



WHEN A FRIEND DIES

Updated
3rd Edition

**A BOOK FOR TEENS ABOUT
GRIEVING & HEALING**

Marilyn E. Gootman, Ed.D.

Foreword by Michael Stipe, singer/songwriter, R.E.M.

free spirit
PUBLISHING®

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Gootman, Marilyn E., author.

Title: When a friend dies : a book for teens about grieving and healing / Marilyn E. Gootman, Ed.D.

Description: Updated 3rd edition. | Minneapolis, MN : Free Spirit Publishing Inc., [2019]

Identifiers: LCCN 2018058106 | ISBN 9781631984228 (pbk) | ISBN 1631984225 (pbk) | ISBN 9781631984235 (web pdf) | ISBN 9781631984242 (epub)

Subjects: LCSH: Grief in adolescence—Juvenile literature. | Bereavement in children—Juvenile literature. | Bereavement in adolescence—Juvenile literature. | Grief in children—Juvenile literature. | Teenagers and death—Juvenile literature. | Children and death—Juvenile literature.

Classification: LCC BF724.3.G73 G66 2019 | DDC 155.9/370835—dc23 LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2018058106>

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The quotes from Nadia Morillo (p. 4), Alexis Gendron (p. 14), and Augustus Griffith Jr. (p. 18) are excerpted from the book *Parkland Speaks: Survivors from Marjory Stoneman Douglas Share Their Stories*, Sarah Lerner, ed. (New York: Crown Books for Young Readers, 2019).

Reading Level Grades 7 & Up; Interest Level Ages 11 & up;
Fountas & Pinnell Guided Reading Level Z

Edited by Pamela Espeland and Alison Behnke
Cover and interior design by Shannon Pourciau

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1
Printed in the United States of America
V20300619

Free Spirit Publishing Inc.

6325 Sandburg Road, Suite 100
Minneapolis, MN 55427-3674
(612) 338-2068
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www.freespirit.com

Free Spirit offers competitive pricing.

Contact edsales@freespirit.com for pricing information on
multiple quantity purchases.

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“A great starting place for young people who are hurting.”

—*Voice of Youth Advocates*

“This compassionate book gracefully addresses the unique needs of teen grievors. It is accessible without being patronizing and allows them to work through their experience by building on the stories of others.”

—Alan Wolfelt, Ph.D.,
director of the Center for Loss and Life Transition

“This compassionate, user-friendly book lists pages of resources and suggested reading, and should be made available to teens.”

—*School Library Journal*

“*When a Friend Dies* offers a voice of understanding and guidance during the very personal and often lonely experience of loss. Dr. Gootman’s book is a friend who shares our journey of grief, a friend who does not take offense if we just want to be alone, and a friend we can introduce to others who need comfort. I am truly grateful for this book.”

—John Bell, singer/guitarist, Widespread Panic

To my children, Elissa, Jennifer, and Michael

This book was inspired by my love and compassion for you and your friends. While I cannot protect you from losses, I hope I can help you through them.

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FOREWORD

by Michael Stipe, singer/songwriter, R.E.M.

When a Friend Dies is a book about acceptance and compassion. Accepting the sadness, confusion, and pain we experience with loss is as important as healing and moving forward. Showing compassion for yourself is about letting the feelings come and go as they do naturally. There is no right or wrong way to feel when someone dies.

Right now, you may be feeling things you've never felt before—and if you can't understand what you're going through, how could anyone else? No one can completely understand. Everybody hurts in their own way, and your grieving and pain are uniquely your own. But feeling lonely and grieving on your own isn't the same as *being* alone. You're not alone.

In this book, other teens share how they felt when their friend died. Reading their words can give you a chance to reflect on your own feelings in a new way. The book's questions and suggestions offer help and reassurance that you can make it through. Be gentle with yourself, take the time you need, and know that the greatest tribute to your friend is just being *you*.

“

“I just can't believe this happened to one of us.” —Seth

“I was at the mall and thought I saw her. When I got close and saw it wasn't her, I felt so sad.”

—Noor

“I can't believe she is gone. She was so young and alive.”

—Erica

“It seems like any minute he should walk into the room. It doesn't seem like he is really gone.” —David

“It feels like an alarm clock is supposed to go off soon and this will all be over.” —Tanisha

”

INTRODUCTION

Kids are not supposed to die. It's against all the rules of nature. It's not right. It's not fair. It shouldn't ever happen. But it does happen . . . and when it does, it's scary.

