

are filled with chaos. Expect early therapeutic writing to reflect that confusion. Helping to sort and to clarify, writing provides an opportunity to pinpoint feelings. Many individuals understand what they feel only after seeing it on paper. No boundaries nor restraints should be placed on the words that flow from pen or typewriter. The bereaved will find himself doing what he needs to do to heal, writing what he needs to write to set the mind free. The heavy mental concentration involved in writing opens the door to an altered state of consciousness. This state of mind paves the way for insights and perceptions that might not be available at other times. Respect and follow all internal leads, expecting answers to come in their own way and in their own time.

Writing can be considered a memorial to a lost loved one, and it can take a variety of forms and directions. There is value in writing a detailed account of the deceased's life, the qualities shared within that relationship. Begin at the beginning, writing about the loss and what that loss has meant. Capture all random thoughts and fleeting memories with the first draft. Polishing can come much later. Talk with the deceased on paper about the relationship, the positive as well as the negative. Remembering the good as well as the bad times makes the story real. Use pictures and memorabilia, to recall the events, the history. Memories and feelings will come flooding back. Recalling one memory will trigger another and another. Most people are surprised at exactly how much they are able to remember, one thought invariably leading to a dozen more. Elaborate on feelings in story form as well as through letters. Consider poetry when the feelings become jumbled and imprecise. Thoughts can be condensed into concise, manageable size when prose is converted to poetic form.

It can be helpful to write about the death, the days leading up to and away from it, the details and events that form the fabric and the scenario. Thoughts and feelings that are just too painful to express in words can now find their way out on paper. The pictures within will take concrete form through the written word. Whether sudden or anticipated, death often leaves the bereaved with an overwhelming sense of unfinished business, a need for completion. Writing offers an opportunity to say what could not be said when the loved one was

alive. In addition, it offers a chance to say good-bye.

Written words provide a safe means of discharging anger. "Why did you leave me?" can be screamed out on paper. Doctors with human frailties, reckless drivers, and a mysterious God can all be called to task. Guilt, whether justified or contrived, can be expressed and forgiveness sought. This is an opportunity to apologize to make amends. Consider writing from the perspective of the deceased. A powerful exercise in self-examination can occur when we allow ourselves to adopt the frame of mind and thought processes of the one who has died. Significant parts of that

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person live within us, that personality very much alive through stored memories and shared experiences. Spending some time in the deceased's room or favorite place, sitting in his special chair, sorting through his things, heightens our sense of that other person. Writing from his or her perspective can offer soothing assurances and spiritual insights about the individual's life and death.

A bereaved individual may want to keep a journal reflecting personal experiences with grief. A chronological record of the grief process can be an invaluable tool in the resolution of loss. Day to day thoughts and experiences can be noted in as much or as little detail as is comfortable. Note, as well, the mental

processing that is done at night through dreams. Grief can be such an overcoming experience that the bereaved is sometimes left with a feeling of certain hopelessness. But through journal notations it is possible to discern movement and motion, to track significant growth and advancement. A journal is a record of where an individual has been, one that offers tremendous personal insight.

Writing takes time, but the opportunities to write are all around us. Carry a notebook to preserve fleeting thoughts that come at random times—while riding in the car, during routine daily tasks, through conversations with others who knew the deceased. Put no time limits on your writing, and don't try to tell the story all at once. Instead, do it bit by bit, little by little, as is comfortable. The spaces between the writing are as valuable to the process as the writing itself. Don't rush. Allow time for what has been learned to do its internal work. Consider, as well, sharing some of what is written with a trusted friend. Sharing ourselves with another person validates our feelings and experiences.

Indulge in reading and rereading what has been written, and read aloud from the written work as often as possible. The therapeutic value of reading aloud cannot be over estimated. Feelings that remain barely shrouded beneath the surface emerge with overwhelming intensity and power when given a verbal voice. There is pain in therapeutic writing, just as there is pain in grieving. The written expression of grief is designed to play back the sadness and the heartache. But as the bereaved relives, re-experiences, pain opens the doors to a heightened level of emotional health, and the accompanying tears are an important exercise in the healing process. Welcome the expression of strong, powerful emotions. Making peace with pain is the essence of the resolution of grief.

We all possess the innate ability to heal ourselves. Writing heals the heart, the mind, and the soul. Each written word opens doors—to the past and to the future, and to a heightened sense of peacefulness and emotional well-being. Therapeutic writing becomes a gift to oneself and to the memory of the one we've loved and lost. Above all, expect miracles from therapeutic writing. There is magic in the written word.

