

# Turning Grief into Positive Action

A Compassionate Guide



by Sandie Dennis



## BeyondEAP

Specialist employee support  
for life's toughest challenges

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# Finding personal meaning in sadness

As an employee support coach, I regularly work alongside people experiencing deep feelings of loss following a bereavement.

So when my family and I lost a close loved one in December 2014, I searched my own 'emotional toolkit' for ways to help us cope with the resulting avalanche of emotions. Together, we decided to channel them into something personally meaningful, thus proving to ourselves that a traumatic event can also have a positive outcome.

On the first anniversary of our loss, we chose to pledge our ongoing support to **The Brain Tumour Charity**. This was a personal decision for us because following their diagnosis, we believe our loved one's life might have been saved had the right resources existed. We wanted to do all we could to stop others from suffering in the same way.

As such, every year (excluding 2020, due to Covid restrictions) we have donated time and resources to fundraising for this amazing charity.







# We are all different.



It is important to note that there is no right or wrong way to grieve, and supporting a charity is one of many coping strategies that might be helpful.

Every person's grief journey is unique, and what matters most is finding ways to process and navigate our emotions, in a way that feels personally meaningful and healing to us.

So if you have been thinking about how to turn grief into positive remembrance, keep in mind that we are all different. Supporting The Brain Tumour Charity works for my family and me, but for many reasons charity work may not be the right approach for you.

Coping with grief is an intensely personal process, so however you choose to honour your loved one, it must resonate with you and/or your family. In this guide I have set out various ways of turning grief into positive action, to help increase the chance that you will find something that resonates.

- **Share Stories and Memories:** Create an opportunity for friends and family to share their stories and memories of your loved one, all together. You could arrange a formal dinner, a relaxed gathering, or plan a specific remembrance event.
- **Plan a Holiday:** Visit a place that your loved one always wanted to see, or go somewhere you know they enjoyed. As well as honouring their memory, taking a trip as a group can offer a little something nice to look forward to.
- **Create a Remembrance Garden:** Take a corner of your garden and use it to cultivate plants or flowers in honour of your loved one, as a lasting tribute to their memory. Your garden corner can soon become a serene, beautiful space for reflection and remembrance.
- **Name a Bench:** If you are able to, name or install a bench in an area your loved one liked to go. This can offer a tangible remembrance space that you could visit on significant anniversaries, or simply whenever you want to feel close to them.
- **Keep a Memory Book:** Buy a book that you can fill up with photos, mementos, and written tributes from family and friends. This can become a precious keepsake that captures the essence of your loved one's life.
- **Light a Candle:** Light a candle on special occasions or anniversaries to symbolise the continued presence of your loved one in your heart.
- **Create a Memorial Video:** Make a video montage of images that depict special moments from your loved one's life. This can be a touching way to remember them and share the 'little' details with others.



- **Write Letters:** Some people find writing a therapeutic way to maintain personal connections, even with the people they've lost. You could try writing letters to your loved one, expressing your feelings, thoughts, and updates on life events.
- **Host a Fundraising Event:** Organise a fundraiser in memory of your loved one, with the proceeds going directly to a cause they cared about, in their name.
- **Create a Piece of Art:** Create an artistic tribute to your loved one. This could take the form of a painting, a sculpture, or a different form of visual art that best reflects their personality and passions.
- **Start a Memory Jar:** Encourage your loved one's family and friends to write down fond memories or special moments they shared with them. Place the slips of paper into your memory jar, to be shared and re-lived during future gatherings.
- **Establish a Scholarship or Award:** Gain sponsorship from an external source or use personal funds, to both enrich the winner's life and support a cause or field your loved one was passionate about.
- **Workplace Remembrance:** If appropriate, ask your loved one's employer to name a room, an area, or a place at work that's purely dedicated to them.





# A Personal Example: How supporting a charity has benefited my family

Over the years, supporting **The Brain Tumour Charity** has helped my family cope with the process of grieving. I have both personally experienced and witnessed the intensely therapeutic results.

Specifically, it has helped us:

- **Find Purpose and Meaning:** The charity has a personal significance to us, so it has offered a sense of purpose and meaning during our darkest, most challenging times. It has also allowed us to contribute positively to a cause that could one day bring a cure, or help others avoid the same fate as our loved one.
- **Honour Their Memory:** Each year we honour and cherish the memories of our loved one in a celebration of their life. In continuing their legacy, we have reframed our loss to create a positive outcome.
- **Form an Emotional Outlet:** Supporting The Brain Tumour Charity provides an opportunity for us to express deep feelings. Our friends and family know that we offer this yearly support, which has helped us heal as we move through our grief together.
- **Facilitate Acceptance:** This first year of honouring our lost family member, telling his story and repeating it, allowed us to mark the beginning of the process of acceptance. More and more, it has helped us come to terms with the reality of our loss and adjust to our new family dynamic.
- **Foster Connection and Community:** Through our charity work, we regularly meet other like-minded people and can talk ever more openly about our grief.

- **Distract from Grief:** Through my work as an employee support coach, I know that grieving is essential. However, engaging in our annual activities with the charity offers a distraction from its intensity, which was especially welcome during those first few years.
- **Fuel Empowerment and Control:** Grief often leaves people feeling totally helpless. Supporting the charity has made us feel empowered to make a positive impact, as well as allowing us to regain control of our emotions.
- **Cope Through Giving:** Knowing our donations of time and money are actively helping others brings a genuine sense of satisfaction, which has helped manage the impact of our grief. We have transformed our pain into a force for good.
- **Turn Grief into Resilience:** Over these years we have moved from overwhelming pain to newly-created memories. In doing this, we have strengthened our resilience.
- **Find Meaning:** We can more easily reflect on the lessons, self-development, and learning that has come from the experience of loss, inspiring deeper meaning for us all.





## Allow yourself time to remember.

Positive remembrance plays a vital role in the healing journey of grief. It will provide a space for you to cope with your emotions, maintain your connections with your loved one, and find the right support in challenging times.

As we have seen, every person's grief is unique, so the way you choose to remember and honour your loved one will differ from someone else's way. Yet we are all alike in that the process of remembrance is an essential aspect of the healing process, so allow yourself time to find the right way forwards for you and/or your family.

I wish you all the best.





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