYSICALLY?

WHAT FAITH LANGUAGE FEELS HONEST FOR OUR FAMILY?

IS THERE LANGUAGE THAT COMFORTS ME BUT MAY CONFUSE THE CHILD?

WHEN THE CHILD IS ANGRY WITH GOD

You do not need a perfect theological answer. You may say: "I don't know why this happened. I believe God can handle your anger and your questions."
Or: "I still believe in God, and I still have questions too."

"You do not have to pretend you are okay with this."

SURVIVING PARENT REFLECTION

Has my own faith changed since the death?

Faith should give grief somewhere to go. It should not require the child to stop grieving.

BEFORE YOU HAVE THE CONVERSATION

*Stronger
Communities
Brighter
Tomorrows*

Prepare yourself before you ask the child to receive something hard.

1

WHAT IS THE CHILD ASKING? _____

2

WHAT DO THEY ALREADY KNOW? _____

3

WHAT FACT MUST BE CLEAR? _____

4

WHAT DETAILS DO NOT NEED TO BE GIVEN RIGHT NOW? _____

5

WHAT WORDS WILL I USE? _____

6

WHAT WORDS WILL I AVOID? _____

- ☐ "Went to sleep"
- ☐ "Went away"
- ☐ "We lost them" without explaining death
- ☐ "God needed them"

- ☐ Graphic details the child did not ask for
- ☐ Promises I cannot guarantee
- ☐ Something else: _____



UNDERSTANDING CHECK

WHAT I KNOW THE CHILD UNDERSTANDS: _____

WHAT I AM UNSURE THEY UNDERSTAND: _____

WHAT I SHOULD ASK BEFORE EXPLAINING MORE: _____

HOW WILL I LEAVE THE DOOR OPEN? "You can ask me about this again..." _____



SURVIVING PARENT CHECK-IN

What part of this conversation is hardest for me to say aloud? _____

Am I withholding something because the child is not ready, or because I am not ready? _____

AFTER THE CONVERSATION: Instead of testing comprehension, try: "What did you hear me say?" or "What are you wondering now?" _____

MODULE 6

WHEN THE QUESTION COMES BACK

THE QUESTION MAY BE THE SAME. THE CHILD MAY NOT BE.

A child may ask the same question again next week, six months later, or years later.

That does not necessarily mean the first explanation failed.

Children revisit death as their understanding of permanence, relationships, fairness, danger, identity, and the future changes.

A five-year-old may be asking where the person physically went. A ten-year-old may be trying to understand how the death happened. A teenager may be asking what the death means for who they are becoming.



BEFORE YOU SAY "WE ALREADY TALKED ABOUT THIS"

- What has changed since the last time?
- Has the child reached a new milestone or developmental stage?
- Could they be asking for different information this time?

REPEATED QUESTIONS MAY BE

- checking whether the answer is still true,
- seeking reassurance,
- testing whether the adult is still willing to talk,
- trying to understand a new detail,
- responding to something heard elsewhere,
- or revisiting the death from a new developmental perspective.

DEVELOPMENT NOTE

AGES 5-7

Repetition may reflect developing understanding of permanence.

AGES 8-12

Questions may become more factual and causal.

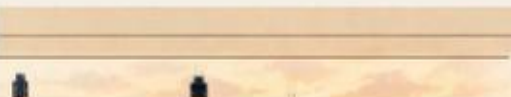
AGES 13-18

Questions may shift toward identity, family history, fairness, legacy, and future impact.

"You've asked about that before. Tell me what you're wondering about this time."

THE REPEATED QUESTION TRACKER

WHAT CHANGED AROUND THE QUESTION?



THE QUESTION



WHEN DID THEY ASK?

DATE: _____

SETTING: _____

- ☐ Birthday
- ☐ Death anniversary
- ☐ Holiday
- ☐ School transition
- ☐ Graduation
- ☐ Family gathering

WHAT WAS HAPPENING AROUND THAT TIME?

- ☐ News about another death
- ☐ Change in routine
- ☐ Conversation with someone else
- ☐ Social media or internet exposure
- ☐ No obvious trigger
- ☐ Something else: _____

WHAT DID THE CHILD ALREADY KNOW?

WHAT DID THEY SEEM TO NEED THIS TIME?

