



ANTICIPATORY GRIEF

Caregiver Workbook & Planning Guide



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MEMORIAL MERITS
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Anticipatory Grief

Caregiver Workbook & Planning Guide

A Practical Resource for Navigating Terminal Illness

This workbook provides practical tools, checklists, and guided reflections for caregivers experiencing anticipatory grief during a loved one's terminal illness.

Memorial Merits

Supporting Families Through End-of-Life Planning and Grief

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Read the full comprehensive guide at: <https://memorialmerits.com/anticipatory-grief-how-to-cope-when-your-loved-one-is-dying-terminal-illness-hospice-care-guide/>

How to Use This Workbook

This workbook is designed to support you through one of life's most difficult experiences - caring for someone with a terminal illness while navigating anticipatory grief. You don't have to complete it all at once or in order. Use what's helpful, skip what isn't, and return to sections as needed.

What You'll Find Inside:

- **Self-Assessment Tools** - Recognize caregiver burnout and monitor your wellbeing
- **Practical Checklists** - Track important documents, conversations, and tasks
- **Memory Preservation** - Ideas for creating meaningful legacies while time remains
- **Self-Care Tracking** - Monitor your own needs during this exhausting time
- **Resource Lists** - Connect with support organizations and services
- **Reflection Prompts** - Process complex emotions in a safe space

You're not grieving too early. You're not doing it wrong. You're facing something extraordinarily difficult, and this workbook is here to support you through it.

Important Notes:

- This workbook complements professional support but doesn't replace it
- Your responses are private - use this space honestly
- There's no "right way" to complete this workbook
- Skip sections that don't apply or feel overwhelming
- Return to this workbook as often as needed

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Caregiver Burnout Self-Assessment

Check any statements that describe your current experience. This isn't a diagnosis - it's a tool to help you recognize when you need more support.

Physical Signs

- ☐ Chronic fatigue even after rest
- ☐ Sleep problems (insomnia or oversleeping)
- ☐ Frequent headaches or body aches
- ☐ Getting sick more often than usual
- ☐ Changes in appetite or weight
- ☐ Neglecting your own medical appointments

Emotional Signs

- ☐ Feeling overwhelmed most of the time
- ☐ Frequent crying or inability to cry at all
- ☐ Irritability or quick anger
- ☐ Feeling numb or emotionally disconnected
- ☐ Anxiety or panic attacks
- ☐ Depression or hopelessness
- ☐ Guilt about your feelings or actions

Behavioral Signs

- ☐ Withdrawing from friends and family
- ☐ Loss of interest in activities you used to enjoy
- ☐ Increased use of alcohol, drugs, or medication
- ☐ Difficulty concentrating or making decisions
- ☐ Neglecting personal hygiene or appearance
- ☐ Increasing conflicts with patient or family

Cognitive Signs

- ☐ Difficulty making decisions
- ☐ Memory problems or forgetfulness
- ☐ Constantly worrying
- ☐ Feeling like nothing you do is enough
- ☐ Thoughts of harming yourself

If you checked several items, especially in multiple categories, you're experiencing caregiver burnout. This isn't failure - it's a normal response to abnormal circumstances. Consider:

- Talking to your doctor
- Seeking therapy or counseling
- Arranging respite care immediately
- Asking family/friends for specific help
- Joining a caregiver support group

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If you checked "thoughts of harming yourself," please call 988 (Suicide & Crisis Lifeline) or text HOME to 741741 immediately. You deserve support and help.

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Weekly Self-Care Tracker

Track basic self-care each day. Even small acts of care matter. This isn't about perfection - it's about awareness and gentle accountability.

Self-Care Item	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
6+ hours sleep							
Three meals eaten							
Showered/dressed							
Took medications							
Brief time outside							
Talked to someone							
Brief physical activity							

Notes on this week:

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Important Conversations Checklist

These conversations are difficult but valuable. Not everyone wants or is able to have all of them. Check what you've discussed and note where important documents or information are located.

