

GRACE HARBOR

Chaplains Core

Spiritual care support for the tender conversations grief brings.

13 SUBJECT-BASED SUPPORT SHEETS + QUICK-START GUIDE

For chaplains serving grieving patients, caregivers, and families

Grace Harbor extends compassionate support beyond the visit. It does not replace the chaplain, the family's own faith community, or the interdisciplinary team.

Grace Harbor Compassionate Services

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A Simple Extension of the Spiritual Care You Are Already Giving

Chaplains Core is designed for quick use during brief visits, follow-up calls, and tender conversations. Use the subject that fits the need - not the calendar.

1. Notice What the Family Is Carrying

Listen for spiritual distress as well as grief: questions of meaning, anger, guilt, fear, doubt, loss of hope, conflict in belief, longing for ritual, or simply the need for someone willing to remain present.

2. Meet the Need Without Forcing an Answer

Offer presence before explanation. Use one appropriate response - a compassionate phrase, silence, prayer, scripture, reading, ritual, or reflection - according to the person's beliefs and with permission.

3. Leave Continuing Support Within Reach

Introduce Grace Harbor and offer the Grace Harbor Pass-Along Card. The card gives the family a simple way to access support after the visit and return whenever additional support is needed.

4. Continue Spiritual Care and Bring the Team In When Needed

Grace Harbor extends support; it does not replace the chaplain, the family's own faith community, or the interdisciplinary team. Continue appropriate spiritual care and involve other members of the team when needs extend beyond the chaplain's role.

FIND THE SUPPORT YOU NEED

Grief does not follow a fixed schedule. Choose the subject that best matches what you are seeing today.

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| 1. Shock & Stabilizing | 8. Milestones, Holidays & Grief Surges |
| 2. Body, Breath & Early Grief | 9. Faith Strain, Doubt & Meaning-Making |
| 3. Ritual, Decisions & First Goodbyes | 10. Re-Engaging Life & Identity |
| 4. The Quiet After | 11. Caregiver Weariness & Support System Repair |
| 5. Anger, Guilt & the Why Questions | 12. Anniversary & Re-Grief |
| 6. Belongings, Memories & Continuing Bonds | 13. Continuing Bonds & When Grief Remains Heavy |
| 7. Relationships, Secondary Losses & Isolation | |

If you're looking for help with something very specific, from the Home page, go to Restoring Your Horizon and open Tile 7.

GENTLE GUARDRAILS

- Keep language simple; offer one small next step at a time.
- Avoid religious platitudes or explanations that force meaning.
- Ask permission before prayer, scripture, ritual, or spiritual framing.
- Honor the person's beliefs, doubts, traditions, and choice not to engage spiritually.
- These sheets are supportive and educational; they are not medical, legal, or mental health treatment.
- Follow agency protocols and immediately involve appropriate clinical/emergency supports for safety concerns, self-harm, abuse, or medical instability.

Shock & Stabilizing

Aim: Provide calm presence and spiritual or meaning-centered steadiness when grief feels unreal or overwhelming.

What families may say

- This doesn't feel real.
- I can't think straight.
- Where is God in this?

What you may notice

- Numbness, agitation, or repeated questions.
- Decision fatigue and overwhelm with details.
- Spiritual disorientation: anger, silence, bargaining, fear, or inability to pray.

Borrowable language

- We can take this one small step at a time. You don't have to hold it all today.
- If faith matters to you, we can bring it gently - or we can simply sit in quiet together.
- It can be hard to make sense of anything when you are carrying this much. We do not have to force meaning today.
- Would you like a brief prayer, a reading, or just steady presence right now?

What you can offer

- Offer a brief grounding moment: feet on the floor, one slow breath, notice one thing that feels steady.
- If welcomed, offer a simple blessing, reading, candle, or speaking-the-name ritual.
- Introduce Grace Harbor with the Pass-Along Card when continuing support would be helpful.

When to bring the team in

- Safety concerns, self-harm talk, or inability to function: follow agency escalation protocol immediately.
- Severe family conflict affecting care decisions: involve social work/IDT.
- Concerning panic, altered perception, substance risk, or medical symptoms: involve the appropriate clinical team.

