

THE
GRIEF
SPIRAL
METHOD

HOW TO HELP YOUR CHILD
GROW THROUGH GRIEF
AT EVERY AGE

THE CLIMB FRAMEWORK

THE GRIEF SPIRAL METHOD

How to Help Your Child Grow Through Grief at Every Age

A Spiral Guide for Parents

[Companion Guide to The Grief Spiral Method Audio Program](#)

The Grief Spiral Method

How to Help Your Child Grow Through Grief at Every Age

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[Companion Guide to The Grief Spiral Method Audio Program](#)

First Edition

Contents

A Note Before We Begin

Chapter 1 *The Return You Didn't Expect*

Chapter 2 *The Lighthouse and the Spiral*

Chapter 3 *The CLIMB Framework*

Chapter 4 *Chart*

Chapter 5 *Listen*

Chapter 6 *Invite*

Chapter 7 *Match*

Chapter 8 *Bookmark*

Chapter 9 *The Obstacles Ahead*

Chapter 10 *Your Spiral Guide Plan*

Chapter 11 *Becoming the Steady Lighthouse*

Appendix *Observation Journal, Bookmarks, Invitations & Questions Log*

A Note Before We Begin

You are holding this guide because you love a child who is grieving—and because something about what you have tried so far has left you feeling lost, or scared, or quietly convinced that you are doing it wrong.

You are not doing it wrong. And your child is not broken.

The Grief Spiral Method exists because the way we have been taught to think about children's grief is fundamentally incomplete. We have been treating grief like a problem to be solved, a phase to be moved through, a wound to be healed and closed. But children's grief does not work that way. It spirals. It comes back. It looks different at seven than it did at five, different at twelve than it did at nine. And each return is not regression—it is growth.

This guide will walk you through the five steps of the CLIMB framework: Chart, Listen, Invite, Match, and Bookmark. Each step helps you support your child at every developmental window of their grief journey—not just the first one, but all the ones that follow across their growing-up years.

Use this alongside the audio program, or on its own. Come back to it in six months, and again in a year. You will hear different things each time—because you, too, are on a spiral of growth.

Your child isn't stuck. They're growing. And your steady presence—not your perfect answers—is the most powerful thing you can offer them.

You are already the parent your child needs. This guide will help you trust that more fully.

Let's begin.

Chapter 1

The Return You Didn't Expect

Why your child's grief keeps coming back—and why that's a good sign

You just watched your child have a complete meltdown about a death you thought they had already processed. Maybe in therapy. Maybe in the grief camp they attended. Maybe just in the slow, steady months of life after loss where things seemed—finally—to be settling.

And now here you are, standing in the doorway, watching it surface again, thinking: Are we going backward? Did I do something wrong? Why is this happening again?

If you have ever asked yourself any version of those questions, this guide was written for you.

What You Were Never Told

Almost everything we have been taught about helping grieving children was designed for adults processing loss—not for children who are still in the process of becoming themselves.

The advice is familiar: talk about the person who died, make a memory box, give your child space to feel their feelings. And these things do help. But they only address the surface of what is actually happening. Because when you implement them, you are treating grief like a one-time event that can be processed and completed.

So you help your eight-year-old talk about missing Grandpa. You validate their tears. You think you are doing everything right—and you are, for that moment. But six months later when they are suddenly angry at the dinner table, or two years later when they become anxious about you leaving for work, you feel blindsided. You think something new has gone wrong.

What you are actually witnessing is something completely different: your child encountering their loss again from a new developmental vantage point. Not regressing. Revisiting. And nobody told you this would keep happening—or that it is supposed to.

The World Working Against You

Beyond incomplete advice, the systems that surround your child are actively working against their natural grief process. Schools give three days off for a death and expect a child back ready to learn. Teachers express concern months later when grief shows up in behavior, framing it as a problem to solve rather than a process to support. Pediatricians ask about grief once or twice, then move on to growth charts.

Well-meaning family members say things like 'they're doing so much better' or 'kids are resilient' when what they really mean is: the child has stopped showing visible signs of sadness, so we can all relax now. And that word—resilient—deserves a moment of honest examination. What resilience actually means is the capacity to adapt and keep growing in the face of difficulty. What we often use it to mean is: back to normal, not talking about it, seeming okay.

Those are not the same thing. A child who has truly integrated a loss looks different from a child who has simply learned to hide it. And for years, parents cannot always tell which one they are looking at.

Your child picks up every signal. They learn that grief has an expiration date. That there is something wrong with them if they are still affected. That they should be over it by now. So they start hiding their grief—not because they have processed it, but because they have learned it makes people uncomfortable when it keeps surfacing.

Signs your child may be hiding grief rather than processing it:

- They stopped talking about the person who died around the same time adults relaxed
- They change the subject quickly when the loss comes up
- They seem 'fine' but anxiety, perfectionism, or anger has increased
- They make offhand comments about the loss that seem designed to test your reaction
- They tell you they are okay but their behavior tells a different story
- They grieve easily with peers but shut down around family

None of these mean something is permanently wrong.

They mean your child has learned to read the room — and the room said: not here.

Your job is to change what the room says.

The Parental Trap

When you notice your child struggling again with something you believed they had worked through, your natural parental instinct activates. You want to fix it. To help them get past this once and for all. So you might overcompensate with positivity, redirect them away from sad thoughts, rush to reassure them that everything is okay now.

