



Beside you through grief's journey

# Managing Life While a Loved One is Missing



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## INTRODUCTION

When a family discovers that one of its members has gone missing, it sets into motion a process of physical, emotional and mental activity that is incomparable to any other situation. As time passes and the family member remains missing, the family becomes more and more dependent on the agencies, the systems and the personnel who are trained to respond to the event. However, these resources are not necessarily focused on how to support the family. If the family has difficulty in asking for or finding appropriate support, they may become emotionally, mentally and even spiritually isolated. The immediate family, the extended family, and often the surrounding community are left to figure out how best to support the family of the missing. It often requires a collaborative effort between the family of the missing, their extended family, friends and the community to provide that support. We offer this workbook to help support the family of the missing, and those assisting them, through this time.

Chapter 1 focuses on Maintaining Daily Structure. This section discusses the importance of maintaining consistency through maintaining the daily routine. A format is provided for the family to record all of the necessary events of a day as a reminder of what needs to be done, to promote a sense of normalcy, and as a guideline should friends, extended family members or members of the community wish to assist the family.

Chapter 2 is about the Roles of the Missing. In this section the family can identify the roles, duties and activities of the missing person that will need to be temporarily filled, who will fill them short-term, and longer-termed if necessary.

The third chapter offers family members a format for Managing Emotions. This section includes several activities. There is a discussion of each topic before the assignment is given. *Emotional Triggers* assists family members in identifying the things that most often result in strong emotional reactions by the family, and how to cope with them. *Fear, Anger and Guilt* encourages the family to keep a daily (or weekly) inventory of when they experienced these feelings, what prompted them, how they handled them and what they can do differently next time these feelings surface. *The Power of Hope* presents the family with information about hope, as well as ways to promote hope.

Chapter 4 discusses Planning for the Future. The difficult task of thinking of and planning for the future is presented including a guideline for dual-perspective thinking to consider “if the loved-one has returned” “if they have not”.

Maintaining My Relationship with the Missing is the topic of Chapter 5. There are two activities in this section. The first is a running list of *Things I Want to Tell the Missing*. The second, *My Day* is offered as a daily journal in which family members may make a short note to the missing, about what they experienced that day, how they felt, and positive coping skill they used to get through the day.

Chapter 6 presents our final topic My Self-care and Wellness. This section provides information to assist the family to take care of themselves. This information will focus on exercise, social interaction, creativity, and spirituality/ fulfillment, and will provide a chart to keep track.

This workbook is designed to provide ways for the family of the missing to cope with the situation, and function at their best while going about the business of locating their loved one. It is not intended to be the only resources utilized by the family. In addition, not every suggestion or activity in this workbook is going to fit every family, or be appropriate for every member of the family. However, based on our work with families of the missing, these activities are the ones families most often considered helpful. We hope that you and your family will find this workbook beneficial.

### CHAPTER 1

#### Maintaining Daily Structure

When a loved one goes missing, often all of the attention of the family is turned to locating them. This becomes the primary focus and the rest of life is placed on hold. As the hours may turn into days family members may forget or are not motivated to provide for their own basic needs. Daily routines may now be abandoned, as it is too painful and difficult to maintain a routine when one member is missing from those routines. However, these routines were created over time to assist in the provision of basic needs such as food, clothing, shelter, and safety. When the daily routines are abandoned, basic needs may go unmet. Revised routines may provide a sense of normalcy and safety during this time.

During stressful situations such as this family members cannot focus for extended lengths of time – their ability to concentrate comes and goes. Support can be provided by assisting them to identify the things that must be accomplished each day: meals, personal hygiene, medication, etc. Then, over time, addition of the activities the family feels are necessary to do to find the missing member may be made: call the police for updates, check in with other family members, walk the neighborhood looking for the missing person, checking the phone to see if it works, etc. It is helpful for the family to create a time-line or schedule to include all of these identified activities, and document this schedule in a way that is easy to post and follow.

The purpose of this schedule is to provide a structure; it provides a guideline by which the family can monitor their behavior. It is important to emphasize this is a guideline, not an expectation. There is no judgment of good/bad or sanction/reward for compliance or non-compliance. There will be days when the family will follow the schedule closely and days when they cannot. The

schedule assists them with short-term memory loss and focus, and provides a sense of control over life. As time passes, the family will be able to see improvement in their ability to comply with the schedule. The activities on the schedule may be edited, changed and adjusted as necessary.