Documentation-friendly language: Provided spiritual and emotional support; offered calm presence and permission-based spiritual care. Grace Harbor continuing-support resource offered as appropriate.

Body, Breath & Early Grief

Aim: Acknowledge the physical burden of grief while offering gentle spiritual care without pressure.

What families may say

- I can't sleep or eat.
- My chest feels tight.
- I don't know how to pray right now.

What you may notice

- Fatigue, shakiness, headaches, nausea, appetite or sleep changes.
- Irritability, tearfulness, or short attention span.
- Prayer feels empty, or the person feels guilty about their faith response.

Borrowable language

- Grief can affect the body as well as the heart. You do not have to push through everything at once.
- You don't have to find the right words. We can sit in silence if that feels better.
- If it helps, I can offer a short prayer - with no pressure for you to participate.
- What is one small thing that might make the next hour easier?

What you can offer

- Encourage one basic next step such as water, rest, a small meal, or asking someone for help.
- Offer a brief quieting practice that fits the person's beliefs and comfort.
- Introduce Grace Harbor with the Pass-Along Card when continuing support would be helpful.

When to bring the team in

- Physical symptoms, prolonged sleep loss, or worsening functioning: involve the nurse/clinical team.
- Home safety concerns: involve the appropriate clinical team.
- Trauma symptoms or distress interfering with basic functioning: involve social work/bereavement according to protocol.

Documentation-friendly language: Provided spiritual support related to grief, physical weariness, and coping; reinforced one manageable next step and appropriate team supports.

Ritual, Decisions & First Goodbyes

Aim: Support meaning-making during arrangements, bedside rituals, farewells, and early remembrance.

What families may say

- We don't even know what to do next.
- I don't want to make the wrong choice.
- I can't imagine the service.

What you may notice

- Overwhelm with logistics and fear of regret.
- Family disagreement about traditions or beliefs.
- Tenderness, anger, or uncertainty when discussing rituals and goodbyes.

Borrowable language

- There may not be one perfect decision. We can look for what feels loving and true to this person and family.
- If you would like, we can create a simple bedside ritual - a blessing, a reading, a prayer, or a memory moment.
- Meaning does not depend on the size of a service. Small things can carry deep love.
- Would you like help finding words for goodbye that fit your beliefs?

What you can offer

- Offer a simple three-part ritual: name, gratitude, and release or blessing, adapted to the family's tradition.
- Help identify a reading, prayer, music, memory, or symbolic act that reflects the person.
- Introduce Grace Harbor with the Pass-Along Card when continuing support would be helpful.

When to bring the team in

- High conflict about arrangements or decisions: involve social work/IDT.
- When the family wants clergy from its own tradition, help coordinate contact if appropriate.
- Safety concerns or complex family dynamics affecting care: involve the appropriate team.

Documentation-friendly language: Provided spiritual care around ritual, decisions, and farewell; supported family-defined beliefs and coordinated additional clergy/IDT support as appropriate.

The Quiet After

Aim: Address loneliness, spiritual numbness, and the drop-off in support that can follow services, visitors, or intense caregiving.

What families may say

- Everyone went home and it's just quiet.
- I feel worse now.
- I don't know what I'm supposed to do with my days.

What you may notice

- Isolation, restless nights, or avoidance of familiar spaces.
- Difficulty completing ordinary tasks.
- Spiritual numbness, anger, or a renewed sense of abandonment.

Borrowable language

- The quiet after can feel especially heavy. You do not have to pretend it is easier now.
- Would it help to choose one small anchor for the next few days?
- If your faith community feels safe and supportive, we can think about one simple way they could help.
- It is possible to feel relief, sadness, anger, and love at the same time.

What you can offer

- Help identify one person, one practical task, and one restorative practice for the next few days.
- Offer chaplain follow-up, bereavement contact, or faith-community support when welcomed.
- Introduce Grace Harbor with the Pass-Along Card when continuing support would be helpful.

When to bring the team in

- Little or no support combined with increasing distress: involve social work/bereavement.
- Marked decline in eating, mobility, self-care, or other functioning: involve the clinical team.
- Any self-harm statement or safety concern: follow immediate escalation protocol.

