

NEW!



HEALING GRIEF

A GUIDE TO HELP YOU COPE BETTER

GRIEF INVENTORY WORKSHEET

Paint a picture of where
you are in your grief

DEVELOPING PERSONAL RITUALS WORKSHEETS

Establish rituals that help you
process grief

CREATING COPING SKILLS WORKSHEETS

Discover the most effective
coping skills for your grief

MANAGING AND COPING WITH GUILT WORKSHEETS

Learn how to let go of
grief-related guilt

FEATURING

7 WORKSHEETS
TO HELP YOU
PROCESS GRIEF

Free worksheets from
Lawrence Shapiro, PhD

Developing personal rituals

Personal rituals are important when processing grief. In these worksheets, learn which rituals are best for your grieving process to cope with strong feelings that come up each day.

Developing Personal Rituals

They say that “time heals all wounds,” and for most people, even the terrible sadness of losing a loved one dissipates over time. George Bonanno, a clinical psychologist at Columbia University and author of *The Other Side of Sadness*, found that 50 to 60% of mourners show no symptoms of grief one month after the loss. This does not mean that the loved one is forgotten; rather, even after a significant loss, people settle into their old routines or develop new ones, and their lives recover a sense of order. Although they may continue to be sad, their emotions are no longer dominating their-day to-day decisions.

For others, the loss of a loved one continues to disrupt their lives for months or even years. They struggle to regain a sense of “normalcy” and report a sense of meaningless, hopelessness, and uncontrollable despair. When these symptoms last for greater than a year after the loss of a loved one, an individual is considered to have prolonged grief disorder, which is sometimes called “complicated grief.”

developing personal rituals can help with grieving

The following is a list of symptoms associated with prolonged grief disorder. Put a checkmark by any symptoms that describe your grief:

- You feel intense sorrow, pain, and rumination over the loss of your loved one.
- You find it difficult to focus on anything but your loved one's death.
- You focus excessively on reminders of your loved one or go to great lengths to avoid reminders.
- You have intense and persistent longing or pining for the deceased.
- You find that you really can't accept the death.
- You feel a numbness or detachment.
- You are always bitter about the loss.
- You feel that life holds no meaning or purpose.
- You have a hard time trusting others.
- You are unable to enjoy activities, even ones you used to love.
- You have trouble carrying out normal routines.
- You isolate yourself from others and withdraw from social activities.
- You experience depression, deep sadness, guilt, or self-blame.
- You believe that you did something wrong or could have prevented the death.
- You feel that life isn't worth living without your loved one.
- You wish you had died along with your loved one.

Choosing a Grieving Ritual

Although individuals who experience complicated grief may feel as if things will never get better, personal rituals can be a great aid in the healing process. Public rituals like wearing black clothing or “sitting shiva” in Judaism (a period of seven days when the bereaved are visited by guests) can help, but personal and private rituals seem to be even more important. For example, research conducted at the Harvard Business School found that rituals play an important role in the coping process by helping individuals regain feelings of control after their loss. Moreover, the rituals that people find most helpful are usually not done in a social setting or as part of a religious observance; rather, they are private and personal.

The following worksheet is designed to help you think about personal rituals that can help you through your grieving process. You might choose to do a ritual every day, or you might only perform rituals on the anniversary of your loss. That is entirely up to you.

choosing a grieving ritual

Look at the following list of rituals and put a checkmark by any rituals that sound like they might be helpful. You can also add your own personal rituals to this list. Remember that rituals are designed to bring up strong feelings, but they should also help you feel more in control of your feelings. By using rituals to grieve, you'll find that your feelings of hopelessness and sorrow will eventually no longer intrude upon your day-to-day life.

- Play music that reminds you of your loved one.
- Watch a movie that reminds you of your loved one.
- Write a letter to your loved one.
- Take flowers and throw the petals into a body of water (particularly a river that will take them away). With each petal, say something to your loved one.
- Light a candle at special times of the day or week to remind you of your loved one.
- Create a memory scrapbook, filling it with photographs, letters, postcards, notes, or other significant memorabilia from your life together.
- Spend time listening to your loved one's favorite music or creating a special mix of music that reminds you of your loved one.
- Watch their favorite movie or a movie that reminds you of the person you lost.
- Plant a tree or flowers in your loved one's memory.
- Make a donation to a charity that your loved one supported or give time working for that organization.