For example, if the missing person is a child, it is essential to include in the schedule time for the parents to spend together, preferably alone. Couples time is utilized to verbalize feelings, concerns and fears not just about the missing child, but for the family and each other as well. Honesty is paramount in this time together.

The schedule needs to also include family meeting time. If possible, this time is separate from meals or other usual daily activity. Family meeting time is a time in which the family should feel free to discuss what they believe about the missing person and the situation. Time is also spent allowing each family member to discuss what else is going on in their life, not associated with the missing loved one.

Eventually, the schedule may also include the activities of all who are living within the household. Finally, re-assigning the chores of the missing person and scheduling the chores of the entire family will allow the household to function more smoothly, and provide a structure of behavior for the family as a whole.

While creating this schedule may now appear to be a big job, it is best to approach it by level of importance, putting down the basics, then adding other tasks as they come up. Each type or level of importance might be represented by a different color. The first level of importance will include eating, rest, exercise, personal hygiene, medication and doctor's appointments.

**NOTE:** The monitoring and administration of this schedule may be assigned to extended family members, friends and neighbors. These people wish/need to be involved and to feel they are contributing something while the family member is missing. Using them for support provides for the family needs as well as their own.

The following is an example of how a schedule might look as it is being developed. Behind that are blank forms that can be used, duplicated or adapted by a family.

	DAD	MOM	SUSIE	BILLY	GRANDMA
<b>6AM</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Get up</li> <li>• Shower</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Get up</li> <li>• Make breakfast</li> </ul>			
<b>7AM</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eat breakfast</li> <li>• Leave for work</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eat breakfast</li> <li>• Clean up</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Get up</li> <li>• Eat breakfast</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Get up</li> <li>• Eat breakfast</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Get up</li> <li>• Eat breakfast</li> </ul>
<b>8AM</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Put kids on bus</li> <li>• Shower</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shower</li> <li>• Catch bus</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shower</li> <li>• Catch bus</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Take medication</li> <li>• Shower</li> </ul>
<b>9AM</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Put up posters</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Walk the dog</li> <li>• Search neighborhood</li> </ul>
<b>10AM</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work</li> <li>• Check with police</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Put up posters</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clean house</li> </ul>
<b>11AM</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Laundry</li> <li>• Check internet</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School</li> </ul>	
<b>12PM</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work</li> <li>• Check neighborhood</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yoga</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Take medication</li> <li>• Make lunch</li> </ul>
<b>1PM</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eat lunch</li> <li>• Text friends</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eat lunch</li> <li>• Scan newspaper</li> </ul>
<b>2PM</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mass</li> </ul>
<b>3PM</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work</li> <li>• Check with police</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transport kids</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Girl scouts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Girl scouts</li> </ul>	
<b>4PM</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Get groceries</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Walk dog</li> <li>• Chores</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Walk dog</li> <li>• Chores</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Take medication</li> </ul>
<b>5PM</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Go to gym</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prep dinner</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Homework</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Homework</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prep dinner</li> </ul>
<b>6PM</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eat dinner</li> <li>• Family meeting</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eat dinner</li> <li>• Family meeting</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eat dinner</li> <li>• Family meeting</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eat dinner</li> <li>• Family meeting</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eat dinner</li> <li>• Family meeting</li> </ul>

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

	NAME	NAME	NAME	NAME	NAME
6AM					
7AM					
8AM					
9AM					
10AM					
11AM					
12PM					
1PM					
2PM					
3PM					
4PM					
5PM					
6PM					

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

	NAME	NAME	NAME	NAME	NAME
6AM					
7AM					
8AM					
9AM					
10AM					
11AM					
12PM					
1PM					
2PM					
3PM					
4PM					
5PM					
6PM					

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

	NAME	NAME	NAME	NAME	NAME
6AM					
7AM					
8AM					
9AM					
10AM					
11AM					
12PM					
1PM					
2PM					
3PM					
4PM					
5PM					
6PM					



The schedule at this point might include more of the household tasks, errands and chores. However, it still must reflect the behavior associated with locating the missing family member. The schedule may now include activities to help alleviate the family's stress; self-care activities should also be included such as massage, sweats, recreation, traditional prayer and meditation and community activities. The schedule now takes on a more functional role. The entire family is now aware of this structure, and begins to accept the responsibility

for assisting each other in compliance with the schedule. This schedule becomes the new basic structure for the family. These structures should remain intact, regardless of the length of time the loved-one is missing. If days change to weeks or months, there should be little need to revise this new structure. The longer the behavioral and emotional structures are in place, the more they become integrated as normal. Therefore, these structures need to be as healthy as possible.