But when you try to push grief forward or race it to the other side, you teach your child that their recurring feelings are wrong. They begin to believe something is broken in them. Why am I still sad when Mom says we have already talked about this? Why does this hurt again when I thought I was better?

And suppressed grief does not disappear. It morphs. It shows up as anxiety, perfectionism, clinginess, anger, or withdrawal. You end up managing disguised versions of the grief rather than the grief itself.

The Grief Timeline Trap

Beneath all of this is something I call the Grief Timeline Trap—the invisible cultural pressure that forces children's grief into adult-sized boxes with expected stages and deadlines. It makes parents rush healing instead of honoring each child's unique developmental capacity to process loss.

Adults have a relatively stable understanding of death. When we grieve, we work with a fully formed brain and a consistent worldview. But children's brains are literally under construction. The seven-year-old who understands that Daddy died does not yet grasp permanence the way their eleven-year-old self will. The nine-year-old who knows Grandma is not coming back cannot yet comprehend the future milestones she will miss—graduations, weddings, grandchildren—the way their sixteen-year-old self eventually will.

Each cognitive leap, each developmental milestone, each new window of understanding means they encounter the same loss again as if for the first time. Not because they have not healed. Because they are meeting their grief with a more sophisticated brain.

Your child isn't stuck in grief. They're growing through it—meeting the same loss from a higher window each time, with more capacity to understand what it actually means.

Until you stop expecting linear progress and start recognizing the spiral pattern, you will keep misinterpreting healthy developmental grief responses as failure. You will wonder why therapy didn't work. You will question whether you did something wrong.

You didn't. Your child is growing. And their grief is growing with them—exactly as it should.

Think about the last time your child's grief resurfaced unexpectedly. Looking back now, what developmental shift might have brought them to a new window of understanding?

Chapter 2

The Lighthouse and the Spiral

A completely different way of understanding children's grief

Here is the insight that changes everything: your child is not stuck in grief. They are not regressing. And you have not failed them when they seem to be back at square one with sadness about someone who died years ago.

What is actually happening is that they are revisiting their loss with a more developed brain. And each return is a sign of healthy processing, not a failure to move on.

The Spiral Staircase

The old model of grief treated it like a straight hallway with an exit sign at the end. Work through it. Arrive at acceptance. Done. This model never fit adult grief particularly well—and it fits children's grief almost not at all.

Children's grief is not a hallway. It is a spiral staircase in a lighthouse.

They circle back to the same feelings at different heights as they grow, seeing their loss from a new developmental window each time. A five-year-old understands death differently than they will at eight, then twelve, then sixteen, then twenty-five. And that is not a problem—that is exactly how it is supposed to work.

Your role as a parent is not to push them through floors or rush them to the top. You are climbing alongside them, pointing out what is visible from each new window. You are the steady presence that says: yes, we are talking about this again, and we will keep talking about it as you grow, because you will keep seeing new things.

What Changes When You See the Spiral

When your nine-year-old suddenly starts crying about the grandmother who died when they were five, your first instinct might be panic: I thought we had gotten through this. But here is what is actually happening.

At five, your child understood death in very concrete, limited ways. They knew Grandma was gone, but they could not grasp the permanence, could not imagine their future without her, could not process unfairness or think about their own mortality. Now at

nine, their brain has developed new cognitive abilities. They can think more abstractly. They can project into the future. They can hold complex emotions simultaneously.

They are not re-experiencing the same grief. They are experiencing their loss for the first time with their nine-year-old brain. It is completely new grief from a higher vantage point.

When grief returns, ask yourself:

What has changed in my child's brain and understanding since last time?

What can they now grasp that they couldn't before?

What part of this loss are they meeting for the first time?

The grief hasn't grown. Their capacity to understand it has.

That is growth. That is the spiral working exactly as it should.

What This Reframe Gives You

When you stop seeing grief returns as setbacks and start seeing them as developmental milestones, everything changes. You stop bracing for impact every time the loss resurfaces. You stop feeling like a failure when the sadness returns. You stop treating your child's grief as a problem to be managed and start treating it as a natural part of their growing-up journey that you can walk alongside.

This approach completely reframes the moments you thought were evidence that something was wrong. When your child asks the same question about their deceased parent that they asked two years ago, you are not witnessing failure. You are witnessing development. When they seem sadder about a loss than they were right after it happened, you are not seeing delayed processing. You are seeing expanded capacity to feel complex emotions.

The grief is not getting worse. Their ability to understand what they have lost is getting better.

The Milestones That Trigger Returns

One of the most consistent patterns in children's grief is that returns cluster around developmental milestones. Starting a new school. The first day of middle school.

Reaching puberty. Getting a driver's licence. A first relationship. Graduation. Going to college. These moments are new heights in the lighthouse—new windows from which your child sees their whole life differently, including the loss that has shaped it.

A teenager heading to college might suddenly be hit with grief for a parent who died when they were eight. Not because the grief never healed, but because they are now standing at a window from which they can see exactly what that parent will miss—the graduation, the move-in day, the phone calls about homesickness, the advice about relationships. Their eight-year-old self had no way to comprehend any of that. This is the spiral doing exactly what it is supposed to do.

When you know to expect these milestone returns—when you can say to yourself 'we're coming up on a big developmental window, I should be especially available'—you stop being blindsided by them. You can even prepare. Be especially present around the first day of a new school, around birthdays, around holidays, around the anniversary of the death. Not because you are creating grief, but because you know it may surface and you want to be ready.

