



# MOMENTS



## MATTER

### Releasing yourself from a sentence of self-blame

JESSICA SIMANDLE, BC

If there is one emotion of grieving clients I'd like to make disappear with a magic wand, it would be guilt.

Grieving people find so many reasons to blame themselves for their loved one's death. They think, 'If only I had done more, not ignored symptoms, or insisted they go to a doctor sooner, they would still be here.' Illness and death are usually random and beyond our control. When we try to make sense of something that leaves us feeling so helpless, it gives us a sense of control to assign blame to the situation. We believe the death was caused by a specific reason that we could have changed but we chose differently. We become our own judge and jury. Despite evidence to suggest otherwise, we condemn ourselves as guilty. Our sentence is a lifetime of self-blame. Sometimes despite our best efforts, people still die. None of us have the power to stop death. When people's lifestyle choices are a contributing factor, we blame ourselves for not doing more to intervene in their health. We can tell someone that doing



something is dangerous or bad for their health, but they tend to do it anyway.

Do you have "woulda, shoulda, coulda" thoughts running on repeat? These assumptions are usually almost always false. Ruminating on the past keeps us stuck in a cycle of self-blame and self-doubt. If you're struggling with these false accusations, it can be a helpful exercise to make a list starting with the phrase, "If only...." What stands out as inaccurate about these statements? Are you applying future information that you did not have at the time? Reflect on why you feel the need to hold onto this information that's no longer serving you in a healthy way.

Grief counselor, David Kessler, proposes we recast our what-if statements into even-if. For example, instead of saying, "what if I had not asked for the pain medication when my father said

Make amends that whenever you love someone, you will tell them.

*Continued on page 2*

his pain was unbearable-would still he be alive?" Change that thought to "even if I had not asked for the pain medication when my loved one said the pain was unbearable, he would have still died and been in pain." It is unfair to accept blame that is not yours. Regret and self-blame can be turned into understanding and meaning.

Kessler offers a powerful exercise called living amends. He encourages griever to commit themselves to meaningful action. No matter what has happened, it's important to not assign blame unfairly. The more the griever

focuses on the true cause of death, the less likely one will beat themselves up unnecessarily. However, none of us do life perfectly in our relationships with others. A living amends encourages us to take the action that you wished you could have done during that person's lifetime and do it for others for the rest of your lifetime. For example, do you wish you had told that person you loved them? Make amends that whenever you love someone, you will tell them.

## WORD SEARCH

Words from Jessica Simandle's article. Good luck!

Lifestyle  
Reflection  
D. Kessler  
Recast  
Amend  
Encourage  
Magic wand  
Commit  
Accept  
Control  
Power  
Helpful

R	W	D	K	Z	X	V	V	Q	Y	F	J	K	A	P	F	C	G	Y	B
W	S	Q	M	G	A	U	H	R	J	D	F	C	E	R	A	Q	G	Y	G
N	E	R	Z	A	H	A	W	U	B	Z	C	H	L	Y	Q	X	P	Z	Q
O	W	N	Z	S	G	V	O	R	W	E	U	C	C	F	F	T	P	B	M
V	P	X	K	G	E	I	X	D	P	R	R	U	G	Q	A	R	A	K	H
J	L	R	E	F	L	E	C	T	I	O	N	R	R	C	O	M	M	I	T
W	D	Q	W	E	M	F	E	W	W	U	W	Z	Y	Y	C	H	E	W	P
W	O	B	A	J	A	O	Z	U	A	V	C	R	R	Z	F	X	N	I	K
R	I	Z	K	N	M	T	O	Y	U	N	J	F	E	H	Q	U	D	C	B
R	V	L	J	E	L	Q	E	E	W	M	D	W	L	M	E	B	A	G	J
R	S	N	D	X	C	H	E	C	R	R	K	I	S	T	E	K	S	P	W
Q	V	P	Z	Q	Q	A	T	G	Q	D	F	N	S	S	S	C	P	L	S
Z	E	Q	Y	K	P	V	P	D	A	E	F	R	E	A	K	I	P	M	N
V	U	H	B	C	P	B	F	L	S	R	H	D	K	C	Q	R	C	I	O
D	Q	Q	E	Z	E	T	R	T	B	K	U	D	D	E	L	Q	O	K	F
G	A	G	P	X	K	C	Y	N	R	E	W	O	P	R	V	C	N	Y	E
B	T	A	Q	B	P	L	M	L	F	S	Z	Z	C	X	R	L	T	V	S
D	F	C	U	S	E	S	D	I	H	C	U	J	Z	N	M	H	R	H	L
X	O	K	T	K	G	L	U	F	P	L	E	H	Z	F	E	S	O	H	I
M	Q	K	R	X	Y	V	N	D	K	G	R	D	G	P	D	T	L	P	E

# A model for good decision-making

**BRIAN CHILTON, PhD.**

Assistant Director of Family Services

When a person's going through times of grief or is overwhelmed with life's circumstances, it can be difficult to make decisions.