Medical Decisions & End-of-Life Wishes

- ☐ DNR (Do Not Resuscitate) preferences - Location: _____
- ☐ Advance directive/living will - Location: _____
- ☐ Healthcare power of attorney - Location: _____
- ☐ Hospice care preferences and timing
- ☐ Pain management preferences
- ☐ Where they want to be in final days (home, hospital, hospice facility)
- ☐ Who they want present at the end

Legal & Financial Matters

- ☐ Will location: _____
- ☐ Financial power of attorney - Location: _____
- ☐ Bank account information and access
- ☐ Life insurance policies - Location: _____
- ☐ Property deeds and titles
- ☐ Debts and outstanding obligations
- ☐ Digital accounts and passwords - Location: _____

After-Death Wishes

- ☐ Burial or cremation preference
- ☐ Funeral or memorial service wishes
- ☐ Organ donation preferences
- ☐ Obituary information and preferences
- ☐ People who should be notified

Personal & Legacy Conversations

- ☐ Stories they want preserved
- ☐ Values they hope you'll carry forward
- ☐ Things they want you to know they're proud of
- ☐ Forgiveness or reconciliation needed
- ☐ Permission for you to live fully after they're gone
- ☐ Their hopes for your future

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Memory Preservation Project Ideas

Creating tangible memories while time remains can provide comfort now and after death. Choose projects that feel meaningful, not obligatory. Keep them simple and focus on process over perfection.

Audio & Visual Memories

- ☐ Record their voice (reading, singing, just talking)
- ☐ Video everyday moments, not just special occasions
- ☐ Save voicemails and video messages
- ☐ Interview them about their life story
- ☐ Photograph their hands
- ☐ Scan old family photos together while they tell stories

Written & Tangible Memories

- ☐ Compile favorite recipes with their stories
- ☐ Save handwriting samples (notes, lists, anything in their hand)
- ☐ Create memory book together
- ☐ Collect letters or emails they've written
- ☐ Gather family history and genealogy information

Sensory Memories

- ☐ Bottle their perfume or cologne
- ☐ Save clothing that smells like them
- ☐ Collect objects they used daily
- ☐ Create playlist of meaningful music

Legacy Projects for Others

- ☐ Letters to grandchildren for future milestones
- ☐ Recorded messages for specific occasions
- ☐ Advice letters for life situations
- ☐ Ethical will (values and wisdom to pass down)

Projects I want to prioritize:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

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Emergency Contacts & Key Information

Keep this information accessible for yourself and other caregivers. Update as circumstances change.

Primary Medical Team

Primary Care Physician: _____ Phone: _____
Specialist: _____ Phone: _____
Hospice Nurse (if applicable): _____ Phone: _____
Hospital/Medical Facility: _____ Phone: _____
Pharmacy: _____ Phone: _____

Patient Information

Full Legal Name: _____

Date of Birth: _____ Social Security #: _____
Medicare #: _____ Medicaid #: _____
Insurance Provider: _____ Policy #: _____
Allergies: _____

Current Medications: _____

Support Team

Primary Caregiver: _____ Phone: _____
Backup Caregiver: _____ Phone: _____
Home Health Aide: _____ Phone: _____
Social Worker: _____ Phone: _____
Clergy/Spiritual Support: _____ Phone: _____

Family Contacts (to notify)

Name: _____ Relationship: _____ Phone: _____
Name: _____ Relationship: _____ Phone: _____
Name: _____ Relationship: _____ Phone: _____
Name: _____ Relationship: _____ Phone: _____

Legal & Financial Contacts

Attorney: _____ Phone: _____
Financial Advisor: _____ Phone: _____
Accountant: _____ Phone: _____
Insurance Agent: _____ Phone: _____

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Support Resources & Organizations

You don't have to navigate this alone. These organizations offer support specifically for caregivers and families facing terminal illness.