You Are the Lighthouse

In this framework, you are not the person responsible for getting your child to the top of the staircase. You are the lighthouse itself—the fixed, steady, reliable point of light that your child navigates by as they make their own climb.

You do not have to have all the answers. You do not have to have processed your own grief perfectly. You do not have to know the right thing to say at every turn. You just have to remain lit. Remain steady. Remain present at the window whenever your child spirals back around to a new level of understanding.

A lighthouse does not climb with the ship. It stands still and shines. Its power is not in movement—it is in consistency. Your child needs to know that when they spiral back—at seven, at twelve, at sixteen, at twenty-two—you will still be there. That the grief will not exhaust your patience. That you will not have moved on to a place where their sadness feels like an inconvenience.

That is the role this method asks of you. And it is a role you are already capable of playing.

How does the spiral metaphor change how you see your child's grief journey? What would it mean to stop seeing returns as setbacks and start seeing them as growth markers?

Chapter 3

The CLIMB Framework

Five steps for supporting your child at every turn of the spiral

The Grief Spiral Method is organized around five steps that you cycle through repeatedly as your child develops. This is not a checklist you complete once and put away. It is a living framework—a cycle you return to at each new developmental window, adapting as your child grows.

Together, the five steps form the word CLIMB—because that is exactly what your child is doing, and exactly what you are doing alongside them.

C
CHART

Chart where your child is developmentally. Understand how their brain currently processes death so you can set accurate expectations for both of you.

L
LISTEN

Listen for spiral signals—the moments when old grief resurfaces. Train yourself to recognize them as developmental growth markers, not alarm bells.

I
INVITE

Invite re-conversation by explicitly normalizing that their understanding will change. Remove the shame that accompanies re-emerging grief.

M
MATCH

Match your language to their current developmental window. Give concrete answers to young children and philosophical space to teens.

B

Bookmark the climb with rituals and memory tools that grow with them, acknowledging that you will revisit this together as they grow.

BOOKMARK

These five practices work in a cycle. You do not complete one and move to the next. Every time your child spirals back to their grief—every time a new window opens—you begin the cycle again: chart where they are, listen for the signals, invite the conversation, match your language to their current capacity, and bookmark the moment so it becomes part of a larger, honored story.

The method is the same each time. What changes is the child, the height of the window, and the specific form their grief takes as their brain and heart continue to develop.

Chapter 4

Chart

Understanding where your child is right now

The first step does not require a psychology degree. It requires you to take a moment and understand roughly how your child's brain currently processes death and loss—so you can set accurate expectations for both of you, and so you can interpret what you are seeing clearly rather than through a lens of fear or confusion.

The Developmental Windows

Children's understanding of death develops in broad stages that track with cognitive development. Here is what those stages typically look like, and what grief tends to mean to a child at each one.

EARLY CHILDHOOD (Ages 3–6) — Concrete and Magical

Children this age do not fully grasp permanence.

Death to them is reversible — like sleep, or a trip.

They may ask when the person is coming back, or whether they will be hungry in heaven.

Grief appears in waves: intensely sad one moment, playing happily the next.

They cannot hold the concept of death continuously in their minds.

What they need: Basic facts. Reassurance about their own safety.

Physical presence and comfort. Simple, concrete language.

MIDDLE CHILDHOOD (Ages 6–9) — Logical and Causal

Children start grasping that death is permanent,

but often think magically about causation.

They may believe their own thoughts or behavior caused the death.

They become interested in the physical and biological aspects:

what happens to the body, where the person is now.

What they need: Logical explanations. Clear reassurance they did not cause it.

Permission to ask questions. Honest, age-appropriate answers.

PRETEENS AND EARLY TEENS (Ages 10–14) — Abstract and Existential

Can now think abstractly, but deeply concerned with fairness and their own identity formation.

They may seem to have processed a loss well, then suddenly be overwhelmed as their brain develops the capacity to understand what they have really lost.

Key questions: Why do people have to die? What does this mean about my own future?

What they need: Room for existential questions. Acknowledgment that life is unfair.

Space to think about who they are in relation to the person they lost.

OLDER TEENS (Ages 15+) — Complex and Philosophical

Can hold multiple complex ideas simultaneously.

They can think about the deceased as a full human — not just 'good' or 'bad.'

They contemplate their own mortality and the meaning of life.

When they spiral back, they are often integrating the loss into their developing philosophy of life and understanding of who they are.

What they need: Philosophical space. Respect for their emerging worldview.

Your own honest engagement with hard questions rather than easy answers.

The Only Question That Matters Here

After reading those stages, the only question you need to ask yourself is this: Where is my child right now? Not where should they be. Not where their sibling is. Where is this specific child, with this specific brain, at this specific point in their development?

This question changes how you interpret everything you are seeing. Grief that looks like confusion in a five-year-old looks like magical thinking in a seven-year-old looks like anger in a twelve-year-old looks like withdrawal in a fifteen-year-old. Same grief, different developmental expression. Charting where they are helps you stop seeing the expression as the problem and start seeing the underlying need.

EXAMPLE — The Same Child at Three Different Points:

Maya lost her father when she was six. Watch how grief looks different at each developmental window, even though the loss is the same.

AGE SIX: Maya asked repeatedly when Daddy was coming home. She seemed fine at school and devastated at bedtime. She needed concrete facts and physical reassurance.

