

Serenity

A newsletter for our donor families

QUARTER 3 • 2023

Upcoming Donor Family Day Events

Please join Midwest Transplant Network (MTN) staff members and fellow donor families for a day of fun, food and friendship. We have two donor family events in September — see details below.

Wichita Donor Family Day — NEW LOCATION

Saturday, Sept. 16 • 10:30 a.m. – 1 p.m.

Tanganyika Wildlife Park • 1000 S. Hawkins Lane, Goddard, KS 67052

Doors will open to registered MTN families at 10 a.m., and you can enjoy Tanganyika Wildlife Park for the entire day. MTN events will begin at 10:30 a.m., with lunch being served at 11:30 a.m.




Kansas City Donor Family Day

Saturday, Sept. 30 • 10 a.m. – 1 p.m.

Kansas City Zoo • 6800 Zoo Drive, Kansas City, MO 64132



Doors will open to registered MTN families at 9:30 a.m., and you can enjoy the zoo for the entire day. MTN events will begin in the Tropics Event Pavilion at 10 a.m., with lunch being served at 11:30 a.m.

Donate Life T-shirts will be available for purchase at both events for \$5. If you wish to have buttons made for future events, please bring a limit of 10 pictures to the event, and staff members will make the buttons and mail them to you once we return to the office. 



Register for either event:
mwtm.org/events

In This Issue

Our quarterly newsletter features inspirational stories of organ, eye and tissue donors as well as resources for Midwest Transplant Network's donor families.

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MIDWEST
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A Grief Care Plan: Your Foundation for Support

Adapted from "What's Your Grief"

When people seek grief support, they often assume it will be all about processing emotions and digging into the mess of hopelessness, anger, guilt, despair and all the other muck. It often comes as a surprise when counselors start by talking about things like eating, sleeping, talking with friends, showering, getting off the couch and going outside. Details about our daily lives may feel unimportant to discuss, but those details are the foundation on which everything in our lives is built.

In grief, our scaffolding often disappears. A good night's sleep is a distant memory. Getting to the gym feels pointless. Routine calls to friends and family disappear. Late night television, four-hour naps, canceled plans and days of forgetting meals are the new normal. This is where a grief care plan comes into play. The grief care plan is a nod to how ugly day-to-day life can look after loss. Sure, we need to create space to sort through anger, guilt and existential despair. But we also need to figure out how to get through the day and take care of ourselves. And grief means that sometimes we've literally forgotten how to take care of ourselves.

Grief hurts our memory, and it enhances our negativity bias. We forget who is there to support us. We're at a loss when it comes to remembering the places and things that might help us feel better. It's 5 p.m. on a Sunday, and we haven't showered, gotten dressed or eaten a full meal — yet we're convinced there is not one single thing we could possibly do that would improve the day.

This is an especially cruel symptom of grief because it means, in the moments we need them most, we are least able to recognize and mentally access the tools that might help us.

This is why creating a care plan is so important. It is something physical and tangible that we complete in a brighter moment so we can look at it in the darkest moments. Yes, it will feel basic. But in rebuilding a life after loss, reestablishing the basics matters.

HOW TO CARE FOR myself
<https://whatsyourgrief.com>
[whatsyourgrief](https://whatsyourgrief.com)

PEOPLE TO REACH OUT TO
○ _____
○ _____
○ _____
○ _____

Have I been as good of a friend to myself today as I would be to someone else who I love?

MY DAILY NON-NEGOTIABLES
○ _____
○ _____
○ _____
○ _____
○ _____

HALT
am I hungry, angry, lonely or tired?

MY FAVORITE MOOD BOOSTERS
○ _____
○ _____
○ _____
○ _____
○ _____

MY FAVORITE DISTRACTIONS
○ _____
○ _____
○ _____
○ _____
○ _____
○ _____
○ _____
○ _____
○ _____

PLACES I FEEL CALM
○ _____
○ _____
○ _____
○ _____
○ _____

OTHER RESOURCES THAT HELP ME
(in person, online, podcasts, etc)

"Things falling apart is a kind of testing and also a kind of healing. We think that the point is to pass the test or to overcome the problem, but the truth is that things don't really get solved. They come together and fall apart again. It's just like that. The healing comes from letting there be room for all of this to happen: room for grief, for relief, for misery, for joy." - Pema Chodron

1 visit <https://whatsyourgrief.com> for more grief support resources.
2 call or txt 988 any time for suicidal thoughts, substance use, and/or mental health crisis

3
4

What is a grief care plan?