_____ Visit your loved one's burial site.

_____ Carry something special that reminds you of your loved one.

_____ Create a work of art in your loved one's memory.

_____ Prepare and eat a special meal in honor of your loved one.

_____ Create a memorial to your loved one with pictures and objects that were important to them.

_____ Light a special candle used only for your ritual purposes.

_____ Read or say aloud an inspirational verse, poem, or prayer.

_____ Sing a song to a photo of your loved one.

_____ Chant or pray.

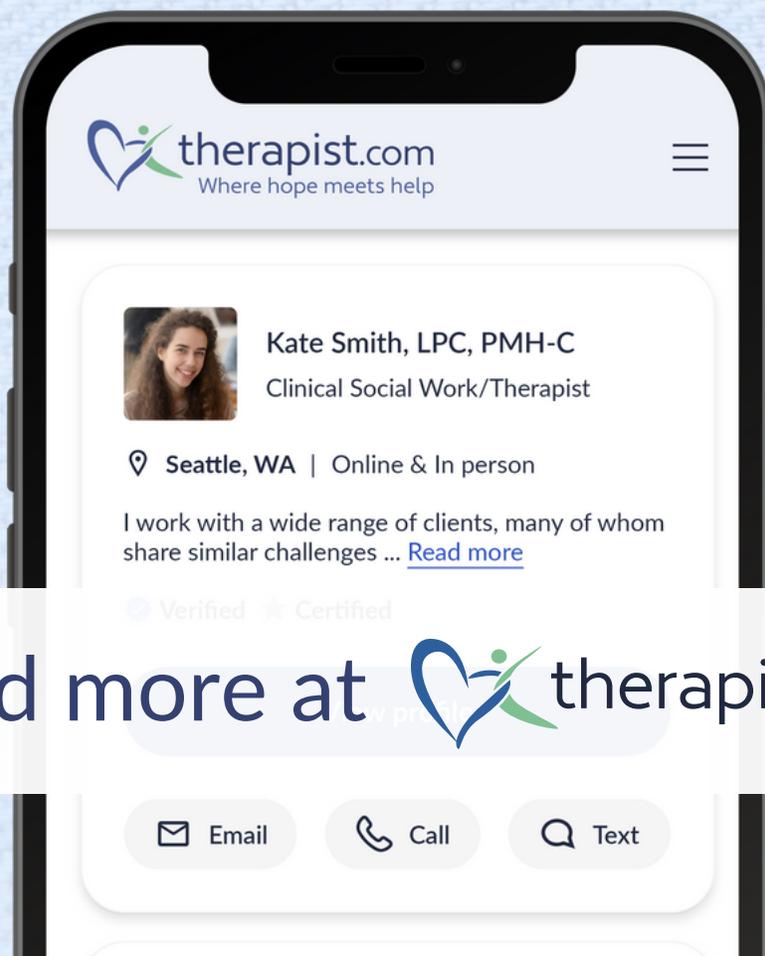
_____ Ring a chime or a bell.

_____ Other ritual _____

Free expert advice

Are you looking for help?