AGE NINE: Maya became convinced that she had caused the accident because she had been angry at her father the week before he died. She needed a logical explanation and clear reassurance that she did not cause it.

AGE THIRTEEN: Maya became intensely angry that her friends had fathers to walk them into high school orientation. She could not explain the anger. She needed acknowledgment that the loss was unfair, not reassurance that it was okay.

Same child. Same loss. Three completely different needs. Charting where she was helped her mother respond to the actual need rather than to the behavior on the surface.

You will not always chart perfectly. You will sometimes mistake a developmental window for a behaviour problem, or miss a spiral signal because you are exhausted and stretched thin. That is part of being a parent, not evidence of failure. What matters is that you are building the habit of looking at your child's grief through a developmental lens—asking 'where are they' before you ask 'what do I do.'

Where is your child developmentally right now? Based on the windows above, how is their brain currently processing death and loss—and what does that tell you about what they need from you?

Chapter 5

Listen

Recognizing spiral signals before they become crises

The second step is about training yourself to hear what your child is actually communicating when their grief resurfaces—so that instead of panic, your first response is recognition.

Spiral signals are those moments when old grief questions resurface. When behavior shifts in ways that seem disconnected from anything current. When sadness arrives with a force that surprises both of you. The goal of this step is to retrain your interpretation of those moments: from alarm bells that something is wrong to developmental growth markers that something is new.

What Spiral Signals Look Like

Your seven-year-old who seemed fine with their sibling's death two years ago suddenly does not want to sleep in their own room anymore. That is not regression—that is a child whose brain can now imagine permanence and is working through what 'forever gone' actually means.

Your twelve-year-old who rarely mentioned their deceased father suddenly becomes fixated on old photographs and asks detailed questions about his personality. That is not obsession—that is identity formation, where they are trying to understand which parts of themselves come from him.

Your sixteen-year-old breaks down crying about a grandparent who died when they were ten, saying 'I miss them so much more now.' They are not backsliding—they are encountering the loss with a brain that can now comprehend the full scope of what that relationship could have become.

When you see a spiral signal, think: 'Ah. We're spiraling back around—but from higher up now.' That single thought changes everything about how you respond.

When Signals Appear

Spiral signals often appear around developmental milestones—starting a new school, reaching puberty, getting a driver's license, graduating, falling in love for the first time. Each milestone is a new window in the lighthouse. From that height, your child sees their loss in a new context and needs to process it at that level.

The signals might look like sudden questions, changes in behavior, increased emotionality, or new rituals they want to create. Sometimes children do not have the language to say 'I am thinking about my loss in a new way,' so it comes out as acting out, withdrawal, or seemingly random sadness. When you have charted where they are developmentally, you can interpret these signals more accurately—and respond with curiosity instead of fear.

What to Do When You Catch a Signal

When you notice a spiral signal, your first job is simply to name it internally before you respond. Not out loud—just to yourself. 'This looks like grief resurfacing. What developmental task are they working on right now?' That pause, even a few seconds of it, changes your response from reactive to intentional.

Your second job is to stay calm. The most powerful thing you can model in these moments is that grief does not destabilize you. That sadness—even sudden, intense sadness—does not require emergency intervention. That your child can bring this to you and you will not panic, fix, redirect, or fall apart.

Your third job is to respond with curiosity rather than alarm. Not 'What's wrong? Why are you upset?' but 'I notice you seem sad today. Do you want to talk about it?' Or even simpler: 'I'm here.' Sometimes the most powerful response to a spiral signal is the quietest one—sitting down next to them, being present, not filling the space with words.

RESPONDING TO SPIRAL SIGNALS — A Quick Guide:

WHAT TO DO:

- Pause before responding
- Name it internally: 'This is a spiral signal'
- Stay calm and present
- Respond with curiosity: 'I notice... do you want to talk?'

- Follow their lead on how deep to go

WHAT TO AVOID:

- Rushing to fix or reassure
- Showing alarm or panic
- Changing the subject to something lighter
- Reminding them they talked about this before
- Suggesting they should be further along

If they are young and asking concrete questions—answer concretely. If they are older and pushing boundaries—look for the grief underneath the behavior. If they are a teenager creating distance—respect it while staying available. You will not always get this right. That is fine. You are learning a new language, and your child will forgive the mistakes when they feel you genuinely trying.

What spiral signals have you noticed in your child recently? Looking at them through the developmental lens, what new window might they be standing at?

Chapter 6

Invite

Normalizing the return so grief doesn't go underground

This is possibly the most powerful shift you can make as a parent of a grieving child: explicitly telling your child that they are supposed to think about this loss differently as they grow.

Most children who hide their grief are not hiding it because they have moved on. They are hiding it because they have read the room and concluded that re-emerging grief makes the adults around them uncomfortable—or disappointed—or afraid. So they suppress it. They perform recovery. They protect you from their own pain, often at significant cost to themselves.

The Invite step is how you undo that dynamic.

What an Invitation Sounds Like

To a young child: 'You might have new questions about Grandma as you get older, and that's exactly right. When you're bigger, you might wonder different things about her, and I'll be here to talk about it.'

To an older child: 'You understood Dad's death one way when you were eight. You'll probably understand it differently now that you're eleven, and that doesn't mean how you felt before was wrong—it means you're growing.'

To a teenager: 'I know we've talked about this before. I also know that what a loss means to you changes as you change. I'm not tired of talking about it. I won't be.'

