

## Markers along the Path Facilitator's Notes

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***“The experience of grief is powerful. So, too, is your ability to help yourself heal. In doing the work of grieving, you are moving toward a renewed sense of meaning and purpose in your life.” Dr. Alan Wolfelt***

Imagine with me, being thrust onto a barren wilderness path, with a backpack full of fresh grief, and a bleeding heart from the loss of our child or children. This unknown trail looms before us. Weak from the exhaustion of grief, our wobbly legs push us forward one heavy step at a time. The sun's burning rays of pain stream down upon us as we look up and see a sign which says, “You have now entered Grief Land, this path never ends.” I think in this moment, your pain would increase, for the sense of hopelessness this sign conveys. Right?

Continue to imagine, trudging on this long and winding way with no other markers or touchstones helping you to know where you are. This is a prescription for a despairing existence to not know where you are going, and how far you have come.

Think of your grief as a wilderness—a vast, hostile forest. You must journey through this wilderness. To find your way out, you must become acquainted with its terrain and learn to follow the sometimes hard-to-find trail that leads to healing. In the wilderness of your grief, the touchstones are your trail markers.

They are the signs that let you know you are on the right path. When you learn to identify and rely on the touchstones, you will find your way to hope and healing. Dr. Alan Wolfelt.

Tonight I want to offer you hope, wherever you find yourself in this unfriendly forest of grief. There may be no ending of some level of grief as we are alive, but our hope lies in reconciliation of our loss.

### **So, what does reconciling your grief mean?**

In **reconciliation**, the sharp, ever-present pain of **grief slowly** gives rise to a renewed sense of **meaning** and purpose. Your feeling of loss will not completely disappear, yet they will soften, and the intense pangs of **grief** will become less frequent. (Griefwords.com)

I use the term “reconciliation” rather than “recovery” from or “resolution” of grief. The reconciliation of grief emerges much the way grass grows. Usually we don't check our lawns daily to see if the grass is growing, but it does grow, and soon we realize it's time to mow again. Likewise, we don't examine ourselves each day to see if we are healing in grief. Yet we do come to realize, over the course of months and years, that we have come a long way. (Dr. Alan Wolfelt)

Usually there is not one great moment of “arrival” but instead subtle changes and small advancements. It's helpful to have gratitude for even very small steps forward. Of course, you will take steps backward from time to time as well, but that is to be expected. Keep believing in yourself. Set your intention to reconcile your grief. Nurture hope for your future

As we walk on this painful path, we must mourn our loss, and be careful to pay attention to each of the 6 needs or “Yield Signs” along the path as well as the touchstone markers.

**The six needs are:**

- ❖ **Accept the reality of the death. Yes, it really did happen. It is permanent.**
- ❖ **Let yourself feel the pain of the loss, in manageable doses.**
- ❖ **Remember your loved one**
- ❖ **Allow a new self-identity to develop**
- ❖ **Search for meaning in your life**
- ❖ **Let beneficial people help you**

Dr. Wolfelt describes 10 “touchstones” or markers along our path, that are essential physical, emotional, cognitive, social, and spiritual signs for mourners to seek out on their journey through grief.

Remember, reconciliation is an ongoing process. If you are newly bereaved in the work of mourning, you might not meet any of the criteria’s markers.

It’s OK. Be patient and be good to yourself.

**Just before we go into discussion time, I will be giving each of you a handout with the 6 needs and 10 touchstones to guide you.**

**Here are the Ten Touchstones Dr. Wolfelt talks about:**

- ***Touchstone One: Open yourself to the presence of your loss. This is where we face the reality of our child’s loss.***
- ***Touchstone Two: Dispel misconceptions about grief.***

Ask yourself if there are any wrong beliefs that you picked up from society or family, friends, about grieving. Two examples would be: Grief and mourning are the same thing. They are not! But we are often told to “Be strong” or “Keep your chin up.”

Many people grieve, but they have learned how to openly express their grief in healthy ways. This causes many to turn inward and isolate in their pain.

The second example would be: Tears expressing grief is a sign of weakness.

Tears are a way to release the tensions and pain sitting inside of us. Have you noticed when you allowed yourself a good cry, you feel better? I know I do.

- ***Touchstone Three: Embrace the uniqueness of your grief.*** Loss and grief touche people differently. We cannot compare our grief to another’s.
- ***Touchstone Four: Explore the emotions that you experience***

Whereas society, family and friends, can often frown upon expressing grief, it is in the healthy expressions of grief that our soul releases the pain. This is an important part of healing.

***Touchstone Five: Recognize you are not crazy***

We are going to feel a mixture of emotions, and thoughts that we were not familiar with before the loss. It is normal.

- ***Touchstone Six: Understand the six needs of mourning***
- ***Touchstone Seven: Nurture yourself.***

Only you can be nurture yourself. This is not the job of our loved ones. What things give you a touch of joy and pleasure? Peace? Maybe curling up in a favorite chair, with a cup of coffee and a book? Maybe taking a hot bath with soothing music in the background? Well, you get the idea...right?