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☐ Factual information | ☐ Help understanding why |
| ☐ Reassurance | ☐ Help understanding what it means now |
| ☐ More detail | ☐ Information heard elsewhere |
| ☐ Permission to talk | ☐ I am unsure |

QUICK CHECK

WHAT I KNOW: _____

WHAT I AM INFERRING: _____

WHAT I SHOULD ASK FIRST: _____

MY RESPONSE

WHAT MAY HAVE CHANGED SINCE LAST TIME?

MODULE 7

MILESTONES AND RE-GRIEVING

SOME LOSSES RETURN WHEN LIFE MOVES FORWARD.

Grief can become active again when a child reaches something new.

A birthday. A graduation. A first game. A school dance. A holiday. A first job. A wedding. Becoming a parent.

The absence may feel different because the child has changed.



A BRIEF ALAN ANCHOR

There were times when I was laughing, celebrating, or enjoying a birthday and the thought would interrupt me: My father is dead.

The grief did not always arrive as a breakdown. Sometimes it arrived as one thought in the middle of something good.

A MILESTONE MAY BRING UP

- who should have been there,
- what the child wishes they could share,
- questions about what the deceased parent would think,
- anger about what was missed,
- fear of forgetting,
- or comparison with other families.

Some milestones may also pass without difficulty. Do not prepare the child for pain so aggressively that pain becomes expected.

BEFORE THE DATE ARRIVES

WHAT EVENT IS COMING?

HAS IT BEEN DIFFICULT BEFORE?

HAS THE CHILD CONNECTED THIS EVENT TO THE PERSON WHO DIED?

WOULD ACKNOWLEDGMENT HELP, OR DOES THE CHILD WANT THE EVENT TO REMAIN ORDINARY?

MY FAMILY'S GRIEF CALENDAR

WHAT DATES MAY CARRY EXTRA WEIGHT?

You are creating awareness, not predicting a crisis.

DATE / EVENT	WHAT I HAVE NOTICED BEFORE	HOW I WANT TO APPROACH IT THIS TIME



DATES TO CONSIDER

- | | | |
|--|---|--|
| ☐ Birthday | ☐ Graduation | ☐ College decision |
| ☐ Death anniversary | ☐ Sports season or performance | ☐ Wedding |
| ☐ Mother's Day / Father's Day | ☐ School dance / prom | ☐ Becoming a parent |
| ☐ Major holiday | ☐ Driver's license | ☐ Family reunion |
| ☐ First day of school | ☐ First job | ☐ Something else: _____ |

ASSUMPTION CHECK

WHAT I KNOW ABOUT THIS DATE:

WHAT I AM PREDICTING THE CHILD WILL FEEL:

WHAT I CAN ASK INSTEAD:

"This date is coming up. Do you want to do anything to remember them, or would you rather keep the day normal?"

MILESTONE PREPARATION PLAN

PREPARE WITHOUT TAKING OVER THE MOMENT.

THE MILESTONE

EVENT: _____

DATE: _____

WHY MIGHT IT CARRY MEANING?

WHAT HAS THE CHILD SAID?

WHAT DO I STILL NEED TO ASK RATHER THAN ASSUME?

WHAT KIND OF ACKNOWLEDGMENT MIGHT HELP?

- ☐ Say the person's name
- ☐ Look at a photo
- ☐ Visit a grave or meaningful place
- ☐ Prepare a favorite food
- ☐ Continue a tradition
- ☐ Pray together

- ☐ Tell a story
- ☐ Let the child choose privately
- ☐ Do nothing special
- ☐ Ask first
- ☐ Something else: _____

DO NOT FORCE THE RITUAL

A child may not want a memorial speech, grave visit, public tribute, social-media post, prayer circle, or family conversation. Sometimes they want the day to be about the milestone. That is allowed.

SURVIVING PARENT CHECK-IN

Am I planning something because the child wants it, or because I need it? _____

Can I honor my own grief separately if the child wants something different? _____

PLAN THE DAY

ONE THING I WILL ASK RATHER THAN ASSUME: _____

ONE THING I WILL NOT FORCE: _____

SUPPORT FOR THE CHILD: _____

SUPPORT FOR ME: _____

AFTER THE EVENT

WHAT DID I NOTICE? _____

WHAT SHOULD I REMEMBER NEXT TIME? _____

A PAUSE

BEFORE VIOLENT LOSS

The next section discusses grief after homicide, gun violence, and other violent deaths.