Notice what these invitations communicate. The loss is important enough to keep discussing. Grief does not have an expiration date. Their evolving feelings are normal and expected. You are not afraid of their sadness. You can handle being their companion in this, again, and again, and again.

Opening the Door Without Forcing It

Inviting does not mean pushing. You are not demanding that your child process grief on your timeline any more than you want them to process it on anyone else's. You are opening a door and making it visible—and then stepping back.

Practically, this might mean checking in periodically rather than always waiting for them to come to you. 'We haven't talked about Mom in a while. I've been thinking about her lately. Do you think about her differently now than you did last year?' Or creating natural openings: 'I was remembering when your brother was alive. You were so little then. Do you wonder sometimes what he'd be like now?'

Some children will walk through the door immediately. Others will note that it is there and come back later—weeks or months later. Both responses are fine. The invitation itself is the medicine. Children who feel free to express grief actually carry it more lightly than children who have learned to hide it.

EXAMPLE INVITATIONS BY STAGE:

YOUNG CHILD:

'You might wonder about Grandpa in new ways as you grow.
Any question you have is okay. I'll always tell you what I know.'

MIDDLE CHILDHOOD:

'When you were seven you understood Dad's death one way.
Now that you're ten, does it feel different to you?'

PRETEEN:

'I notice you've been asking more questions about Mom lately.
That makes sense. Your brain can understand things now it couldn't before.'

TEENAGER:

'I know grief is supposed to be 'over' by now. It's not. Not for you, not for me.
There's nothing wrong with you for still feeling it.'

When They Don't Want to Talk

Sometimes your child will not want to engage, no matter how gently you open the door. That is their right. Do not push. Do not interpret silence as evidence that something is broken. Simply leave the door open and come back another time.

What matters is not that every invitation leads to a conversation. What matters is that your child knows—from repeated experience—that the door is always there, that you will not shut it, that bringing their grief to you will never cost them your comfort or your approval.

What invitation could you offer your child this week—one that opens the door without pressuring them to walk through it? Write it in their specific language here:

Chapter 7

Match

Speaking their developmental language

You do not need to give the same answer to the same question every time your child asks it. In fact, giving the same answer every time is exactly what creates the sense that grief has been 'dealt with' and does not need to be revisited.

Matching means offering information in the form that your child's brain can actually integrate right now. Not withholding truth to protect them—offering truth in the language they are currently capable of receiving.

The Same Loss, Three Different Windows

Here is what matching looks like in practice. Say the loss is a parent who died by suicide—one of the hardest conversations any parent can navigate with a child. Watch how the essential truth stays constant while the language and complexity grow with the child.

AT AGE FIVE — Concrete Language:

'Daddy had a sickness in his mind that made his thoughts very confused and sad.
The sickness became so bad that his body stopped working.
It wasn't your fault, and nothing you did caused it.'

You are not lying. You are offering truth in the form a five-year-old can hold.

AT AGE TEN — Causal and Relational Language:

'Dad loved you very much, and he also had a disease called depression
that made it impossible for him to think clearly.
The disease lied to him and told him we'd be better off without him, which wasn't true.
He wasn't choosing to leave you — he was sick and couldn't see any other option.'

Both things are true: he loved you, and he was too sick to keep himself alive.'

AT AGE SIXTEEN — Abstract and Philosophical Language:

'I think the disease had taken over his thinking so completely that he wasn't able to think clearly about you or the future.

I imagine he was in enormous pain and just wanted the pain to stop.

We have to hold both things in our minds:

the person we loved, and the disease that took him.

Separating those two things — that's one of the hardest parts of this kind of loss.'

Matching Emotions, Not Just Information

Matching also applies to how you respond to your child's emotional experience—not just the questions they ask. A young child feeling sad needs you present, offering physical comfort, validating simply: 'You're feeling very sad about Grandpa. Sad is okay. I'll stay right here with you.'

A teenager feeling sad might need space first, then connection—and validation that includes the complexity of what they are actually experiencing: 'You're feeling sad and maybe angry and maybe guilty all at once. All of those make sense. Grief isn't just one feeling.'

The emotional match is sometimes more important than getting the words exactly right. A child who feels that their emotional experience has been accurately seen—that you understand what they are actually feeling, not what you think they should be feeling—will bring you more grief in the future. And that is exactly what you want.

What to Do When You Get It Wrong

You will match imperfectly sometimes. You will give a seven-year-old more information than their brain can hold, or offer a teenager a simplification that makes them feel patronised. You will say the wrong thing, or say nothing when something was needed, or start a conversation and then shut it down when it got too hard.

When that happens, you repair it. 'I think I got that wrong. Can I try again?' is one of the most powerful sentences a parent can say to a grieving child. It models that conversations about loss are not fragile—that you can try, fail, acknowledge it, and try differently. That the relationship is strong enough to hold imperfection.

Children do not need perfect parents. They need parents who keep trying, who come back after a clumsy moment, who show through their behaviour that grief is worth the effort of getting the language right even when it takes more than one attempt.

When You Don't Know What to Say

Some parents get stuck worrying they need perfect answers. 'What if I don't know what to say when they ask the hard questions?'

Match your honesty to their developmental level. 'I don't know why this happened' is a complete and appropriate answer at any age. 'I wonder about that too' creates companionship in the wondering. You are not their theology professor or their therapist. You are their parent—the steady presence who does not disappear when things get hard. Your willingness to stay present and keep trying matters more than having perfect language.