Documentation-friendly language: Provided spiritual support related to loneliness and the quiet after loss; identified supportive connections and additional team resources as appropriate.

Anger, Guilt & the Why Questions

Aim: Hold hard emotions and spiritual questions without forcing resolution or defending a belief system.

What families may say

- I'm angry at God.
- I should have done more.
- Why would this happen?

What you may notice

- Self-blame or repetitive questioning.
- Anger toward staff, family, clergy, God, or faith.
- Avoidance of worship or spiritual practices because of shame, hurt, or anger.

Borrowable language

- You don't have to defend your feelings to me. We can tell the truth here.
- Feeling guilty does not automatically mean you were responsible. We can look gently at what you are carrying.
- Some questions may not have answers that satisfy us. You do not have to carry the questions alone.
- If you would like, we can pray honestly rather than trying to make the words sound right.

What you can offer

- Offer lament, journaling, silence, or another honest spiritual practice if welcomed.
- Help separate what the person wishes had been different from what was actually within their control.
- Introduce Grace Harbor with the Pass-Along Card when continuing support would be helpful.

When to bring the team in

- Persistent self-blame with significant depression or impaired functioning: involve bereavement/social work.
- Escalating anger creating safety concerns: involve the clinical team.
- Increasing substance use or other safety concerns: involve appropriate IDT members.

Documentation-friendly language: Provided nonjudgmental spiritual care for anger, guilt, and meaning questions; avoided forced explanations and coordinated additional support as indicated.

Belongings, Memories & Continuing Bonds

Aim: Support families as belongings, memories, identity, and ongoing connection take on new meaning.

What families may say

- I can't touch their things.
- I feel like I'm forgetting them.
- Who am I now?

What you may notice

- Avoidance or rapid clearing of belongings followed by regret.
- Strong emotion around ordinary objects, photographs, music, or places.
- Spiritual longing expressed through dreams, sensed presence, signs, or questions about continuing connection.

Borrowable language

- There is no required timeline for belongings. You can go slowly.
- Love and memory can remain part of your life even as life changes.
- Would it help to choose one small item or memory to keep close for now?
- If a dream or experience feels meaningful to you, we can talk about what it means to you without forcing an interpretation.

What you can offer

- Offer a memory ritual, blessing of belongings, journal, memory box, or photo space if it fits the person.
- Use a simple keep / give / decide-later approach if practical decisions feel overwhelming.
- Introduce Grace Harbor with the Pass-Along Card when continuing support would be helpful.

When to bring the team in

- Family conflict about possessions or memorial decisions: involve social work.
- Behaviors around belongings that create significant impairment or safety concerns: involve appropriate IDT members.
- Persistent inability to function because of grief triggers: involve bereavement/clinical support.

Documentation-friendly language: Provided spiritual care related to memory, belongings, identity, and continuing bonds; supported family-defined meaning without imposing interpretation.

Relationships, Secondary Losses & Isolation

Aim: Help families navigate differing grief styles, strained relationships, lost roles, and isolation.

What families may say

- We are grieving so differently.
- People disappeared.
- I feel alone even with others around.

What you may notice

- Irritability, arguments, withdrawal, or misunderstanding.
- Friends or family pulling away; the mourner feels judged.
- Hurtful comments or disconnection from a faith community.

Borrowable language

- Different grief styles can still come from love. You do not have to grieve the same way to remain connected.
- It is okay to set boundaries with comments or interactions that are hurting you.
- Would it help to find words for what you need - and what you do not need - from other people?
- If your faith community has hurt you, we can talk about what safe support might look like now.

What you can offer

- Help create one simple request for support or one respectful boundary statement.
- Offer chaplain follow-up, grief group, bereavement support, or a trusted community connection when appropriate.
- Introduce Grace Harbor with the Pass-Along Card when continuing support would be helpful.

When to bring the team in

- Domestic safety concerns or escalating conflict: involve social work/clinical lead immediately according to protocol.
- Isolation with significant depression or loss of functioning: involve bereavement/social work.
- Complex family systems affecting care decisions: involve the IDT.

Documentation-friendly language: Provided spiritual support related to relationship strain, isolation, and secondary losses; reinforced boundaries and appropriate community/IDT support.