### CHAPTER 2

#### Roles of the Missing

An indicator that the family is adjusting to the temporary absence of the missing person is their participation in the process of temporarily re-assigning the roles and expectations of that person. This begins out of the necessity to reassign basic chores and roles around the house. As time passes, the re-assignment of physical roles may expand. Once these roles are re-assigned, they become the 'new normal' over time, and serve as one of the ways to help the family to adjust to the continuing absence.

More difficult for the family members is the temporary filling of the non-physical roles of the missing person. Their personality is unique and distinct, and fits into the pattern with the other personalities in the family. The removal of that personality leaves a void in the inter-relationships of the other personalities. As a metaphor, picture

the family as a hanging mobile, where each personality within the family balances the others. Cut the string of one of the pieces of the mobile, and the mobile spins out of balance. The family relationship pattern will need to achieve a new balance to compensate for the missing loved-one. Occasionally other family members may pick up one of the traits of the missing loved to fill the void left by the missing one.

We offer this activity as a means by which the family can begin to temporarily substitute other family members for the tasks, talents and/or roles of the missing one. It may work best to begin with the household chores of the missing person, as they need to be completed for the smooth functioning of the household. As before, the first is an example of how it could be used. The second is a blank form to be duplicated, used or adapted by the family.



TASK, TRAIT OR TALENT	LEAVE UNFILLED (CHECK)	PAY SOMEONE TO FILL (WHO?)	PAY SOMEONE TO FILL (WHO?)
Walk the dog		Corner mechanic	Billy
Fix the car			
Cracks bad jokes		High school kid next door	Uncle George
Mows the grass			
Sings in the shower	X		
Cooks on the grill	X		
Drives Cindy to ballet			Grandma

TASK, TRAIT OR TALENT	LEAVE UNFILLED (CHECK)	PAY SOMEONE TO FILL (WHO?)	PAY SOMEONE TO FILL (WHO?)

As we stated, many of the physical roles of the missing person may need to be temporarily reassigned or assumed by extended family members, friends or others. Even some of their traits, habits or characteristics may be filled by a substitute, when done so with respect.

“The emotion that  
can break your  
heart is sometimes  
the very one that  
heals it...”

NICOLAS SPARKS

### CHAPTER 3

#### Maintaining Emotions

In this chapter we address the emotional aspects of dealing with a missing person. Families often identify three feelings as more prevalent than others; the pain of the absence of the family member, the uncertainty and fear about their fate, and the guilt of not protecting them from that fate. Because these issues are so intense and emotionally powerful, it is very difficult for anyone in or around the family to discuss them. While it is helpful to discuss these types of issues, it should only be attempted when you are ready to do so. Forcing a premature discussion of any of these topics will do more harm than good.

A safe place for the family to explore and discuss their emotional reactions about the absence of their loved one can be very helpful. This 'place' can be a weekly family 'meeting' where folks can check in about their status and feelings, free of expectations or judgment.

#### EMOTIONAL TRIGGERS

There are many emotional triggers experienced by family members during the absence of the loved one. They may be physical or non-physical, internal thoughts or feelings, or external reminders experienced through the five senses. Once the brain detects a trigger, it causes the body to feel and react. One of the best ways to manage these triggers is to begin by identifying the three most frequent emotional triggers that you experience. This may be the empty place at the dinner table, the full trash can that is the missing person's chore to empty, or the missing goodnight kiss. Once the trigger is identified, labeling the emotions that are generated by these triggers is the next step. Finally, finding ways to cope with those triggers and associated emotions is the final step. Using the example of the empty seat at the table from above, the family may rearrange everyone's place

at the table, so the empty place will be in another location. Another possibility would be to move the table against a wall so that the empty space is no longer as obvious. The important thing is that the place for the missing person is still maintained, but the emotional triggering of it is lessened by the new positioning.