The plan is just a single sheet you fill in with reminders about the non-negotiable routines you've set for your days, along with the people, places and things that can help you when grief has you pinned to the couch for days.

The grief care plan is an interruption tool. Grief lies to us sometimes. It makes us feel completely hopeless and alone. A care plan won't erase the hardest feelings of grief, but seeing the care plan pinned to your fridge or pulling it up on your phone when you can't think of a single thing that could help to shift your day can be just the interruption your grief brain needs. It can be a reminder that you aren't as alone as you feel. It's a reminder that there are some things within your control. It can be the push to try one thing that you haven't tried today, just to get you off the couch or to get your brain a bit unstuck.

The non-negotiables

The first section of the care plan is the “non-negotiables.” These are the basic things that you know you need to do every day in order to be baseline functioning. They are things you might think of as “routine,” but on the worst days of grief, they are the things that can easily slip. Seeing them on the list can be a reminder that you skipped them, and it might be contributing to how hard the day feels.

These are not aspirational things. Don't put “go to the gym” on there because you want to go to the gym every day. This is for things more like “take a shower” and “get 30 minutes of sunlight/daylight.”

HALT check-in

The care plan has a “HALT” check-in, asking you if you're hungry, angry, lonely or tired. Why? Because these are all states that make it harder for us to function, problem-solve and make self-compassionate choices. They come from the field of substance abuse, as they are physical and emotional states that can trigger avoidance coping. Checking in with ourselves and addressing them can help us to pick other types of coping.

Mood boosters

What boosts mood is different for all of us. All that matters is you come up with a list of different things that you know boost your mood, even if lately you've felt disconnected from them.

Support system

Grief is frighteningly isolating sometimes. When you're down, it can feel like you are completely alone. In reality, it is usually a combination of missing the person we lost and not having the desire or energy to reach out to the people we can connect with. Take some time to inventory the people in your life and decide who you can reach out to. Maybe they are friends, family, your pastor, your neighbor, your counselor. Even if they seem obvious, list them out, because in our darkest moments, it helps to see them written out. It also helps to use them as a little checklist, reminding you that if you haven't reached out to each of the people on that list, you haven't yet done all the things that are in your control.

Remember, this isn't about people who are going to fix our grief or understand everything we're going through. No one can fix our grief or understand everything we're going through. What people can do is sit with us through those things, reminding us that we don't have to shoulder all the weight alone.

Distractions

The reality, in grief and in life, is that sometimes you just need some healthy distractions. There are times our brains just need a break. Grief can be exhausting and can feel relentless. When rumination has our mind spinning or grief has us totally depleted, an interruption that can keep it occupied might be just what the doctor ordered. Maybe it is video games, jigsaw puzzles, crossword puzzles, podcasts, reading a good mystery, art or doing some hands-on volunteer work in your community.

Calm

When we're having an especially bad grief day, it can be easy to know rationally that getting out of the house might be a good idea, but it can be very hard to find the motivation and figure out where to go. Sometimes a little reminder of the places that bring us some calm helps with that push to move us out the door. Maybe it is the library, a local coffee shop or a park.

There is no formal way to write a care plan — you can just jot it down on notebook paper or make a note in your phone. Just remember to list out your non-negotiables, HALT check-in, mood booster, people in your support system, your preferred distractions and ways to help calm yourself. 🧘



Download a grief care plan worksheet:
mwtn.org/grief-worksheet

Mission

Saving lives by honoring the gift of donation with dignity and compassion

Vision






Leading organ and tissue donation through excellence, quality and partnerships

Contact Us

For more information or questions, call **913-262-1668** or visit **mwtm.org**

To receive Serenity via email or to unsubscribe, please send your request to **aftercare@mwtm.org**.

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Westwood, KS 66205



Donate Life Legacy Walk Recap

Nearly 2,000 participants from 20 states and covering 120 counties in Kansas and Missouri attended MTN's seventh-annual Donate Life Legacy Walk. It was an amazing night celebrating the beautiful gift of life offered through organ, eye and tissue donation. Families spent the evening walking the Tribute Trail to read about donor heroes and transplant recipients, playing lawn games and listening to music performed by Cherry Bomb. We look forward to celebrating our donor heroes again on Saturday, June 1, 2024! 