Milestones, Holidays & Grief Surges

Aim: Prepare for meaningful dates and occasions that may intensify grief, while honoring choice and tradition.

What families may say

- I dread the holidays.
- Their birthday is coming.
- I don't know how to do this without them.

What you may notice

- Avoidance of gatherings or pressure to maintain every tradition.
- Increased sadness, irritability, or anxiety near meaningful dates.
- Spiritual longing for reassurance, closeness, or a sign.

Borrowable language

- A meaningful date can bring a fresh wave of grief. That does not mean you are going backward.
- We can think about what you want to keep, what you want to change, and what you want permission to skip.
- Would a small ritual - a candle, prayer, letter, meal, act of service, or memory - feel meaningful?
- You can honor the person and still protect your energy.

What you can offer

- Create a simple plan for connection, comfort, and an exit option.
- Coordinate remembrance with the person's faith community when desired.
- Introduce Grace Harbor with the Pass-Along Card when continuing support would be helpful.

When to bring the team in

- Significant worsening of depression or functioning near dates: involve bereavement/social work.
- Family conflict around traditions or remembrance: involve social work as appropriate.
- Any safety concern: follow immediate escalation protocol.

Documentation-friendly language: Provided anticipatory spiritual support for a meaningful date; explored family-defined ritual, boundaries, and additional support as appropriate.

Faith Strain, Doubt & Meaning-Making

Aim: Support spiritual struggle and questions of meaning without pressure, judgment, or premature answers.

What families may say

- I feel abandoned.
- I don't believe like I used to.
- People keep telling me things that do not help.

What you may notice

- Avoidance of worship or anger toward faith leaders.
- Shame about doubt or fear of judgment.
- Searching for meaning, purpose, hope, or a way to understand what happened.

Borrowable language

- You are allowed to tell the truth about what you believe and what you are questioning right now.
- You do not have to accept an explanation just because someone meant it kindly.
- Would you like to name one thing you are grieving, one thing you are questioning, and one thing you still hope for?
- If you prefer, we can stay with comfort and presence rather than trying to find answers.

What you can offer

- Offer scripture, poetry, lament, reflection, or silence only when it fits the person's beliefs and wishes.
- Offer to coordinate with the person's own clergy or faith community if welcomed.
- Introduce Grace Harbor with the Pass-Along Card when continuing support would be helpful.

When to bring the team in

- Spiritual crisis connected with self-harm or safety risk: follow immediate escalation protocol.
- Severe hopelessness or inability to cope: involve bereavement/clinical team.
- Theological needs beyond the chaplain's role or tradition: coordinate with the person's own clergy when appropriate.

Documentation-friendly language: Provided spiritual care for faith strain, doubt, and meaning questions; honored the person's beliefs and preferences without imposing interpretation.

Re-Engaging Life & Identity

Aim: Support the spiritual and identity questions that can arise as a mourner begins participating in life again.

What families may say

- I feel guilty laughing.
- I don't recognize myself.
- People expect me to be better.

What you may notice

- Unexpected grief during ordinary activities.
- Pressure from others to move on or return to normal.
- Mixed feelings about relief, enjoyment, purpose, or a changing identity.

Borrowable language

- A moment of relief or enjoyment does not erase your love.
- You do not have to become the person you were before this loss. We can explore who you are becoming.
- Grief may continue to come in waves while life also begins to grow around it.
- What is one small step toward life that feels possible without asking you to leave love behind?

What you can offer

- Pair one act of living with one act of remembering.
- Explore service, creativity, worship, community, or another source of meaning if it fits the person.
- Introduce Grace Harbor with the Pass-Along Card when continuing support would be helpful.

When to bring the team in

- Persistent inability to function at home, work, or in basic routines: involve bereavement/clinical support.
- Severe avoidance, panic, or increasing isolation: involve social work/bereavement.
- Family tension around re-entry or changing roles: involve social work/IDT as appropriate.

Documentation-friendly language: Provided spiritual support related to identity, re-engagement, and continuing love; explored one meaningful next step and additional supports.

Caregiver Weariness & Support System Repair

Aim: Address exhaustion, depleted support systems, and spiritual weariness before and after loss.