- ***Touchstone Eight: Reach out for help.***

This is another important touchstone. Isolation will dig you further into your pain.

- ***Touchstone Nine: Seek reconciliation, not resolution***

There is no resolution to grief. You don't "get over" your grief. Reconciliation on the other hand takes the pain and reality of loss and merges it with working through the pain and moving on with life. It does not mean you forget your child. Never!

- ***Touchstone Ten: Appreciate your transformation.***

Grief changes us. There is no way around this! Yet, when we learn to mourn, we then have the chance to re-discover who we are, and who we are becoming because of this loss.

As we know, there are many things in life we cannot control such as winds and storms or other people and their choices... and we cannot have total control over grief either. There will be days when grief seems like it fills up every place inside of our beings. It can be all consuming in the beginning. It is in the mourning process that this begins to lessen the intense pain inside.

I want to clarify the distinct difference between grief and mourning, according the Katherine Ashenburg, who wrote the book called "The Mourner's Dance."

"Grief" is what we feel inside: sadness, anger, confusion, shock, denial, guilt, regret, or whatever those feelings might be.

"Mourning" is the expression of those feelings. The most obvious example is crying because we feel sad, but mourning can also be telling a funny story about a loved one who has died, or signing up for a class because you know the person you loved would have wanted to learn that skill. It could mean putting together a photo album of our child's passing, or creating a small memorial for them.

Mourning is an action inspired by these internal emotions. Writing, speaking, creating, feeling the pain and crying it out, thinking it out, playing it out, painting, drawing, or sculpting, dancing it out, etc.

I can assure you that IF you are willing to do the work of mourning, you will find your way out of the darkness and make the most of your precious life on this Earth. As long as there is breath in you, there is a unique purpose for your life. Do you see this?

I encourage you in the midst of your pain, choose life. Choose to hope that even the most heart wrenching loss and pain can be survived. Refuse to give into despair, you will slowly change from mourning into reconciliation.

It has been 11 ½ years since the death of my daughter, and I have reconciled her death. It has not been easy, but worth the efforts that it took to heal. I am currently at touchstone # 10. I am actually embracing the new things coming to the surface of me. When I think of where I am right now, I realize it took me a process of 11 years to get to where I am, as I've had many other issues to deal with on top of grief. Your reconciliation time may look different than mine. It's OK.

Now, I am going to switch gears and move into our discussion time. Once each of you receive your handout. I will give you a minute to review the 6 reconciliation needs and 10 touchstones.

### **Discussion**

Our discussion question is: **Which one of the touchstones do you see yourself currently on, in your grief journey?** Remember to have time for as many ladies to respond. Let Snoopy remind you to please keep your response to 2 minutes. I would like to encourage you to give honor to the lady who is sharing by NOT talking to each other.

Please pass Snoopy onto the next lady who wants to respond. Thank you!

Handout attached.

## *Reconciliation Touchstones along your Path of Grief*



There are no time limit on our paths to reconciliation...but it is useful to look at the markers along this path to gauge where we are at. This helps us to know which areas we need to give more attention to in our grief process

Six Key Needs of Mourning to make time for each day, perhaps first thing in the morning, to help with the process of reconciliation:

- ❖ Accept the reality of the death. Yes, it really did happen. It is permanent.
- ❖ Let yourself feel the pain of the loss, in manageable doses.
- ❖ Remember your loved one
- ❖ Allow a new self-identity to develop
- ❖ Search for meaning in your life
- ❖ Let beneficial people help you



## *Signs of Reconciliation `` the Ten Touchstones*

Found in Dr. Alan Wolfelt's book entitled "Understanding Your Grief"

***Touchstone One:*** *Open to the presence of your loss.*

**Acknowledge the pain and loss of your child.**

***Touchstone Two:*** *Dispel misconceptions about grief.*

<https://www.griefhealingblog.com/2012/02/common-myths-and-misconceptions-about.html>

***Touchstone Three:*** *Embrace the uniqueness of your grief.*

**Your journey of grief and mourning may look different than another fellow griever. It's OK.**

***Touchstone Four:*** *Explore the emotions that you experience*

**This is so important to be aware of and process your feelings. What is not dealt with--stays alive inside-- and keeps us stuck.**

***Touchstone Five:*** *Recognize you are not crazy*

***Touchstone Six:*** *Understand the six needs of mourning (See above)*

***Touchstone Seven:*** *Nurture yourself.*

**Be sympathetic to yourself. Say kind words to yourself. Include something daily that brings you a touch of joy.**

***Touchstone Eight:*** *Reach out for help.*

**Fellow grievers and grief group's helps a lot in your healing process. Please don't isolate.**

***Touchstone Nine:*** *Seek reconciliation, not resolution*

***Touchstone Ten:*** *Appreciate your transformation.*

**Embrace who you are becoming as the result of this loss.**