It does not include graphic descriptions.

If this is not part of your family's experience, you may skip the section.

If it is part of your experience and you need to stop here for now, that is okay.

Come back when you are ready.



If you need to ground yourself first:

Stop. Look around the room. Name three things you can see.

SURVIVING PARENT NOTE



You may be carrying information the child does not know. You may also be carrying memories, anger, betrayal, fear, unanswered questions, or details you have never said aloud.

This section is not asking you to tell the child everything. It is asking you to think carefully about what belongs where.

Truth does not require telling every truth at once.

MODULE 8

WHEN THE LOSS WAS VIOLENT

VIOLENCE CAN ADD QUESTIONS TO GRIEF

A child may wonder: Who did this? Why did it happen? Could it happen again? Was my parent afraid? Did they do something wrong? Am I in danger? Why does everyone know more than I do?

Some children ask directly. Others hear pieces from relatives, classmates, social media, news reports, neighborhood conversations, or adults who do not realize they are listening.

Silence does not always protect a child from information. Sometimes it only changes where the information comes from.

“

Children do not just grieve the person they lost; they often grieve the sense of safety that was lost, too.

VIOLENT LOSS MAY ALSO BRING



criminal investigations,



unresolved cases,



arrests or trials,



rumors,



conflicting family accounts,



public reporting,



community knowledge,



complicated information about the person who died,



anger toward a perpetrator,



and fear that violence will happen again.

Begin with what the child needs in order to understand what happened and trust the adults around them.

A BRIEF ALAN ANCHOR

My father was murdered when I was five. I understood that he had been shot. I also understood that he was not coming back.

There were other parts of the story that belonged to adults and other family members. A child can need truth without receiving ownership of every detail surrounding the death.



THE CHILD NEEDS TO KNOW

Information necessary to understand the death, safety, and what happens next.



THE ADULTS NEED TO KNOW

Details needed for legal matters, investigations, family decisions, or adult understanding.



THE CHILD MAY NEED TO KNOW LATER

Information that may become relevant as their age, questions, identity, or understanding changes.

*Stronger
Communities
Brighter
Tomorrows*

WHAT DOES THE CHILD ACTUALLY KNOW?

DO NOT BUILD THE CONVERSATION ON A GUESS
WHAT HAS THE CHILD BEEN TOLD DIRECTLY?

“Children pick up more than we say, and less than we think.”

1

WHO TOLD THEM?

2

WHAT WORDS WERE USED?

3

WHAT MAY THEY HAVE HEARD ELSEWHERE?

- ☐ Family members
- ☐ Friends
- ☐ School
- ☐ Neighborhood conversations
- ☐ Social media

- ☐ News reports
- ☐ Court or legal conversations
- ☐ Other adults
- ☐ I do not know
- ☐ Something else: _____

TOLD DIRECTLY

MAY HAVE HEARD ELSEWHERE

STILL UNKNOWN

4

ASK BEFORE YOU CORRECT

“Tell me what you understand about what happened.” or “Have you heard anything about the death that you want to ask me about?”

5

QUESTIONS FOR THE CAREGIVER

IS THE CHILD LEARNING ELSEWHERE BECAUSE THEY DO NOT BELIEVE THEY CAN ASK ME?

6

IS THERE SOMETHING THE CHILD CLEARLY KNOWS THAT I AM PRETENDING THEY DO NOT?



DEVELOPMENT NOTE

AGES 5-7: Keep explanations concrete and brief. AGES 8-12: Questions may increasingly focus on cause, fairness, and responsibility. AGES 13-18: Adolescents may have access to public information and may recognize when obvious facts are being withheld.

KNOW NOW / ADULTS ONLY / MAY NEED TO WAIT

NOT EVERY TRUE DETAIL HAS THE SAME PURPOSE

KNOW NOW

Information that helps the child understand: what happened, that the person died, whether the child is currently safe, what changes now, and what questions they are allowed to ask.

WHAT BELONGS HERE?

ADULTS ONLY

This may include: graphic details, investigative strategy, legal evidence, adult relationship conflicts, unconfirmed allegations, private information belonging to someone else, or details that do not help the child understand their own experience.