In such times, a person may think to oneself, "As if I don't have enough to deal with already, I have to make yet another decision." When emotions are running high, people have a difficult time making good decisions. Quite honestly, we can't always trust our emotions, especially when making choices that could have a lasting impact on our lives and others.

Thankfully, there are some good models that can help us make good decisions even when we're overwhelmed. Along with my duties at Mountain Valley, I serve as an adjunct professor for a Christian school in eastern North Carolina. Recently, I taught an ethics class that used some resources from Dr. Scott Rae, an ethics professor at Biola University in La Miranda, CA.

Dr. Scott Rae created a model to help people when faced with an ethical dilemma. An ethical dilemma is defined as a "conflict between two or more value- or virtue-driven interests" (Rae, *Moral Choices*, 111). Rae suggests doing the following when faced with a major decision (Rae, *Moral Choices*, 111-113).

## Gather the facts

The first thing a person must do is ask: "What do we know?" and "What do we need to know" (Rae, *Moral Choices*, 111). It may be that you are able to make a quick decision by merely clarifying the details of the situation.

## Determine the ethical issues

Present the situation in an x versus y format so that you can identify what is causing you to make a choice.

## Determine what virtues or principles have a bearing on your situation

What values are at stake with your decision? For instance, you may be in a situation where a loved one wants to remain at home, but it is no longer safe for him or her to remain at home. Here, you face competing interests of autonomy (the loved one's right to choose for oneself), beneficence (seeking to do what's best), and maleficence (preventing harm from coming to another). Listing out these virtues can be very informative to your decision.

## List the alternatives

At this point, you would want to list all the alternatives you have before you. There may be good and bad alternatives alike. Nonetheless, it's good to know what options lie before you.

## Compare the alternatives with the virtues or principles

Here you will eliminate the bad alternatives by showing how they would lead to a bad or worse result than you desire.

## Consider the consequences

Estimate how each alternative could lead to particular consequences if that route is taken. While we cannot know the future, we can deduce how certain tracks could end.

## Make a decision

As Rae said, "Deliberation cannot continue indefinitely. At some point, you must make a decision" (Rae, *Moral Choices*, 113). With the steps you have taken leading to this point, you will be in a much better position to make an informed decision.

Granted, this model will not guarantee that we will always make the best choices. But it can offer a solid system to assist you with decision-making when and if you're in a situation where you feel overwhelmed. In addition to this model, you may find it extremely beneficial to find counsel with a good friend, family, clergy, or counselors. Though they cannot make a decision for you, they can help you think through the choices and could even assist with this seven-step model. Hopefully, you will find solace even in the most challenging of choices.

## RESOURCES

Rae, Scott B. *Moral Choices: An Introduction to Ethics*. Fourth Edition. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2018.

# Gardening through grief

TRACEY ANDERSON, MA, MAR  
Bereavement Coordinator

Gardening is one of the most popular hobbies in the United States.

During the COVID pandemic, over 18 million people started gardening for the first time. Some wanted to grow their own food, while others wanted to get out of the house and have something to do. Gardening is a great form of exercise. It is also a great way of dealing with grief and anxiety. Through gardening, people can get both physical and emotional benefits while they go outside and work in the dirt. Creating a memorial garden can be a way to honor your loved one. It can be as small as having an indoor plant or you can do an entire area of your yard outside. You can create a space where you can reflect and spend time with your loved one. Gardening offers so many benefits. Not only is it great for individuals, but you can meet other people through community gardens or involve family and friends in your personal garden. The possibilities are endless!

