

## Deep Grief

*For parents grieving a child lost to substances*

### **Deep grief is the landscape we never asked to enter**

It is a place shaped by love so strong that its absence brings us to our knees. When a child dies, the world tilts off its axis. When a child dies from substances, the tilt can feel even sharper, weighted with layers of trauma, shock, confusion, and the ache of not knowing what might have changed the ending. Deep grief settles into the bones, into the breath, into the quiet moments when the world moves on but our hearts cannot.

### **Deep grief is not just an emotion—it is an experience that touches every part of us**

It affects our minds with fog and forgetfulness, making simple tasks feel impossible. It unsettles our bodies with exhaustion, heaviness, and pain that has no clear medical name. It floods our hearts with longing, anger, guilt, love, disbelief, and a sorrow too large for words. And it stirs our spirits—pushing us to question meaning, fairness, purpose, and the nature of love itself. In deep grief, every memory shimmers with both beauty and devastation.

### **For parents like us, there is another layer—the world doesn't always understand our loss**

Too often, society whispers or judges when substances were part of our child's story. People may not know what to say. Some speak in ways that wound. Others stay silent. This stigma can make our grief feel invisible or unacknowledged, as though the manner of our child's death overshadows the fullness of their life. But here, in this space, we speak the truth clearly:

Our children were more than their struggles. They were loved—deeply, fiercely, endlessly. And our grief is sacred.



## **Deep grief also comes with questions we may never answer**

The “what-ifs” and “if onlys” that pull us back into moments we replay again and again, searching for the point where the story could have changed. These thoughts don’t make us weak or irrational—they are a parent’s attempt to rewrite the impossible, to make sense of the senseless. Over time, we may learn that the guilt we carry is not truth, but a reflection of how desperately we wish our children were still here.

## **Deep grief does not move in straight lines**

Some days we function. Some days we crumble. Some days we feel a glimmer of hope, only to be swept under again by a memory, a song, a scent, a photograph, a birthday. This is not failure. This is love learning how to live in a world where the person we would have given our lives for is no longer physically present.

## **And slowly—very slowly—we begin to carry our grief differently**

Not because the love has faded, but because the heart finds ways to breathe around the pain. We start to notice moments when softness returns—a shared story, a gentle sunset, a laugh that surprises us. Healing does not mean forgetting, letting go, or moving on. Healing means learning to walk with the weight in a way that doesn’t crush us.