Caregiver Support Organizations

- **Family Caregiver Alliance** - caregiver.org - Comprehensive resources and support
- **Caregiver Action Network** - caregiveraction.org - Advocacy and community
- **AARP Caregiving Resource Center** - aarp.org/caregiving - Practical guides
- **Eldercare Locator** - eldercare.acl.gov - 1-800-677-1116

Mental Health & Crisis Support

- **988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline** - Call or text 988 (24/7)
- **Crisis Text Line** - Text HOME to 741741 (24/7)
- **NAMI Helpline** - 1-800-950-6264 - nami.org
- **BetterHelp** - betterhelp.com - Online therapy with flexible scheduling

Hospice & End-of-Life Care

- **National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization** - nhpco.org
- **Medicare Hospice Benefits** - medicare.gov/coverage/hospice-care
- **Hospice Foundation of America** - hospicefoundation.org

Grief Support

- **GriefShare** - griefshare.org - Faith-based support groups nationwide
- **The Dougy Center** - dougy.org - Support for children and families
- **Reddit r/CaregiverSupport** - 24/7 community understanding

Practical Assistance

- **Meals on Wheels** - mealsonwheelsamerica.org - Food delivery
- **Veterans Administration** - va.gov - Support if patient is veteran
- **Local faith communities** - Often organize meal trains and volunteer care

Resources I've contacted or want to explore:

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Grief Journaling Prompts

Use these prompts to process complex emotions in a safe space. You don't have to answer them all or answer them "correctly." Write whatever comes, even if it's messy or contradictory.

Right now, I'm feeling...

The hardest part of caregiving today was...

Something I wish I could say to them (but can't or haven't)...

A memory I want to preserve forever...

I'm feeling guilty about...

What I need right now but don't have...

Something that made me smile or laugh recently...

I'm afraid that...

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Decision-Making Framework for Difficult Choices

Terminal illness requires impossible decisions with no perfect answers. This framework can help you work through difficult medical and care choices when options feel overwhelming.

The Decision I'm Facing:

What I Know About This Situation:

1. Medical facts and prognosis:

2. Their stated wishes (if known):

3. Their current quality of life:

My Options and Their Likely Outcomes:

Option A:

Description: _____

Likely outcomes: _____

Aligns with their values because: _____

My concerns: _____

Option B:

Description: _____

Likely outcomes: _____

Aligns with their values because: _____

My concerns: _____

Key Questions to Consider:

- Does this prioritize quality of life or quantity of life?
- What would they choose if they could tell me now?
- Am I making this decision based on their needs or my own?
- What outcome will I be able to live with long-term?
- Have I consulted with their medical team and other family members?

My Decision:

Why I Made This Choice:

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Remember: There are rarely perfect choices in terminal illness. Making the best decision you can with the information you have, while honoring their values and your own moral compass, is enough. You're doing your best in an impossible situation.

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Personal Reflections & Notes

Use these pages for anything you need - tracking symptoms, recording meaningful moments, venting frustration, or processing grief. This space is yours.

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This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are approximately 20 lines visible. The paper has a slight shadow on the right side, suggesting it's resting on a surface.

Final Thoughts

You're navigating one of life's hardest journeys. You're allowed to be exhausted. You're allowed to feel relief alongside grief. You're allowed to need support. You're allowed to survive this however you can.

Anticipatory grief doesn't follow rules or timelines. This workbook is a tool, not a test. Use it in whatever way serves you. Return to it when you need guidance, skip sections that don't apply, add your own pages as needed.

Most importantly: you're not alone in this. Millions of caregivers are walking similar paths, facing similar impossible choices, feeling similar exhausting emotions. Your experience is valid. Your grief is real. And you're doing better than you think.

For more support and resources:

Visit Memorial Merits at MemorialMerits.com

Comprehensive guides on grief support, end-of-life planning, caregiver resources, and navigating terminal illness with compassion and practical help.

**You're stronger than you feel.
You're doing better than you think.
You're not alone.**

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