## The benefits of gardening

- Gardening is a great form of exercise, it helps with flexibility, strength, and balance
- It can reduce stress, lower blood pressure, and increase levels of Vitamin D
- Gardening can be calming, help you with mindfulness, decrease excessive thoughts, and help you with concentration
- Gardening can help you see progress, give you something to look forward to, and give you a sense of accomplishment when you see your plants and flowers grow
- Rage weeding can help you as you can take out your feelings of anger, stress, or helplessness by pulling out the weeds of your garden



- Gardening can help you through your grief as you see the cycle of life through your plants
- Gardening can help you form connections with others who like to garden. You can join gardening groups through Facebook or in the community. You can also garden with family and friends

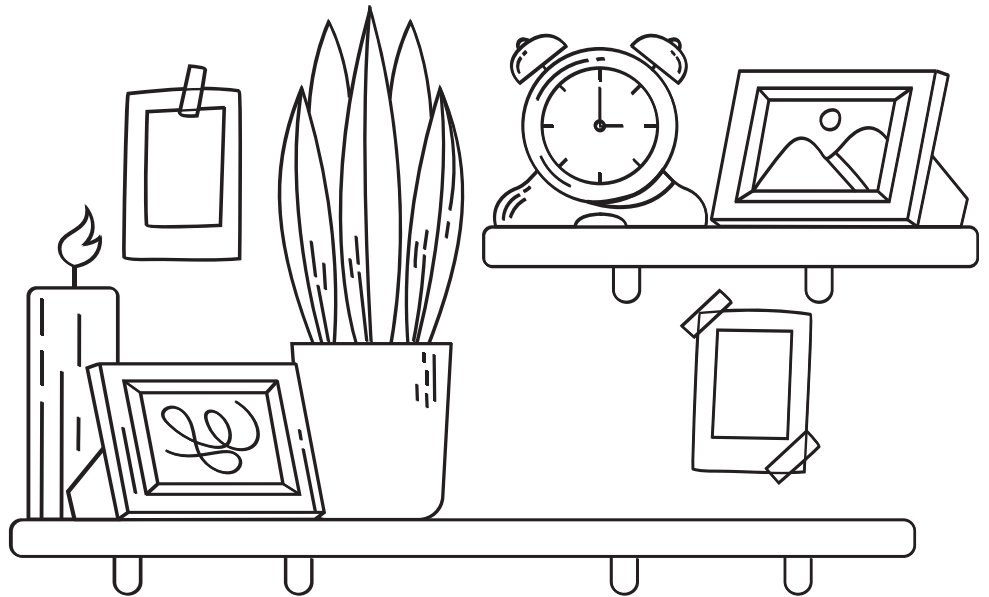
## Starting a grief garden

There are a few questions to ask yourself before you start your garden. Is there a flower or plant that reminds you of your loved one? What is your loved one's favorite color? You can plant flowers that will bloom in that color. Is there a time of year that is very difficult for you? You can plant flowers or plants that will bloom during the time that is most difficult for you. Is there a special place indoors or outdoors that reminds you of your loved one?



In the garden  
of memory, in  
the palace of  
dreams... that is  
where you and  
I shall meet.

— LEWIS CARROLL



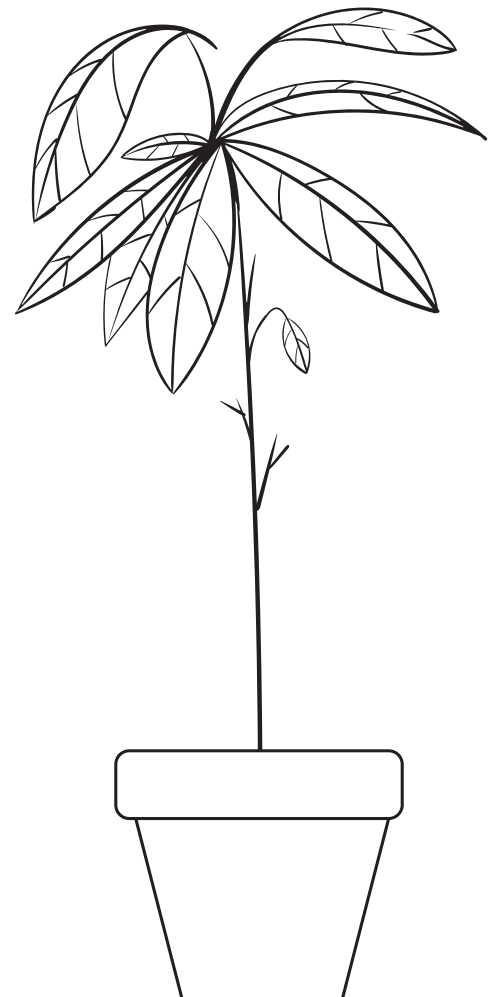
You can find a place outdoors to have a garden to remember your loved one. You can include memorial stones, wind chimes, a bird feeder, plaques, a swing or a memorial bench. You can decorate it any way you like. You can even bury their ashes in the garden. Some have written letters to their loved ones, ripped them up, and buried them in with the seeds of their favorite plants or flowers. Some families have saved seeds to use and bury on special anniversaries that they want to remember their loved ones. Some people want to plant a butterfly garden or a garden that will attract wildlife. A garden can be designed any way that you choose.