Think of a question your child has asked about their loss. How might your answer sound different at their current age versus two years from now? What does matching their developmental language look like for you right now?

Chapter 8

Bookmark

Creating the rituals that honor the spiral

The final step makes the spiral visible and honored rather than hidden and shameful. A bookmark is anything that marks where you are in the climb and creates a reliable container for revisiting grief as development unfolds. It signals to your child: this grief lives here, it is safe, and we return to it together.

What a Bookmark Looks Like

An annual ritual: every year on Grandma's birthday, you look at photos together and each person shares one memory. As your child grows, the memories they choose and how they talk about them will change. The five-year-old picks the photo where Grandma is holding them. The ten-year-old picks the photo where Grandma is laughing and wants to know what was funny. The fifteen-year-old picks a photo of Grandma as a young woman and asks what her life was like before she had children. Same ritual, different window, every single year.

A memory box that you explicitly name as something to be opened at different ages: 'I've put some of Mom's things in here—her favorite book, a recording of her voice, some letters she wrote. We can look through it whenever you want, and as you get older, different things might mean more to you.' You are naming the spiral in advance and making it safe.

A simple phrase you use consistently: 'We carry the people we love with us even after they die. How you carry Uncle James might change as you grow, and that's okay. We can talk about it whenever you need to.' Then, when they are ten and struggling with whether it is okay to feel happy when he is gone, you can say: 'Remember how we said the way you carry Uncle James would change? This is that change happening. You're not forgetting him by being happy. You're learning to carry him differently.'

BOOKMARK IDEAS BY FAMILY:

Annual birthday ritual: photos, shared memories, their favorite meal

Monthly 'remembering' night: candle, one story each

Memory box opened at different developmental milestones

A dedicated journal that grows over years

A walk or drive to a place they loved, once a year

Letters written to the person who died, kept in an envelope

A phrase used consistently: 'We carry them with us'

The content matters less than the consistency.

The bookmark says: grief lives here, and we return to it together.

Why Bookmarks Work

Bookmarks serve multiple purposes at once. They normalize revisiting—your child does not have to wait for a crisis to think about who they lost. They create predictable containers where grief is expected, which makes it less frightening when it emerges unexpectedly outside those containers. They give you a framework for tracking the spiral yourself—you can look back over years and see how your child's relationship with the loss has evolved.

And most importantly, they communicate to your child something that no amount of explaining can replace: you are in this for the long term. You are not rushing them through grief. You are climbing through it with them—not this year, not until they seem better, but for as long as they need, which may be forever in the best possible sense.

How to Create a Bookmark

The best bookmarks are simple, repeatable, and honest about what they are. You do not need to pretend the ritual is just a nice family tradition. You can name it directly: 'This is something we do to remember Grandma. We've done it since you were little, and we'll keep doing it as you grow, because how you think about her will keep changing.'

The naming is part of the power. When a child knows that a ritual exists specifically to hold their grief—that it is not just a candle at dinner, it is a grief-safe space built deliberately for them—they trust it differently. They know what it is for. They know they can bring their real feelings to it, not just their presentable ones.

If you do not have a bookmark ritual yet, start small. The smallest possible version of a bookmark is a consistent phrase you say: 'We carry the people we love with us, even after they're gone.' Said regularly, from the time they are young, it becomes a framework they can use when grief surfaces in unexpected places. You do not need an elaborate ritual to give your child a container for grief. You need a consistent message that says: this is safe, this is expected, and we do not have to figure it out alone.

One of the most remarkable things about bookmark rituals is watching them transform as your child transforms. The conversation your five-year-old has around the memory box is almost unrecognizable compared to the one your fifteen-year-old will have with the same objects. But the ritual holds them both. The consistency of it—the fact that it has always been there—is itself a form of safety.

Your child will outgrow many things. They will not outgrow the need to remember. Give them a ritual that can grow with them, and you will have given them something they will return to long after they are grown—not because they are stuck, but because they carry their people with them.

What bookmark could you create with your child right now? What would a simple, consistent ritual look like that you could realistically maintain across their growing-up years?

Chapter 9

The Obstacles Ahead

What will get in your way—and how to move through it

Even when you understand this method clearly—even when it makes complete sense in these pages—you will encounter obstacles when you try to live it out. Knowing them in advance means you can recognize them when they appear, rather than being ambushed by them.

Your Own Need to See Them Move On

This is perhaps the most common and most understandable obstacle. It is excruciating to watch your child grieve. When they seem to be doing better, you feel relief. When they spiral back to sadness, you feel like you have failed to protect them.

You might catch yourself subtly discouraging grief conversations—changing the subject, offering too-quick reassurance, suggesting activities to distract. This is not because you are a bad parent. It is because watching your child hurt is almost unbearable, and your instinct is to make it stop.

But remember: you are not causing their pain by allowing the conversation. The pain is already there. What you are doing by allowing it is helping them carry it. By climbing alongside them instead of trying to make them skip floors, you are doing the most powerful thing a parent can do.

Comparing Your Child to Others

Your child's friend lost a parent the same year and seems fine—why is your child still struggling? Your older child processed the loss one way, so why is your younger child so different? Every child spirals at their own pace and with their own pattern. The lighthouse is the same for everyone, but the specific windows where grief emerges differ enormously.

Some children have windows close together. Some skip apparent windows and hit grief hard at unexpected moments. Some will seem to sail through for years and then be hit with enormous force at a milestone. You cannot standardize this—and the moment you

try to measure your child against someone else's grief trajectory, you will lose sight of where your actual child actually is.