Find the answers to your questions



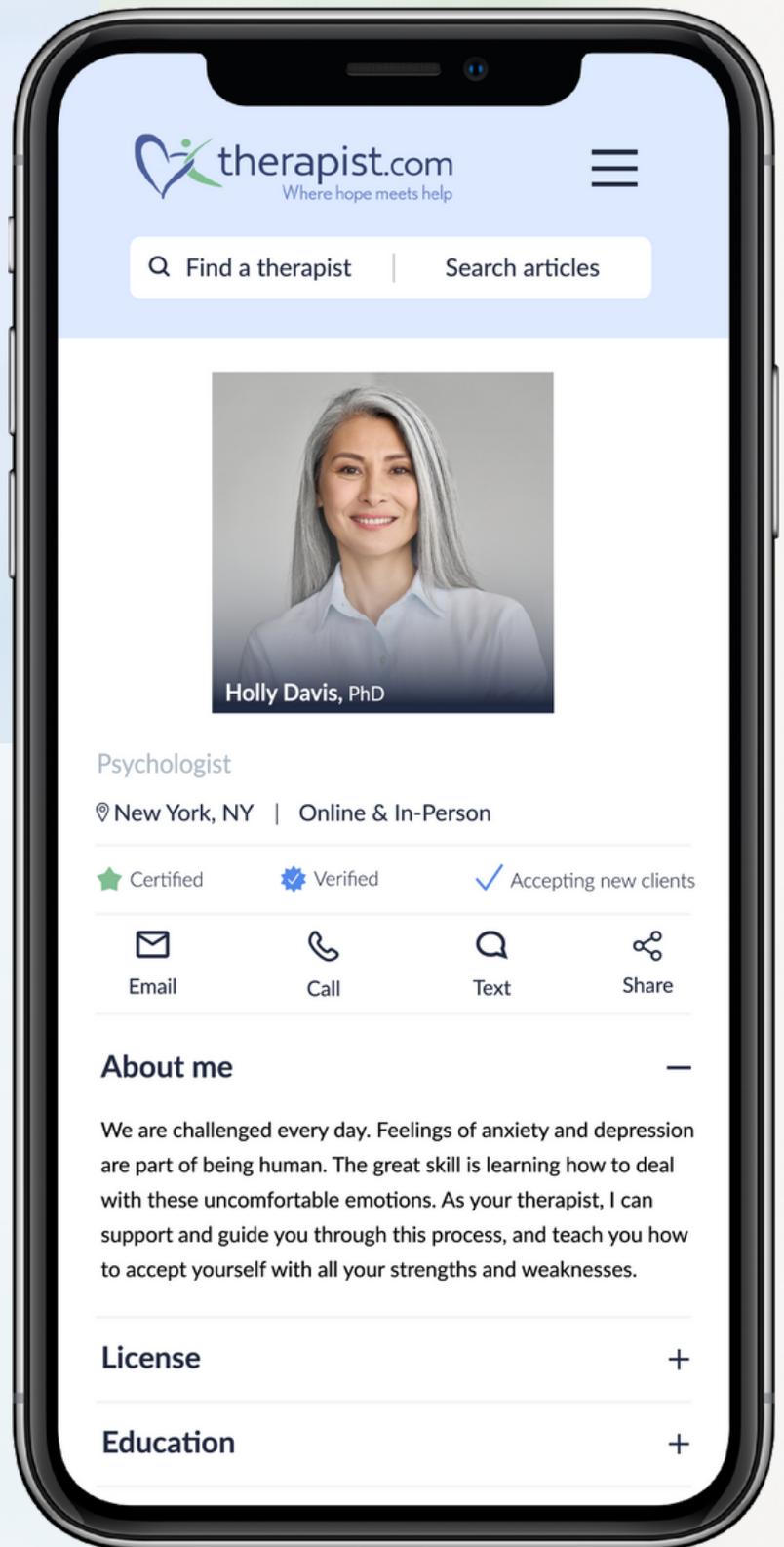
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Grief inventory

These worksheets will help you take inventory of your grief to paint a broad picture of where you are.

GRIEF INVENTORY

Answer the following questions, providing as much detail as possible, to gain a broad picture of your grief.

How long have you been grieving?

How does your grief display?

What are your predominant emotions?

How has your grief evolved since the loss?

Is there anything that makes you feel blocked?

What parts of your grief are you most comfortable with?

What parts of your grief are the hardest or scariest?

What are you currently doing to let others know your feelings about your loss?

What part did you have in the funeral or memorial of the person who died?

Are there any things you wish you had done at the funeral that you were not able to do?

What are you trying to do for yourself to assist with mourning the person who died?

What is the difference between mourning and grieving? Why is it important for you to confront your grief and not bury it?

What is one thing you are doing to distract yourself a in healthy way?

What does it mean to have a continued relationship with the person who died?

How has this death affected your identity? What changes have occurred since the death?

How has the death impacted your anxiety level?

How has this death affected you spiritually or religiously?

How are your family members and friends supporting you through this grief journey?

How are your family members and friends holding you back?

What are some things you stopped doing after the death that you would now or someday like to continue?

