



COMPLICATED SIBLING RELATIONSHIPS AND GRIEF

Grieving a Relationship That Held Both Love and Difficulty

Not every sibling relationship is close, easy, or uncomplicated. Brothers and sisters can share love and loyalty while also carrying years of conflict, competition, distance, disappointment, estrangement, or hurt. When a sibling dies, grief may bring all of these parts of the relationship to the surface at once.

THE UNIQUE GRIEF OF LOSING A SIBLING

You may miss your sibling deeply while also remembering painful experiences. You may feel sadness for the relationship you had, anger about what happened between you, or regret about things that were said or left unsaid. Complicated feelings do not make your grief less real.

GRIEF DOES NOT REQUIRE A PERFECT RELATIONSHIP

- A strong longing to call, text, see, or share ordinary news with your sibling.
- Grief is not reserved for relationships that were peaceful or consistently close. A difficult relationship can create its own kind of loss. You may grieve the sibling you knew, the relationship you once had, and the relationship you hoped might someday become possible.
- There is no need to rewrite the past after someone dies. You can acknowledge what was loving and meaningful while also being truthful about what was painful. Both can belong in the same story.

GENTLE REMINDER

Your sibling was part of your story. Their death does not make that relationship less important, and there is no timetable for learning to live with their absence.

GENTLE WAYS TO CARE FOR YOURSELF

Death can make unfinished conversations feel especially heavy. You may wish you had apologized, forgiven, asked a question, explained yourself, reached out, or had one more opportunity to repair the relationship. You may also wish your sibling had done those things for you.

WHEN MORE SUPPORT MAY HELP

Some questions may never receive the answers you wanted. Writing a private letter, journaling what you wish you could say, talking with a trusted person, or creating a personal ritual can sometimes provide a place for words that no longer have somewhere to go.





A DEEPER LOOK

Grief after a complicated relationship can include sadness, love, anger, relief, guilt, resentment, tenderness, confusion, or even numbness. One feeling does not cancel out another. Relief, for example, does not mean you did not care; it may reflect the end of a difficult situation or long period of worry.

THE SIBLING BOND

- Try not to judge yourself for emotions that do not fit other people's expectations of grief. Feelings can change from day to day, and you do not have to choose a single emotion that defines your relationship.
- Sometimes the deepest grief is for what never happened. You may have hoped that you and your sibling would become closer, resolve an old conflict, reconnect after years apart, or understand one another differently as you grew older.
- Their death can close the possibility of changing the relationship in the way you imagined. Mourning that lost possibility is a meaningful part of grief. You are grieving not only a person, but perhaps a future reconciliation or connection you still hoped for.

A THOUGHT TO CARRY WITH YOU

Your sibling will always be part of your story - held in your memories, carried in your heart, and remembered in the life you continue to live.

A MOMENT FOR REFLECTION

What memory, quality, story, or part of your relationship with your sibling would you like to hold close today?

CARRYING THE BOND FORWARD

Family members can have very different experiences of the same sibling. Someone may remember your brother or sister warmly while you remember painful interactions, or the reverse. These differences can create tension when everyone is grieving.

With heartfelt compassion,
Linda Findlay
Founder, Mourning Discoveries