Fear That Talking Makes It Worse

You might fear that inviting re-conversation will make things worse—that you are somehow reminding them of pain they would otherwise forget. But children do not forget significant losses. They submerge them when they sense adults cannot handle the conversation.

By inviting re-conversation, you are not creating pain. You are creating permission to acknowledge pain that already exists. Children who feel free to express grief carry it more lightly than children who hide it. The spiral that happens in the open is far less damaging than the one happening underground.

Your Own Unprocessed Grief

Perhaps the most important obstacle to name: you are grieving too. Whatever this loss is, it belongs to you as well as to your child. And there will be moments when supporting your child's grief asks you to hold your own grief at the same time—which is one of the hardest things grief asks of anyone.

You are allowed to tell your child: 'I feel sad about this too. I don't always know the right thing to say. But I'm not going anywhere, and we'll figure this out together.' That honesty is not weakness. It is exactly the kind of modelling that teaches your child that grief can be held, that it does not destroy, that it can be lived with rather than hidden from.

What you cannot do—or what will cost both of you dearly if you try—is grieve in hiding while performing competence for your child. Children are extraordinarily sensitive to emotional incongruence. They know when you are sad even when you say you are fine. When your performance of okayness is too complete, they learn that grief must be performed, not felt. They learn to hide from you the same way they sense you are hiding from them.

Finding your own support—a grief counsellor, a trusted friend, a grief group, even just a journal—is not a luxury when you are parenting a grieving child. It is part of the job. The steadier you are in your own grief, the steadier you can be for theirs. The lighthouse needs maintenance too.

***You don't have to have processed your own grief
perfectly to be the steady lighthouse your child needs.
You just have to stay lit.***

Which of these obstacles feels most alive for you right now? What would you want to say to yourself when it shows up?

Chapter 10

Your Spiral Guide Plan

Starting today, and continuing for years

Understanding a method and actually practicing it are two different things. Here is your concrete plan—for today, for this week, and for the long journey ahead.

Right Now: Claim the Shift

Before you do anything else, do one simple thing. Take a slow breath and picture your child's face—not the worried version you have been carrying around, but just them, as they actually are. And say this to yourself: 'My child isn't broken. They're meeting their grief with exactly what they have right now.'

That is it. You have just shifted from fixer to Spiral Guide. You have claimed your new identity. It took ten seconds.

Today: Your First Conversation as a Spiral Guide

Find a quiet moment with your child—it does not need to be formal or scheduled. A car ride, cooking dinner, a walk. And say something like: 'I've been thinking about how you've been feeling about [name the person who died]. I wonder if it feels different to you now than it did before—like maybe you're noticing new things or asking different questions.'

Then stop. Just listen. Do not fix, do not redirect, do not worry if they do not say much. You are simply opening the door and showing them it is safe to walk through whenever they are ready. The invitation is the practice.

Tomorrow: The Observation Habit

Get a notebook or open a notes app on your phone—something private, just for you. Each day, write down one thing you noticed about where your child is developmentally and one thing you noticed about their grief. It might be: 'Jake asked why Grandma had to die—causal thinking emerging, age seven.' Or: 'Emma seems angry that her friends don't understand—teen identity focus, comparing her experience to peers.'

You are not analyzing or judging. You are becoming fluent in reading the spiral. Over weeks and months, this log becomes one of the most useful tools you have—a record of your child's developmental journey through grief that you can look back on and learn from.

This Week: Developmental Matching in Practice

Each time your child brings up their grief or you notice grief showing up in their behaviour, pause and ask yourself: what developmental task are they working on right now? Then match your response to that task—concrete answers for young children, room for existential questions for preteens, honest engagement with complexity for teenagers.

You will not get this right every time. When you do not, repair it. 'I think I got that wrong—can I try again?' is one of the most powerful things you can say to a grieving child. It models that these conversations are worth the effort, that imperfection is survivable, and that you will not give up just because it gets hard.

Also this week, create one grief-safe ritual. It does not need to be elaborate. Maybe it is looking at photos every Sunday morning. Maybe it is lighting a candle at dinner and sharing one memory. Maybe it is a monthly visit to a place the person loved. The content matters less than the consistency. You are building a structure that says: grief lives here, it is safe, we return to it together.

YOUR SPIRAL GUIDE DAILY PRACTICE:

EACH MORNING:

Remind yourself: 'My child isn't broken. They're growing.'

EACH VISIT OR INTERACTION:

Notice one spiral signal, if present.

Ask yourself: what developmental window are they at?

Respond with curiosity rather than fear.

WEEKLY:

One observation entry in your notebook.

One grief-safe ritual maintained.

One invitation offered, however briefly.

ONGOING:

When grief resurfaces — pause before reacting.

Ask: 'What new window are they standing at?'

Then: Chart. Listen. Invite. Match. Bookmark.

What 30 Days Builds

By day thirty, something remarkable will have happened. Your child will still have grief—that is not what changes. But they will have something new: the felt experience that their grief does not scare you. That you can handle it. That you see them growing through it rather than being diminished by it.

You will notice them bringing things to you they used to hide. You will catch yourself responding with curiosity instead of fear. You will see them moving between grief and joy more fluidly—because they no longer have to choose between feeling their loss and having your approval.