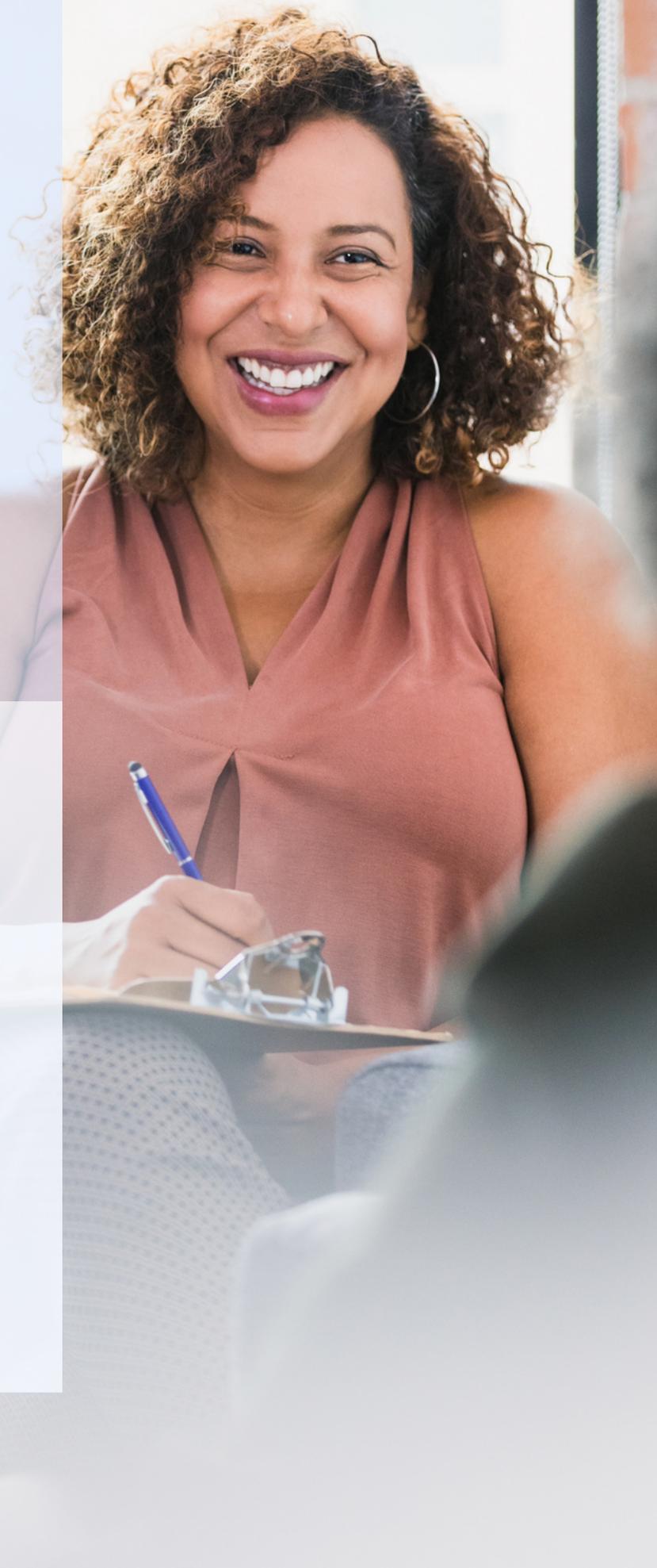
What are some things you are hopeful for in the future?

No commitment.
No risk.

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Free worksheets from
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Creating coping skills

Use these worksheets to create new coping skills when you have anxious feelings that stem from your grief.

NEW COPING SKILLS

Fill out this worksheet to create some new coping skills for when you feel anxious.

What are some things that make you feel anxious?

What do these anxious things make your body feel?

What do these anxious things make you think?

What do these anxious things make you do?

When you feel anxious, you can cope by:

- Deep breathing
- Using positive self-talk
- Meditating
- Talking to a friend
- Going for a walk
- Writing in a journal
- Exercising
- _____
- _____
- _____

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Managing and coping with guilt

Misperceptions and thinking errors can inform the grieving process and be difficult to release. Use these worksheets to help reframe your thinking so you can let go of guilt.

GUILT-RELATED THINKING ERRORS

Review the following thinking errors as a way to consider reframing your thoughts and beliefs.