If you can't physically make an outdoor garden, you can have an area indoors to remember your loved one. Maybe there is a special place in the house where the two of you spent lots of time. You can set up a plant next to their picture or even have a plant on the windowsill. You can even use suncatchers in your special area.

Set up an area of reflection whether it is indoors or outdoors. This can be a place where you can be alone, reflect, and spend time

remembering your loved one. This can be an area of peace, calm, and tranquility for those moments where you want to be alone and remember your loved one. Make it personal and comfortable for you. This can provide you with a place of safety, security, and a place of serenity to remember the good times you had with your loved one. It can become a type of sanctuary for you, your family, and friends. You can even play your loved one's favorite music to set the mood for your time of reflection.

Gardening can be such a powerful tool to help you through your grieving process. Gardening can give you something to look forward to as you watch the plants and flowers bloom and grow. A grief garden can provide you with a place of peace and tranquility. A place to honor, memorialize, and remember the love that you shared with your loved one. A place to visit whenever the need arises. Gardening can help you heal, give you a sense of purpose, a new hobby, something to anticipate, and a sense of accomplishment as you watch your flowers and plants bloom and grow. Enjoy your time out in the sun and watch your garden grow.





# Grief support groups

## NORTH CAROLINA

### STOKES COUNTY

#### April 7th @ 6pm

Slate Funeral Home  
132 E Dalton Rd, King, NC 27021  
Melissa McCollum: (336) 679-2466

### SURRY COUNTY

#### April 10th @ 11:30am

Central Cafe  
304 N Main St, Dobson, NC 27017  
Jessica Simandle: (336) 583-8589

#### April 10th @ 11am

Mountain Valley Elkin office  
968 N Bridge St, Elkin, NC 28621  
Tracey Anderson: (336) 526-2650

#### April 24th @ 6pm

Mountain Valley Elkin office  
968 N Bridge St, Elkin, NC 28621  
Tracey Anderson: (336) 526-2650

### YADKIN COUNTY

#### April 3rd @ 11am

SECU Hospice Care Center  
243 N Lee Ave, Yadkinville, NC 27055  
Melissa McCollum: (336) 679-2466

#### April 8th @ 5pm

Oak Grove Baptist Church  
8087 Windsor Rd, Hamptonville, NC 27020  
Melissa McCollum: (336) 679-2466

#### April 17th @ 5pm

SECU Hospice Care Center  
243 N Lee Ave, Yadkinville, NC 27055  
Melissa McCollum: (336) 679-2466

### WILKES COUNTY

#### April 21st @ 6pm

Reins-Sturdivant Funeral Home  
270 Armory Rd, North Wilkesboro, NC 28659  
Tracey Anderson: (336) 526-2650  
Melissa McCollum: (336) 679-2466

## VIRGINIA

### HENRY COUNTY

#### April 2nd @ 2pm

King's Grant Retirement  
350 Kings Way Rd, Martinsville, VA 24112  
Shannon Roberson: (888) 789-2922

#### April 8th @ 10am

The Community Fellowship  
2674 Virginia Ave, Collinsville, VA 24078  
Shannon Roberson: (888) 789-2922

### PATRICK COUNTY

#### April 17th @ 2pm

Stuart Church of Living Water  
101 E Blue Ridge St, Stuart, VA 24171  
Shannon Roberson: (888) 789-2922

### GRAYSON COUNTY

#### April 21st @ 2pm

Mt Olivet Community Church  
6926 Carrollton Pike, Galax, VA 24333  
Jessica Simandle: (888) 789-2922

## No RSVP needed

Please attend the group nearest you.  
Meeting dates and times are subject to change

For more information, please call  
the group's grief support coordinator

Mountain Valley  
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of Surry

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Wilkes County

Yadkin County  
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Activity page  
**solutions**



*The Humble Have*  
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HOSPICE SERVICES

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**SPARTA**  
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38 E CHEEK ST  
(336) 372-4545



# WELCOME

to Moments Matter, our bereavement newsletter

INSIDE:

Releasing yourself from self-blame  
A model for good decision-making  
Gardening through grief

+ April 2025 grief support group schedule

SCAN  
for the Moments Matter  
newsletter survey!



## Helpful books on grief and loss

There are more than 150 titles at the Alleghany, Stokes, Surry, and Yadkin locations of the Northwestern Regional Library • [mtnvalleyhospice.org/grief-library](http://mtnvalleyhospice.org/grief-library)





# Activity page solutions

