

A letter release:

Letting go of the pain from a recent loss of a loved one

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If you have recently experienced the loss of a loved one, a letter release (originally called Balloon Therapy) is a helpful activity to help you or a child get through what can be a difficult time.

I had learned about Balloon Therapy at a Grief Conference that I attended several years ago. It became very helpful when not long ago my Mom passed away, then not long after, my Dad. It was difficult for me to even say the words “passed away” or “died” with the name Mom or Dad attached. But Balloon Therapy helped me get through difficult times and overcome the pain.

Originally Balloon Therapy was used with balloons but unfortunately after balloons come to the ground, small animals consume them and often suffocate. So I revised it by using two pieces of biodegradable paper and works the same. I still call it balloon therapy or “letter release”. You simply write a list as a note to your loved one who passed away. Leave it in a special place to honor them (church, park, by a tree, etc.). But there is an important second part that makes this work.



Begin with two note papers:

1. On the first paper write down a list of things they left you that are important. This can include memories, things you did together, things they enjoyed, traditions they gave to you, things that you enjoy because of them, etc. These are all the things that they gave you that you will keep in your heart, as part of you that will remain with you. Keep this list with you at all times, as long as you need. When you feel down and miss them, take a deep breath and look at the list. If you ever need to add things to the list, that is ok. When you look at the list, remember all the special moments you had, the special things in life they shared, and the memories that stay with you.
2. On the second piece of paper, make another list that can be more difficult to write, but is necessary to let go of the pain. This list might include the hugs they gave you, walks with them, them making dinner for you, doing outdoor activities with them, going to the movies, talking with them, etc. Unfortunately when someone passes away these physical things go with them. It is these things on this list that unfortunately because they are no longer with you is not possible. So list them on the paper (remembering that these can be listed as memories on your first list). Leave the paper in a special place, like a park bench, church, a tree, or favorite place you would go with them. As you leave it take a deep breath and exhale slowly, tell them anything you feel at that moment from “thank you” to “I love you and will miss you”. As it is released you release those things that you can no longer have, remembering the special memories they gave you to keep. As you walk away from the paper, keep in mind the wonderful memories they gave you.

Once you have left the paper, read the first list you wrote, thinking of all the special things and memories you now carry in your life. Keep this list with you as long as you need and soon the loss will be filled with memories that become part of you. At times when you feel badly and miss them, refer to your first list and take a deep breath to help remind you of the special things they left you with. Try this for yourself and with children as well. I hope it is as helpful as it has been for me and many others who have learned this technique. *PHBS/PCS*



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