- **Are you experiencing hindsight bias?** This occurs when our impression of how we acted or would have acted changes after we learn the outcome of an event. In the case of a loved one's death, this bias can lead us to believe that we knew what was going to happen or that we overlooked signals that we should have been able to interpret. Our biased beliefs can even lead us to believe that we caused or could have prevented our person's death. Ask yourself: What did I know then? What do I know now? How can I differentiate between the two?
- **Are you exaggerating your role?** We inadvertently exaggerate our role when we spotlight our individual contribution to significant events. This leads us to assume we had an outsized impact on the outcome. It also leads us to overlook the roles played by other people. When we exaggerate our role, we often assume that we, more than anyone else, are responsible for the circumstances of our loved one's death. Ask yourself: How would an objective eyewitness describe my role?
- **Are you confusing prevention with causation?** Sometimes when we feel that we could have prevented an outcome, we believe that we also caused the outcome. However, prevention and causation are very different things. This thinking error is often complicated by our tendency to *both* exaggerate our role *and* to confuse prevention with causation. In this case, we distort our understanding of our own ability to prevent events, and we also assume our distorted role is evidence of causation. Ask yourself: Can I explain the difference between "preventing" something and "causing" it?
- **Are you experiencing accountability guilt?** Those of us who hold accountable roles, like parents or caregivers, sometimes believe that we are completely responsible for our loved ones' safety in all circumstances, whether or not we have control over—or are even fully aware of—those circumstances. When a loved one dies, we believe we had the power to prevent this outcome. When we develop this belief, we ignore what was actually foreseeable and possible. Ask yourself: Can anyone keep anyone else safe in all circumstances? Can I expect my own parent or caregiver to keep me safe at all times?
- **Are you ignoring the reality of pressured decision-making?** No matter our role, when we're under pressure or in the midst of an emergency, our actions are informed by freeze, fight, or flight responses. In these circumstances, we may make different decisions than we'd otherwise make. These are normal and expected reactions to stressful situations. Ask yourself: What pressures did I feel during the circumstances of my loved one's death?

- **Were you aware of other options that were available to you?** We often feel guilt after the death of a loved one for decisions we did *not* make, even when we did not know all of our options at the time. This thinking error overlooks the reality of constrained choices. Whether we recognize it or not, our choices are always limited by external variables. Further, we can't always be aware of all of our options all of the time. In hindsight, we often forget that our knowledge was more limited at the time than it is now. Ask yourself: Did I make the best decision given the knowledge I had at the time?
- **Are you holding yourself to unreasonable standards?** Sometimes we hold ourselves to impossible standards or entertain fantasies that we could have acted in a way that was not truly possible. This thinking error informs many of the preceding thinking errors, as well. Ask yourself: Are my standards for my actions reasonable? Can I identify anyone else who I think should also be able to meet these standards?
- **Are you engaging in counterfactual thinking?** This kind of thinking occurs when we focus on possible alternatives to life events that have already happened. These thoughts consist of "what ifs" and "if onlys." Counterfactual thinking can lead to rumination, and we may fixate on alternative realities that were not possible at the time and are not possible now. Ask yourself: What are my "what ifs" and "if onlys"?
- **Are you feeling hunch regret?** Hunch regret is a dimension of hindsight bias in which we believe, after an event has occurred, that we should have seen it coming or that we overlooked signs that indicated the event. In some ways, hunch regret relates to the confusion between prevention and causation. It's important to acknowledge that even if we had a hunch or gut feeling about what would happen, that doesn't mean we could have or even should have acted on it. Identifying and acting on a hunch does not mean that an outcome would have been prevented. Ask yourself: Do I feel like I had a hunch that something bad was going to happen? In what ways were my decisions and actions constrained?
- **Are you ignoring your intentions?** When we place the blame on ourselves for an undesirable outcome, we often overlook our intentions. Ask yourself: Did I intend for a bad outcome?
- **Are you confusing a feeling with evidence?** Confusing a feeling with evidence is a common experience. In the case of a loved one's death, it can be a source of a great deal of pain. Just because you feel guilty does not mean that you are. Your guilt may be related to a number of other things. In fact, it might be a way for you to hold on to your loved one. Ask yourself: What evidence do I have that supports my guilt?

ACTIVITIES FOR MANAGING AND COPING WITH GUILT

Thinking errors provide salient, seemingly rationale explanations for feelings of guilt. However, thinking errors are based on misperceptions. As you become familiar with thinking errors and how your own misperceptions inform these errors, you'll become more capable of introducing interventions with the help of your therapist.

