

# *Understanding Your Grief*

Ten Essential Touchstones for  
Finding Hope and Healing Your Heart

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From *Understanding Your Grief* by Alan Wolfelt, Ph.D.

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Center for Loss director Dr. Alan Wolfelt is known around the world for his passionate messages of hope and healing in grief.

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*“A wound that goes unacknowledged  
and unwept is a wound that cannot  
heal.”*

John Eldredge

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*“Much of the pain from suicide  
grief can come  
from trying to keep the pain  
secret.”*

--Alan D. Wolfelt

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*“You need to have the intention to survive, and if you don’t have the tools, you have to reach out for them.”*

--Iris Bolton

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# Touchstone One

## Open to the Presence of Your Loss

*"In every heart there is an inner room, where we can hold our greatest treasures and our deepest pain."*

Marianne Williamson

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# Dosing Your Pain

While this first Touchstone seeks to help you understand the role of pain in your healing and eventual transcendence, I want to make sure you also understand that you cannot embrace the pain of your suicide grief all at once.

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## Dosing Your Pain continued

If you were to feel it all at once, you would no doubt feel overwhelmed and unsure that you could survive. Instead, you must allow yourself to “dose” the pain—feel it in small waves then allow yourself to retreat until you are ready for the next wave. P.33



# Touchstone Two

Dispel the Misconceptions About Grief

*“Two roads diverged in a wood, and I –  
I took the one less traveled by,  
And that has made all the difference.”*

Robert Frost

## **Misconception 1**

Grief and mourning are the same thing.

## **Misconception 2**

Grief and mourning progress in predictable, orderly stages.

## **Misconception 3**

You should move away from grief, not toward it.

## **Misconception 4**

Tears of grief are only a sign of  
weakness.

## **Misconception 5**

Being upset and openly mourning means  
you are being “weak” in your faith.

## **Misconception 6**

When someone you love dies, you only  
grieve and mourn for the physical loss of  
the person.

## **Misconception 7**

You should try not to think about the person who died on holidays, anniversaries, and birthdays.

## **Misconception 8**

After someone you love dies, the goal should be to “get over” your grief as soon as possible.

## **Misconception 9**

Nobody can help you with your grief.

## **Misconception 10**

When grief and mourning are finally reconciled, they never come up again.

# Touchstone Three

## Embrace the Uniqueness of Your Grief

*“At bottom every man knows well enough that he is a unique human being, only once on this earth; and by no extraordinary chance will such a marvelously picturesque piece of diversity in unity as he is ever be put together a second time.”*

Nietzsche

# Touchstone Four

## Explore Your Feelings of Loss

*"Did you ever know, dear, how much you took away with you when you left? I was wrong to say the stump was recovering from the pain of the amputation. I was deceived because it has so many ways to hurt me that I discover them only one by one."*

C.S. Lewis

# Touchstone Five

## Recognize You Are Not Crazy

*“If you are sure you understand everything that is going on, you are hopelessly confused.”*

Walter Mondale

# Touchstone Six

## Understand the Six Needs of Mourning

*“Going to the woods and the wild place has little to do with recreation, and much to do with creation.”*

Wendell Barry



# The Six Needs of Mourning

1. Accept the reality of the death.
2. Let yourself feel the pain of the loss.
3. Remember the person who died.
4. Develop a new self-identity.
5. Search for meaning.
6. Let others help you—now and always.

# Touchstone Seven

## Nurture Yourself

*“There is nothing in nature that can't be taken as a sign of both mortality and invigoration.”*

Gretel Ehrlich

# Touchstone Eight

Reach Out for Help

*"Action is the antidote to despair."*

Joan Baez

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# Companioning vs. Treating

- Companioning is about honoring the spirit; it is not about focusing on the intellect.
- Companioning is about curiosity; it is not about expertise.
- Companioning is about learning from others; it is not about teaching them.
- Companioning is about walking alongside; it is not about leading.
- Companioning is about being still; it is not about frantic movement forward.
- Companioning is about discovering the gifts of sacred silence; it is not about filling every painful moment with words.
- Companioning is about listening with the heart; it is not about analyzing with the head.

# Companioning vs. Treating

- Companioning is about bearing witness to the struggles of others; it is not about directing those struggles.
- Companioning is about being present to another person's pain; it is not about taking away the pain.
- Companioning is about respecting disorder and confusion; it is not about imposing order and logic.
- Companioning is about going to the wilderness of the soul with another human being; it is not about thinking you are responsible for finding the way out.

In your journey through grief, seek out the support of those who naturally adopt a "companioning" attitude toward you and avoid those who don't.

# Touchstone Nine

Seek Reconciliation, Not Resolution

*“Mourning never really ends. Only as time goes on, it erupts less frequently.”*

Anonymous

# Touchstone Ten

## Appreciate Your Transformation

*"Nature does not know extinction, all it knows is transformation."*

Wernher Von Braun

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