WHAT BELONGS HERE?

MAY NEED TO WAIT

Some information may matter later when the child is older, asks a different question, or begins forming an adult understanding of the person who died.

WHAT MAY BELONG HERE LATER?

WHAT WOULD TELL ME THE CHILD IS READY FOR MORE?

PRIVACY TEST

Does this fact belong to this child's story?

Does it partly belong to someone else's story?

Am I sharing it because the child needs it, or because I need someone else to carry it?

WHEN THE PERSON WHO DIED HAD A COMPLICATED LIFE

A parent can be loved and complicated at the same time. As a child grows, they may need more context about choices, relationships, mistakes, strengths, and consequences. That context should be factual and age-appropriate. The child should not be required to defend or condemn the person they lost.

A child should be allowed to love someone without being forced to simplify who that person was.

VIOLENT-LOSS SUPPORT PLAN

HELP THE CHILD CARRY THE LOSS WITHOUT MAKING THEM CARRY THE CASE

WHAT FEELS UNCERTAIN?

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☐ Who caused the death | ☐ Media coverage |
| ☐ Arrest or investigation | ☐ Safety concerns |
| ☐ Trial or court outcome | ☐ What the child has heard |
| ☐ Family disagreement | ☐ What to tell the child |
| ☐ Rumors | ☐ Something else: _____ |

WHAT CAN I SAY TRUTHFULLY TODAY?

"WHAT I KNOW RIGHT NOW IS..."

"WHAT I DO NOT KNOW YET IS..."

"IF I LEARN SOMETHING YOU NEED TO KNOW, I WILL..."

WHAT SAFETY QUESTION MAY BE UNDERNEATH THIS?

WHAT CAN I HONESTLY SAY ABOUT SAFETY?

RUMOR PLAN

"You may hear things about what happened. Some may be true, some may not be. You can always bring them to me, and I will tell you what I know."

SURVIVING PARENT CHECK-IN

What part of this story am I still trying to make sense of? _____

Am I tempted to tell the child something because I need them to understand my pain? _____

Who is an appropriate adult for the details the child should not carry? _____

SUPPORT CIRCLE

Trusted adult: _____

School contact: _____

Family support: _____

Faith/community support: _____

Grief professional: _____

Violent-loss specialist, if relevant: _____

WHEN MORE SUPPORT MAY BE NEEDED

If fear, sleep disruption, avoidance, anger, intrusive reminders, school difficulty, or other changes in functioning are persistent, worsening, or significantly limiting everyday life, professional guidance may be appropriate.

MODULE 9

THE SURVIVING PARENT IS GRIEVING TOO

YOU ARE NOT ENTERING THIS AS A NEUTRAL OBSERVER

You may be trying to help a child grieve while carrying grief of your own.

Along with missing the person who died, you may be carrying anger, betrayal, guilt, resentment, loneliness, fear, exhaustion, financial pressure, parenting pressure, or unanswered questions.

Your grief is part of the family environment.

Children often notice what makes an adult go quiet, which questions change the room, which names are avoided, which stories are told, and which emotions seem welcome.

YOU DO NOT HAVE TO HIDE EVERY FEELING

Healthy honesty can sound like:

“I miss him too.”

“This is a hard day for me.”

“I’m sad, but you do not have to take care of me.”

“I’m going to talk to another adult about what I’m carrying.”

The child can know you are grieving without becoming responsible for making your grief manageable.

WHEN THE CHILD BECOMES “THE STRONG ONE”

A surviving parent may be exhausted. One child may appear easier, more mature, more helpful, or less emotional. That child can quietly become the person everyone depends on.

DO I RELY ON THIS CHILD BECAUSE THEY RARELY COMPLAIN?

DO I PRAISE THEM MORE FOR BEING EASY THAN FOR BEING HONEST?

WOULD THEY KNOW HOW TO ASK ME FOR HELP IF THEY STOPPED COPING WELL?

You will respond well some days and poorly on others. The important work is learning what belongs to you before placing it on the child.

WHAT THIS BRINGS UP IN ME

THE CHILD'S GRIEF CAN TOUCH YOUR OWN
WHAT HAPPENED?

WHAT DID I FEEL FIRST?