One of the best ways to assist your family to cope with triggers is by asking them "what would make the empty place at the table easier to tolerate?" The entire family must actively be part of the process for it to have value for them. Working together to suggest possible solutions, to choose one, and to create a plan to implement the solution is very helpful. As family members improve their ability to cope, they become emotionally stronger, and a sense of control emerges. The family begins to understand that they can manage their feelings and not be triggered by them. You and your family can then apply the process to other triggers, and assist each other in dealing with individual emotional triggers. After dealing with the physical trigger, one must also cope with the feelings the trigger elicited. Suggestions for coping might include talking to someone about the triggers, keeping a feelings journal of the experience, exercise, or prayer and/or meditation.

The following is a chart to help family members identify their triggers, list the emotions associated with those triggers and what steps were taken to deal with the trigger. When someone lists a trigger, anyone in the family who also experiences that trigger can include their feelings and coping responses as well. Each person might use their own colored pen so their entries can be identified. The example of the empty place at the table has been entered on the example page. The second page is the master to be copied and used.

JOEY IS MISSING	ASSOCIATED FEELINGS	PHYSICAL STEPS TAKEN	EMOTIONAL STEPS TAKEN
<p><b>Trigger #1:</b> Empty space at the table</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sadness</li> <li>• Fear</li> <li>• Frustration</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Table is moved against the wall</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Talking about feelings</li> <li>• Write in journal</li> <li>• Distract myself with happy thoughts</li> </ul>
<p><b>Trigger #2:</b> Walking the dog is Joey's chore</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Annoyed</li> <li>• Grateful to have time to myself</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do it as quickly as possible</li> <li>• Take my time</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Let the dog sleep on my bed at night</li> <li>• As I'm walking, send a loving prayer to Joey</li> </ul>
<p><b>Trigger #3:</b></p>			
<p><b>Trigger #4:</b></p>			
<p><b>Trigger #5:</b></p>			
<p><b>Trigger #6:</b></p>			
<p><b>Trigger #7:</b></p>			

JOEY IS MISSING	ASSOCIATED FEELINGS	PHYSICAL STEPS TAKEN	EMOTIONAL STEPS TAKEN
<p><b>Trigger #1:</b> Empty space at the table</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sadness</li> <li>• Fear</li> <li>• Frustration</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Table is moved against the wall</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Talking about feelings</li> <li>• Write in journal</li> <li>• Distract myself with happy thoughts</li> </ul>
<p><b>Trigger #2:</b> Walking the dog is Joey's chore</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Annoyed</li> <li>• Grateful to have time to myself</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do it as quickly as possible</li> <li>• Take my time</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Let the dog sleep on my bed at night</li> <li>• As I'm walking, send a loving prayer to Joey</li> </ul>
<p><b>Trigger #3:</b></p>			
<p><b>Trigger #4:</b></p>			
<p><b>Trigger #5:</b></p>			
<p><b>Trigger #6:</b></p>			
<p><b>Trigger #7:</b></p>			



### FEAR, ANGER AND GUILT

Uncertainty about the fate of the missing family member is, without doubt, a primary emotional issue of the family. Throughout the missing period, the individuals in the family will create a variety of scenarios in their minds as to where the loved one is, and what is happening to them. These scenarios most often create feelings of fear, anger and guilt. These possible scenarios should be discussed in the family's 'safe place', which helps the family members to see that they are not the only one experiencing these images and feelings. This also allows the family to preparing for each possibility. The family is 'trying on' each scenario to see how they react to it physically, emotionally and spiritually. Family members need to discuss and process each scenario they create without fear of judgment, ridicule or dismissal due to the discomfort of other family members. They also need the opportunity to express the fear, anger and or guilt that accompanies each scenario, even though it is only a possibility.

There is a theory in mental health that by describing these scenarios and feelings over and over again, eventually the family becomes less frightened by them, particularly as the family may be able to find elements of hope within each scenario. The emotional intensity seems to diminish as the individuals become more familiar with the scenario and associated feelings. (We will discuss the role of hope later in the chapter.)