CHANGING SELF-PERCEPTIONS

The *Changing Self-Perceptions* worksheet helps to encourage new, more constructive thinking habits. This activity does not ask you to stop feeling guilt; it simply asks you to dissociate your feelings of guilt from a rationale.

CHANGING SELF-PERCEPTIONS

Use your knowledge of thinking errors to identify the misperceptions in your self-talk. Then, work to reframe each of these misperceptions. Integrate this worksheet into your daily life by adding to it once or twice a day. Then, continue to add to it as often as required to reframe misperceptions.

Misperceptions	Reframed Perceptions
<p><i>I should have known better.</i></p>	<p><i>I did the best I could at the time.</i></p>

FLIP THE SCRIPT ON GUILT

Misperceptions and thinking errors can powerfully inform the grieving process and can be difficult to release. If we feel lost in grief, pain, and other feelings, guilt can feel like an appropriate consequence of the loss of a loved one. However, guilt can also provide a kind of comfort. Rather than accepting the difficult reality that many circumstances are outside our control and that some things happen that don't make sense, guilt allows us to assign blame. This may sound strange, but assigning blame for pain can actually help to make sense of some of the most difficult, confusing experiences.

For these reasons, it can be difficult to process and then let go of guilt. The *Flip the Script on Guilt* worksheet offers a critical tool to help you tell a different story.

FLIP THE SCRIPT ON GUILT

Answer the following questions with as much detail as possible.

Write down all the negative and critical things you think about yourself in regard to your guilt. Go into detail about how ashamed and flawed you feel.

Now think of the nicest, most compassionate person you know. Write down what they would say to you in response to your previous answer.

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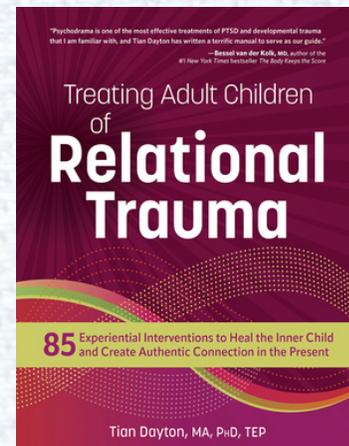
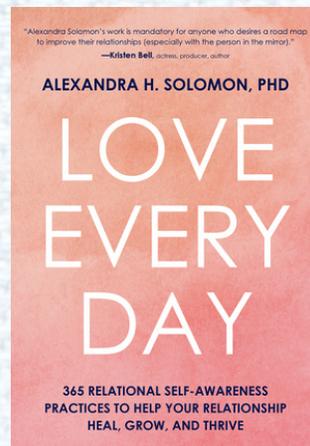
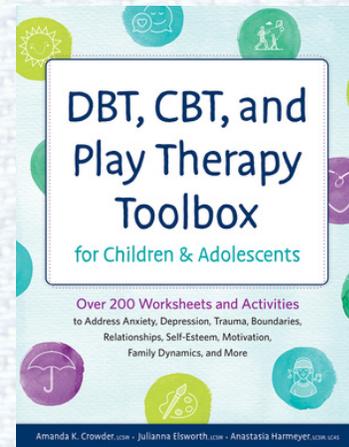
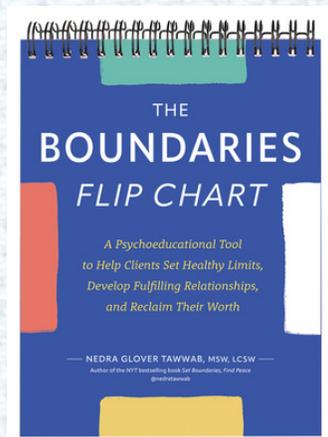
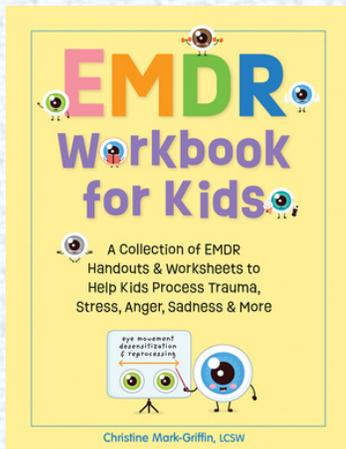


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