☐ Sadness

☐ Anger

☐ Fear

☐ Guilt

☐ Resentment

☐ Helplessness

☐ Shame

☐ Irritation

☐ Loneliness

☐ Exhaustion

☐ Relief

☐ Something else: _____

WHAT DID IT TOUCH IN ME?
IT REMINDED ME OF:

IT MADE ME AFRAID THAT:

IT BROUGHT BACK ANGER ABOUT:

IT MADE ME WANT TO AVOID:

WHAT BELONGS TO ME?

WHAT BELONGS TO THE CHILD?

WHERE DID I MIX THEM TOGETHER?

BEFORE I RESPOND AGAIN

Do I need time before continuing? Yes No Do I owe the child a repair or apology? Yes No Unsure Do I need another adult to help me process this? Yes No

REPAIR IS ALLOWED

"I was carrying a lot when you asked me that, and I did not respond the way I wanted to. You did nothing wrong by asking."

or

"My reaction was about what I was feeling. You do not have to protect me from asking hard questions."

WHERE DOES MY GRIEF GET TO GO?

THE CHILD CANNOT BE YOUR ONLY PLACE TO PUT IT

A surviving parent may be parenting alone, working, handling bills, managing family, answering questions, dealing with legal matters, and trying to function while grieving.

Your grief still needs somewhere to go.

Without other support, a child can quietly become the emotional container for the household. That is too much for them.

MY ADULT SUPPORT MAP

PERSON I CAN TELL THE FULL TRUTH TO:

PERSON WHO CAN LISTEN WITHOUT MAKING ME DEFEND HOW I FEEL:

PERSON I CAN CALL WHEN PARENTING FEELS TOO HEAVY:

PERSON WHO CAN HELP PRACTICALLY:

FAITH OR SPIRITUAL SUPPORT, IF RELEVANT:

PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT, IF NEEDED:

WHAT DO I NEED SUPPORT WITH?

- | | |
|---|--|
| ☐ Grief | ☐ Legal stress |
| ☐ Anger | ☐ Family conflict |
| ☐ Guilt | ☐ Faith questions |
| ☐ Loneliness | ☐ Exhaustion |
| ☐ Parenting | ☐ Fear about the future |
| ☐ Financial stress | ☐ Something else: _____ |

WHAT I WILL NOT ASK THE CHILD TO CARRY

I WILL NOT ASK THE CHILD TO REASSURE ME THAT:

I WILL NOT MAKE THE CHILD RESPONSIBLE FOR:

IF I NEED TO SAY MORE THAN THE CHILD SHOULD HEAR, I WILL GO TO:

HEALTHY HONESTY

"I'm sad today."
 "I miss them too."
 "I'm having a hard moment, but I'm okay."
 "I'm going to talk to someone about what I'm carrying."

TOO MUCH RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE CHILD

"You're all I have left."
 "I need you to be strong for me."
 "You're the only person who understands."
 "I don't know what I would do if something happened to you."

My child can know I am grieving. My child does not have to become the place where all of my grief goes.

MODULE 10

WORDS YOU CAN USE

You do not have to find the perfect sentence. Use these as starting points. Change them so they sound like you.

SILENCE

"I noticed you've been keeping more to yourself. I'm not upset. I just want you to know I'm here if something is sitting with you."

FEAR

"I understand why that worries you. I'm here now, and I'm going to keep doing what I can to take care of myself and come back to you."

"I DON'T WANT TO TALK."

"Okay. I won't force it. The door is still open."

"ARE YOU GOING TO DIE TOO?"

"Everyone dies someday, but I am here now, and I am doing what I can to take care of myself and stay with you for a long time."

ANGER

"You can be angry. We still have to keep people and things safe."

PROTECTING THE ADULT

"You don't have to protect me from how you're feeling. I can handle it."

WHEN YOU DO NOT KNOW

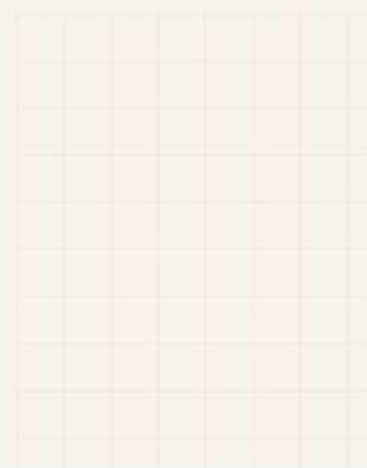
"I don't have all the answers, but I'll always tell you the truth."