**Fear** is a feeling created by perceived danger or threat that occurs in certain types of organisms, which causes a change in metabolic and organ functions and ultimately results in a change in behavior, such as fleeing, hiding, lashing out or freezing from the perceived danger or threat. It is always about the future. People become afraid of a situation because they cannot find acceptable

alternatives to the apparent outcome. In short, they fear situations in which they can find no hope. However, hope can be utilized as an antidote for fear. Assisting your family in finding some point of hope helps to reduce the element of fear. We will discuss developing hope later in this chapter.

**NOTE: For a child family member, the fear and the uncertainty of the situation is usually expressed in fear for their own personal safety, and they may engage in behaviors to protect themselves from being taken or going missing. Often they regress to behaviors of an earlier age when they felt safe (i.e. thumb sucking, bed wetting, baby talk). Children also create traumatic mental scenarios and pictures which affect their imagination, and can result in dreams and nightmares. Support for children should be focused on their personal safety. Assisting the child to name where, what and who are safe helps them to understand that, by turning to what is safe, they have some control over the situation and their feelings. This helps to reduce their fear.**

**Anger** occurs when we feel that one of our personal boundaries has been crossed and we have in some way become vulnerable. Anger is normal, and is not wrong or bad. However, the way we express our anger may be a problem. We don't 'heal' anger, we 'manage' anger.

If we have difficulty in the way that we express anger, we can manage it in a variety of ways; release the energy through exercise, planning a different reaction to an upcoming situation which may trigger our anger, deep breathing when we feel anger beginning to rise, or walking away from a situation until you've calmed down and are ready to return are a few suggestions.

**Guilt** is a feeling we experience when we think that we should have done something we didn't do, or that we did something that we shouldn't have done. When we feel guilt, we need to ask ourselves 'what could I have done so the result would have been different?', and write down the answers that come up. If no answers come up, it is an indication that there was nothing you could have done for the result to be different. Then ask yourself why you are still feeling guilty – what is feeling guilty doing for you? If answers do come up for the first question, ask yourself if you would have expected other people to do these same things if they were in your situation? If not, why do you hold yourself to a different standard?

If the answer that come up to the question 'What could I have done so the result would have been different?' are things that others would have done in your situation, ask yourself if you did the best you could do at the time, with the information you had? What would you do differently in the future? Is there something you can do about it in this

moment? Talking about this with another family member, friend, clergy, elder or counselor can be very helpful.

Our thoughts, feelings and behavior can all be influenced by the fear, anger and guilt that we experience. Often we don't take the time to figure out what is influencing us in any given moment. The following chart is to assist a person to recognize how these three emotions (fear, anger and guilt) might be affecting them. It is suggested that the individual fill this out each morning, afternoon and evening. The chart may lead the person to see patterns to these feelings so that they may develop coping mechanisms to better manage them.

The individual fills in the date and time of day down the left-hand column, then places an X in the appropriate box under FEAR, ANGER or GUILT. The number 1 indicates a low level, 5 indicates a high level. The first page is an example, the second page is a master that can be copied.



<b>LEVEL OF FEAR</b>	<b>MORNING</b>	1	2	3	4	5
	<b>MORNING</b>		X			
	<b>AFTERNOON</b>		X			
	<b>AFTERNOON</b>	X				
	<b>EVENING</b>	X				
	<b>EVENING</b>					

<b>LEVEL OF ANGER</b>	<b>MORNING</b>	1	2	3	4	5
	<b>MORNING</b>	X				
	<b>AFTERNOON</b>			X		
	<b>AFTERNOON</b>			X		
	<b>EVENING</b>	X				
	<b>EVENING</b>	X				X

<b>LEVEL OF GUILT</b>	<b>MORNING</b>	1	2	3	4	5
	<b>MORNING</b>					
	<b>AFTERNOON</b>	X		X		X
	<b>AFTERNOON</b>		X	X		
	<b>EVENING</b>		X		X	
	<b>EVENING</b>					

<b>LEVEL OF FEAR</b>	MORNING	1	2	3	4	5
	MORNING					
	AFTERNOON					
	AFTERNOON					
	EVENING					
	EVENING					

<b>LEVEL OF ANGER</b>	MORNING	1	2	3	4	5
	MORNING					
	AFTERNOON					
	AFTERNOON					
	EVENING					
	EVENING					

<b>LEVEL OF GUILT</b>	MORNING	1	2	3	4	5
	MORNING					
	AFTERNOON					
	AFTERNOON					
	EVENING					
	EVENING					

**Hope**, as we said earlier, is an antidote for fear, and it can also significantly reduce the influence of anger and guilt on our lives as well. Physically, when we experience hope we release a hormone which modulates or reduces activity in the part of our brain that controls anger and fear. Promoting a sense of hope for ourselves is a valuable coping tool when a loved one is missing.