If someone you know has died, this book is for you. I hope it will bring you comfort and help you heal.

When my daughter Elissa was a teenager, one of her friends died. I saw how this death affected my daughter. I spent a lot of time talking with her and being with her, but I also wished there was a book I could give to her. At that time, most books written about death and dying spoke *about* teenagers, not *to* them. As you'll see, this book speaks directly to you.

Some of the words are mine. Some of the words are those of teenagers whose friends have died, or of famous people who have spoken or written about death. All are meant for you to read at your own pace, in your own time.

You might read this book from cover to cover all at once, starting now. You might read it in little pieces—a page or two today, a paragraph tomorrow, more the day after or next week. How you read it is up to you. But do try to think about the questions, because they will help you understand what is happening to you. And do try the suggestions—some of them or all of them. They have helped other teenagers, and they may help you too. You won't know unless you give them a chance.

If you think you need more help, consider talking with a counselor or a therapist. You're going through a lot right now—maybe more than you can handle on your own, or with this book, or even with the support of parents, other family members, or close friends. Counselors and therapists are trained to help people through tough times. On pages 102–105, you'll find ideas about where to start looking for this kind of expert help.

You may want to read more books about death and dying. You'll find a list of possibilities on pages 118–119. You can also ask a librarian for ideas, or the media specialist at your school, a school counselor, a religious or spiritual leader, or anyone else whose advice you value and trust.

Bottom line? *You should do whatever works for you to help yourself heal.* You have had a terrible shock, and you need to take care of yourself.

This book can be a part of taking care of yourself. Share it with family adults and teachers. They need to know what you are going through, and this book may help them understand. Especially if you sometimes have trouble putting your feelings into words, this book can speak for you.

Whatever you decide to do—about this book, about your grief, about anything in your life right now—I can promise you one thing: *You will heal with time.* You have probably heard this before. Maybe you don't believe it, but it's true. Not because I say so—because other teenagers say so. They have lived through, learned from, and grown by the horrible experience of having a friend die. You can too.

Marilyn Gootman
Athens, Georgia

“

“This whole experience has made me look at things differently. I will not take anything for granted.” —Nadia Morillo

“How can life ever be the same?” —Omar

“Will I ever feel okay again?” —Tomas

“When my friend died, the rest of the world kept going. I wanted the world to stop and I wanted to just scream out, ‘Doesn’t anyone realize that I am hurt?’ I kept looking at people and thinking, ‘You don’t have a care, and look at me, one of my friends just died.’”

—Selina

HOW CAN I STAND THE PAIN?

Shock, terror, and disbelief may bombard your body and mind when a friend dies. Surely it must be a mistake! How can it be—alive and breathing one minute, and gone the next?

The pain may seem unbearable. You may fear that your mind is on overload. You might even worry that you'll go insane.

Don't panic! You won't always feel this bad. The pain will lessen as time goes on.

After a while, your sad feelings will become fewer and farther between, and your happy feelings will return. Death gashes emotions, just like a knife gashes skin. With time and care, both kinds of wounds heal. They leave scars, but they do heal.

Try to be gentle with yourself. When things start to feel unbearably painful, find a healthy, caring, loving way to distract yourself.

**"Caring for myself is not self-indulgence,
it is self-preservation."**

—AUDRE LORDE

**You don't have to do all
your grieving at once.**

**What activities soothe you and
keep your mind occupied when
you feel overwhelmed?**

**It's okay to take your mind off
your grieving for a while. Listen
to music, write, draw, make
something, exercise . . .**



“

“I cried hysterically, and then I went numb—kind of like I was watching myself from the outside.” —Nicole

“I can’t feel anything.
It doesn’t feel real.”

—Devin

“It’s easy to convince
yourself it’s just a
bad joke or a dream.”

—Théo

WHY CAN'T I FEEL ANYTHING?

You may be too stunned to feel anything. You may feel like you're living in a dream.

There is nothing wrong with you. Sometimes people's minds close down when they feel overwhelmed. They shut out the reality of what has happened. This is your mind's way of protecting you from feeling overloaded with pain.

Give yourself some time to let your feelings surface. Then, when they're ready to come out, let them.

"One must go through periods of numbness
that are harder to bear than grief."

—ANNE MORROW LINDBERGH