You will also notice something shifting in yourself. The parent you were thirty days ago was bracing for each grief return, treating it as evidence of something gone wrong. The Spiral Guide you are becoming meets each return differently—with recognition, with readiness, with the quiet confidence of someone who knew it would come back and was ready to be present for it.

The parent who was terrified their child would get stuck in grief is becoming someone who understands: that is not how this works. Grief does not trap children who have a steady lighthouse to navigate by. It travels with them—transformed, integrated, and increasingly carried with love rather than only with pain.

Chapter 11

Becoming the Steady Lighthouse

Who you are becoming through this journey

There is a name for what you are becoming. I call it a Spiral Guide.

A Spiral Guide is not a parent who has grieved perfectly, or who never cries in the car on the way home, or who always says exactly the right thing when their child asks a question that breaks their heart. A Spiral Guide is a parent who has understood something crucial: that your child's grief is going to keep spiraling back—and that your steady, consistent, unfrightened presence at each new window is the most powerful thing you can offer them.

What You Are Actually Building

The work you do through this method does not just shape your child's grief. It shapes their entire relationship with you. When your child learns—through repeated experience—that they can bring you hard emotions and you will not shut down, rush them, or break, they learn they can bring you anything.

The lighthouse is not just about grief. It is about becoming the kind of steady presence your child can navigate by throughout their entire life. The trust you build in these spiral conversations—the safety they feel when they know you will not flinch—extends far beyond the loss you are currently moving through. It becomes part of who they are, and part of who you are to each other.

The Long View

Your child will grieve differently at ten than they do at seven. Differently at sixteen than they do at twelve. Differently at twenty-five than they do at seventeen. Each time, the spiral comes back around, and each time, you will have the same five practices available to you: Chart where they are. Listen for the signals. Invite the conversation. Match your language to their window. Bookmark the climb.

Some of those returns will be gentle—a question asked over dinner, a photo lingered over, a moment of quiet sadness that passes quickly. Some will be harder—a breakdown

at a milestone, an anger that seems to come from nowhere, a grief that demands more time and space than either of you expected.

For all of them, you will be ready. Not because you have all the answers. But because you know how to stay lit.

A Final Word

Keep this guide saved. Listen to the audio again in three months, then six months, then a year. You will hear different things each time because you will be on your own spiral of growth—your own developing understanding of what it means to help someone you love carry loss across a lifetime.

Your child isn't broken. They're not stuck. They're growing through their grief—and you, the steady lighthouse at the center of their world, are exactly what they need.

You did not fail when the grief came back. You did not fail when you said the wrong thing. You did not fail when you cried in front of them or when you changed the subject or when you did not know what to say.

You showed up. You stayed. You are here now, reading these words, trying to do better.

That is what a lighthouse does. It stays lit.

Start climbing.

Appendix

My Observation Journal

Use this space to track your child's developmental journey through grief. Date each entry. Over months and years, this becomes one of your most valuable tools for seeing how your child is growing rather than just how they are suffering.

Entry 1 — Date: _____

Developmental window observed:

Spiral signal or grief moment noticed:

Entry 2 — Date: _____

Developmental window observed:

Spiral signal or grief moment noticed:

Entry 3 — Date: _____

Developmental window observed:

Spiral signal or grief moment noticed:

Entry 4 — Date: _____

Developmental window observed:

Spiral signal or grief moment noticed:

Entry 5 — Date: _____

Developmental window observed:

Spiral signal or grief moment noticed:

Entry 6 — Date: _____

Developmental window observed:

Spiral signal or grief moment noticed:

Entry 7 — Date: _____

Developmental window observed:

Spiral signal or grief moment noticed:

Entry 8 — Date: _____

Developmental window observed:

Spiral signal or grief moment noticed:

Entry 9 — Date: _____

Developmental window observed:

Spiral signal or grief moment noticed:

Entry 10 — Date: _____

Developmental window observed:

Spiral signal or grief moment noticed:

Our Bookmarks

Record the grief-safe rituals and memory tools you have created together. Note when each one was started and how it has changed as your child has grown.

Bookmark 1:

Started: _____ How it has changed over time:

Bookmark 2:

Started: _____ How it has changed over time:

Bookmark 3:

Started: _____ How it has changed over time:

Bookmark 4:

Started: _____ How it has changed over time:

Bookmark 5:

Started: _____ How it has changed over time:

Bookmark 6:

Started: _____ How it has changed over time:

Invitations I've Offered

Keep a record of the doors you have opened. Note whether your child walked through immediately, came back later, or has not yet. All three are valid. The door being open is what matters.

- 1.
 - 2.
 - 3.
-

- 4.
 - 5.
 - 6.
 - 7.
 - 8.
 - 9.
 - 10.
-

Questions My Child Has Asked

Record the grief questions your child has asked over time. You will be amazed, looking back, at how the questions themselves change as they grow—from concrete to existential, from factual to philosophical. This log is a map of their cognitive and emotional development.

1. Age: _____ Question: _____

2. Age: _____ Question: _____

3. Age: _____ Question: _____

4. Age: _____ Question: _____

5. Age: _____ Question: _____

6. Age: _____ Question: _____

7. Age: _____ Question: _____

8. Age: _____ Question: _____

9. Age: _____ Question: _____

10. Age: _____ Question: _____

11. Age: _____ Question: _____

12. Age: _____ Question: _____

THE GRIEF SPIRAL METHOD

How to Help Your Child Grow Through Grief at Every Age

[Companion Guide to the Audio Program](#)