What families may say

- I'm tired all the time.
- I can't keep up.
- I don't know who I can lean on.

What you may notice

- Exhaustion, irritability, or neglect of basic needs.
- Withdrawal from community or reluctance to ask for help.
- Spiritual dryness, emptiness, or the feeling of having nothing left to give.

Borrowable language

- You have been carrying a great deal for a long time. It makes sense that you are tired.
- Your need for care did not end because the crisis changed.
- Would it help to name one specific thing someone else could carry for you this week?
- Rest can be part of faithful care for yourself; it does not have to be earned.

What you can offer

- Create a short help menu: meals, rides, errands, sitting with someone, calls, or other concrete needs.
- Reconnect with a safe faith-community care team, grief group, counseling, or chaplain follow-up if desired.
- Introduce Grace Harbor with the Pass-Along Card when continuing support would be helpful.

When to bring the team in

- Exhaustion accompanied by depression symptoms or significant impairment: involve bereavement/social work.
- Increasing substance use or medical concerns: involve nurse/social work.
- No support system with worsening function or safety concerns: involve the clinical team.

Documentation-friendly language: Provided spiritual support for caregiver weariness and depleted supports; identified practical/community resources and appropriate IDT follow-up.

Anniversary & Re-Grief

Aim: Prepare for anniversaries and other returning reminders while normalizing that grief does not follow a calendar.

What families may say

- It's been a year and it hurts again.
- Everyone thinks I should be okay.
- I don't want to face this date.

What you may notice

- Sleep disruption or increased distress near the date.
- Heightened sensitivity, tears, or withdrawal.
- Spiritual longing for closeness, reassurance, remembrance, or ritual.

Borrowable language

- Anniversaries can bring the ache close again. You do not have to treat that as failure.
- You do not have to perform strength for other people.
- Would you like to plan one small, meaningful act for the day?
- Love does not follow the calendar. Neither does grief.

What you can offer

- Create a remembrance plan that includes who, where, what, and permission to change plans.
- Offer a blessing, prayer, memory-sharing circle, quiet ritual, or another tradition if welcomed.
- Introduce Grace Harbor with the Pass-Along Card when continuing support would be helpful.

When to bring the team in

- Severe depression, major functional decline, or safety risk around the anniversary: involve bereavement/clinical team.
- Family conflict about remembrance: involve social work as appropriate.
- Persistent trauma symptoms interfering with functioning: involve bereavement/clinical support.

Documentation-friendly language: Provided spiritual support related to anniversary grief; explored remembrance, flexibility, and appropriate additional supports.

Continuing Bonds & When Grief Remains Heavy

Aim: Support ongoing connection while recognizing when the weight of grief may call for additional professional help.

What families may say

- I thought I'd be better by now.
- I can't stop replaying everything.
- I feel like life ended too.

What you may notice

- Intense yearning or distress that remains difficult to carry.
- Avoidance of reminders or difficulty resuming basic activities.
- Hopelessness, numbness, isolation, or a sense that life has lost meaning.

Borrowable language

- There is no shame in needing more support. Some seasons of grief require more hands.
- We can honor your love while also building support for the life you are still living.
- Would you be open to additional grief or mental health support alongside spiritual care?
- You deserve care that matches the weight you are carrying.

What you can offer

- Offer a warm connection to bereavement support, counseling, mental health care, or a grief group when appropriate.
- Continue spiritual care alongside additional professional support rather than treating referral as an ending.
- Introduce Grace Harbor with the Pass-Along Card; for deeper or very specific needs, the family can use Grace Harbor navigation, including Restoring Your Horizon and Tile 7.

When to bring the team in

- Any self-harm talk, intent, abuse, or immediate safety concern: follow emergency/agency protocol.
- Severe or prolonged impairment: involve bereavement/clinical lead and appropriate mental health resources.
- Concerns beyond spiritual-care scope: coordinate with social work, clinical staff, bereavement, or mental health professionals as appropriate.

Documentation-friendly language: Provided ongoing spiritual care; acknowledged continuing bonds and the weight of grief; coordinated additional bereavement/clinical/mental health support as appropriate.