Certainly we have hope that the loved one is safe, and that they will return. But we can also have hope that the family will get through this situation well, that family members will become stronger as a result. Beyond that we can have hope for things not associated with the missing loved one; hope that your son will pass his driving test, that all of the cat's kittens will be placed into loving homes, that your boss will recommend you for the promotion.

Where-ever in your life you can find a locus of hope will benefit you.

Hope, like fear, is always about the future. So making positive plans for the short and long term future builds hope. Hope can also be built and strengthened through your religious faith, by being around people who exhibit hope, reading inspiring books or articles, and by doing things or activities that have built your hope before.

The following chart allows the individual to record their level of hope, 1 being a low level and 5 being a high level. The person can also jot down what they will do to maintain or increase that level of hope. The first page is an example. The second is a master that can be copied.



LEVEL OF HOPE						
DATE	1	2	3	4	5	ACTIVITY TO INCREASE/MAINTAIN THIS FEELING
DATE	X					Make plans with friends to meet for coffee
DATE			X			Exercise and be physically active
DATE				X		Go for a walk in nature
DATE					X	
DATE						
DATE						
DATE						
DATE						
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DATE						
DATE						
DATE						
DATE						
DATE						
DATE						
DATE						
DATE						

LEVEL OF HOPE						
DATE	1	2	3	4	5	ACTIVITY TO INCREASE/MAINTAIN THIS FEELING

### CHAPTER 4

## Planning for the Future

As time passes and the fate of the missing person remains unknown, the family begins to separate or compartmentalize their beliefs about the situation. The family members create for themselves a dual system of values through which to view their future. The ultimate example would be 'my loved one will return and everything will be alright' **vs** 'my loved one will not return and life will forever be different'. Family members find themselves 'vibrating' between these two beliefs, which creates a situation of unresolved internal conflict. Unresolved conflict is one definition of the word 'stress'.

The family is usually able to deal with the present moment with no conflict; the loved one is temporarily missing. The conflict occurs in the realm of the future. Our beliefs about the future are necessary to provide us with a context in which to make decisions about the future. However, when our beliefs about the future are in conflict as stated above, it becomes difficult to make a single decision, and we stagnate. Because these conflicts cannot be resolved until there is a resolution of the 'missing' situation, it is necessary for the family to

accept two perceptions of the future, and create two sets of decisions and expectations. Family members will plan for a future that includes the missing loved one, and a future that does not. This may be considered unhealthy from the viewpoint of many mental health models. It is, however, the coping mechanism necessary for the family to continue to function within the current situation, and maintain a sense of future.

To repeat; making any short or long ranged plans for the future, it is often necessary to make a plan that includes the missing person, and a plan that does not. In this way the family continues to be able to plan for and live life, in whatever situation exists at that time. The chart below will help family members to consider both possible futures. They list the date of the event, the name of the event, how they will participate in the event if the loved one has returned, and how they will participate if the loved one has not returned. The first page is an example, the second page is a master that can be copied.





DATE	EVENT	IF THEY HAVE RETURNED WE WILL	IF THEY HAVE NOT RETURNED WE WILL
12/25	Christmas Day	Spend Christmas Eve and Christmas Day at home with just the immediate family	Go to Grandma's on Christmas Eve for dinner, stay the night. Breakfast and open presents on Christmas morning, then drive home
1/1	New Years Eve	Ask (the missing) what they want to do; go out? Have people over? Just the family?	Have the neighbors over for New Year's Eve, go to the sports bar New Year's Day to watch the game.
2/10	Sister's Birthday	Have a surprise party for her at the house inviting family, her friends and boyfriend.	Have a surprise party for her at the house inviting family, her friends and boy friend.