BUILD YOUR OWN

SITUATION:

WHAT I WANT THE CHILD TO UNDERSTAND:

MY SENTENCE:



MODULE 11

WHEN MORE SUPPORT IS NEEDED

You do not have to handle everything alone.

Consider whether the child's difficulties are persistent, getting worse, significantly interfering with daily functioning, creating major safety concerns, or becoming too difficult for the family to manage without additional help.

Look at the pattern rather than one difficult day.

MY SUPPORT CIRCLE

TRUSTED ADULT

Name / organization: _____ Contact: _____

SCHOOL

Name / organization: _____ Contact: _____

FAITH OR COMMUNITY

Name / organization: _____ Contact: _____

GRIEF PROFESSIONAL

Name / organization: _____ Contact: _____

SPECIALIZED OR CRISIS SUPPORT

Name / organization: _____ Contact: _____

This may include childhood-bereavement, violent-loss, homicide-loss, or urgent/crisis resources when relevant.

WHAT SUPPORT DO WE NEED MOST?

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☐ Sleep | ☐ Family support |
| ☐ Fear | ☐ Violent-loss support |
| ☐ Anger | ☐ Support for the surviving parent |
| ☐ Talking about the death | ☐ Faith/community support |
| ☐ School support | ☐ Crisis support |
| ☐ Parenting support | ☐ Something else: _____ |

THE NEXT STEP

ONE PERSON I WILL CONTACT:

WHAT I WILL ASK FOR:

When: _____

IMMEDIATE SAFETY

MODULE 12

MY 30-DAY CAREGIVER PLAN

CHOOSE THREE PRIORITIES

You do not need to change everything at once. Review the ideas below and choose the three actions most likely to matter during the next 30 days.

POSSIBILITIES

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ Interpret one behavior more carefully | ☐ Ask someone for support |
| ☐ Test an assumption | ☐ Create a new safety routine |
| ☐ Ask a question differently | ☐ Stop forcing a conversation |
| ☐ Stop using a confusing phrase | ☐ Make more room for my own grief |
| ☐ Prepare for a milestone | ☐ Contact a professional |
| ☐ Have a difficult conversation | ☐ Something else: _____ |

1

PRIORITY 1

WHAT I WILL DO:

WHY IT MATTERS:

FIRST STEP:

2

PRIORITY 2

WHAT I WILL DO:

WHY IT MATTERS:

FIRST STEP:

3

PRIORITY 3

WHAT I WILL DO:

WHY IT MATTERS:

FIRST STEP:

30-DAY REVISIT

Date: _____

What changed in the child? _____ What changed in me? _____
 What worked? _____ What still needs attention? _____

BEFORE YOU CLOSE THIS WORKBOOK

YOU ARE ALLOWED TO COME BACK

You may finish this workbook and still not know exactly what the child is feeling.

Children change. Grief changes. Families change. Questions return. Milestones arrive.

What matters is that you have learned to slow down before assuming, notice before labeling, listen before explaining, and revisit what may need another look.

You do not have to interpret every behavior or force every conversation.

Remain available. Tell the truth. Pay attention. Seek more support when the family needs it.

BEFORE YOU PUT THIS AWAY ONE SENTENCE I WANT TO REMEMBER:

MY 30-DAY RETURN DATE:

PERSON I WILL CONTACT IF I NEED SUPPORT:

KEEP THESE FOUR QUESTIONS

OBSERVE

What did I actually see or hear?

UNDERSTAND

What might be happening?

RESPOND

What can I do without forcing disclosure?

REVISIT

What should I watch, ask, or return to later?

ABOUT THIS WORKBOOK

The Secret of Childhood Grief: The Caregiver Workbook is a companion to The Secret of Childhood Grief by Alan Austin. It is designed to help surviving parents and primary caregivers support grieving children and teens ages 5–18 through observation, reflection, communication, and intentional response.

CONTINUE WITH THE LONG ECHO PROJECT

The Long Echo Project
the-long-echo.com
hello@the-long-echo.com

A child does not need you to understand everything they feel. They need to know you are still willing to look, listen, and stay.