DATE	EVENT	IF THEY HAVE RETURNED WE WILL	IF THEY HAVE NOT RETURNED WE WILL
12/25			
1/1			
2/10			



**Hope is a passion  
for the possible.**

**SOREN KIERKEGAARD**



## CHAPTER 5

### Maintaining My Relationship with the Missing

While the loved one is missing, we have the need to somehow stay connected to them because they are physical missing, but psychologically present. We might even find ourselves talking to them as if they were present. We might also find ourselves thinking about the things we want to tell the loved one when they return.

To this end we suggest keeping a running list of "Things I want to Tell \_\_\_\_". This can be a running list, with each entry dated. In addition to being helpful for the family member, it will prove to be helpful to the missing person when they return, in adjusting to what has happened within the family while they were gone. It also shows the returned family member how much the family thought about him or her while they were missing. The first page is an example, the second is master to be copied.



THINGS I WANT TO TELL: Susan

**4/25/21** Today Billy the cat became Billie Mae when she surprised us all with a litter of six kittens.

**4/26/21** One of the kittens didn't make it, but the others are strong and healthy.

Juniper the dog is jealous of the attention Billie Mae is getting.

**4/27/21** Jimmy took his test today for his learners permit. He passed!



While this is simply a listing of things that have happened, family members may also want to include their feelings, thoughts and impressions along with the events. For this we suggest “MY DAY”, where the family member will write on a separate page for each day they make an entry. Again, in addition to being helpful for the family

member, it will prove to be helpful to the missing person when they return, to be able to adjust to what has happened within the family while they were gone. It also shows the returned family member how much the family thought about him or her while they were missing. The first page is an example, the second is master to be copied.

## MY DAY

DATE: April 25, 2021

Today we found out that Billy the cat is female – she had a litter of six kittens. At first I was

very overwhelmed at the thought of having to deal with kittens at the same time I’m trying to

find you. But the kittens were so cute that I soon found myself won over. Perhaps the kittens

are a good thing as they may distract me from continually thinking and worrying about you.

They may give me a short mental break. One of the kittens looks pretty scrawny, but the rest

are active, noisy and full of energy.







## CHAPTER 6

### My Self-Care and Wellness

Perhaps one of the most important, and often the most forgotten concerns for the family of the missing is their own self-care and wellness. To begin, it is important to understand that Stress Management is part of Self-Care, which is part of Resilience, which is part of Wellness. If one focuses on Wellness, they have all of the others covered. In this chapter we will discuss the importance of, and ways to incorporate exercise, social interaction, creativity, and spirituality/ fulfillment activities into a family's life – all leading to wellness.

In Chapter 1 we discussed creating a daily structure and documenting it on a chart. We discussed a few healthy activities, but this chapter will expand on them. Each activity discussed in this chapter can be added to the daily structure chart.

**Exercise/activity** tops our list for self-care. When an individual is stressed, or having a response to a traumatic situation, their body and brain flood with the hormone cortisol – the stress and aging hormone. This is a natural response designed to prepare you to deal with danger. In your brain it activates the fight/flight/freeze response and shuts down your immune system, makes it difficult to focus, learn new information, remember short-term, sleep, and causes hypervigilance (expecting bad things to happen) and a negative world view. Physically the release of cortisol increases your heart rate, respiration, digestion and blood pressure preparing you to fight or flight. When the traumatic event is longer lasting, like a loved one gone missing, these attributes can be damaging to the brain and body.

One thing that reduces the level of cortisol in the body and brain is the release of endorphin into the system. This can be accomplished through laughter, feeling good about yourself, and feeling nurtured. But the quickest release is through exercise. For people with a normal level of life

stress the recommendation is 20 minutes per day, 3 days a week, break a sweat. The more stressful your life, the more one should increase exercise.

Exercise does not mean you have to go to a gym and pump iron, though that certainly is healthy. However, a good walk around the neighborhood that breaks a sweat and lasts a minimum of 20 minutes is also healthy. It is important to remember, however, that as long as the stressful situation lasts, the more your body produces cortisol. So exercising one time is not enough: your body is producing cortisol daily, so you may want to exercise daily to keep a balance.

Find the type of exercise that works for you, that you can enjoy. If you choose exercise that is a chore or difficult to do you are less likely to do it. And, start out small; perhaps 5 sit-ups, 5 push-ups, and 5 jumping jacks to start. Then after a couple of days increase to 6, then 7 and on until you are up to 20 minutes of exercise. Once you are in a routine, you will see that the benefits of exercise are immediate.

**Social interaction** is also an essential part of wellness. The feed-back that we receive from others helps to support our sense of worth and the meaning of our life. Social interaction with family and friends helps us to feel wanted and needed. It assists us in knowing how to act in certain situations, and what are normal feelings and reactions to others. Social interaction also distracts us for a short time from the stressors in our life. And, through social interaction we can learn coping skills that have been useful for other people, and problem-solving skills we may not have thought of on our own.

One important facet of social interaction is the consciousness of the folks with whom you interact. Are the family and friends within your circle hopeful or fearful? We discussed and charted hope in the

third chapter. It is important that the folks with whom you interact are hopeful, and utilize self-care and wellness techniques for themselves. This will serve for you as an example and incentive to follow their lead. Avoid, if you can, people who have negative outlooks on life, and who tend to worry and expect the worst to happen.

**Creativity** is a word that people often feel has to do with imagination and artful expression. A more useful definition of creativity is 'solving problems outside of the box (or in a unique way)'. We all solve problems on a daily basis with the resources available to us. However, when we are faced with a large problem that we can't solve (like a loved one gone missing), we hesitate to address, or we overlook the smaller problems that we can solve. This then reduces our self-esteem and sense of self-worth and value.

As I said earlier, we solve problems everyday; how do I fit all of this food in the fridge?, what's the most efficient way to do all of my errands?, how do I fix that hole in the wall? When we focus on problem solving we are using our frontal lobes, which then release the hormone serotonin, which calms down the amygdala (fear and anger center). We are also focused on the present moment rather than worrying about tomorrow or being depressed about yesterday. And, like meditation, it is single pointed concentration. It is helpful to schedule 15-20 minutes of problem-solving into your day utilizing things such as cross-word puzzles or other word games, sudoku, or a jig-saw puzzle. The benefits of this help to re-set the body and brain.

**Spirituality/fulfillment** is another often overlooked element of wellness. When we speak of spirituality we are not necessarily speaking of religion, though religion is one way of expressing spirituality. There are many ways of expressing spirituality; connecting to nature, volunteering or helping

others, connecting with beauty. Spirituality is the way in which we connect with that which we believe is larger than us.

There are a couple of ways by which we can measure spirituality; the level of fulfillment we feel following an event and/or the level of gratitude we feel following an event. Once we identify the events that cause us to feel fulfilled and/or grateful, we can begin to control our exposure to our spirituality; we can begin practicing spirituality.

The chart below allows us to begin to recognize how well we are taking care of ourselves. By keeping track daily of the self-care activities in which we have participated, we can see the areas in which we are the most active, and least active. We can then use this information to become more balanced in our self-care. The first sheet is an example, the second is a master that can be copied.

SARAH	EXERCISE	CREATIVITY	SOCIAL INTERACTION	SPIRITUAL
7/8	X		X	X
7/9	X			
7/10	X	X		X
7/11			X	
7/12				
7/13	X	X		
7/14	X	X		X
7/15	X		X	X
7/16	X			
7/17	X			
7/18				
7/19				

SARAH	EXERCISE	CREATIVITY	SOCIAL INTERACTION	SPIRITUAL
7/8				
7/9				
7/10				
7/11				
7/12				
7/13				
7/14				
7/15				
7/16				
7/17				
7/18				
7/19				

## CONCLUSION

It is our hope that this workbook is helpful to you, the family of a missing person. Our intention is to provide tools that can assist you to live in a healthy way through this very difficult time. The suggestions here are not meant to be tasks or chores that family members feel they are forced to do. Nor is it our intent that every person will utilize every suggestion. Our goal is that each member of your family find one or two tools which help them to function. And, should time pass while the loved one is missing, family members may find different tools are helpful at different times in your situation.

May you soon be reunited with your loved one.



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“Hope is not the absence of pain, but the belief in the possibility of joy’s return. The pain of grief can co-exist with hope and joy. One does not leave to make room for the other.”

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