WORKSHEET 144 · FOR THE PSYCHOLOGIST

The letter I couldn’t give

Telling the person what was left unsaid

AIM

Offer a space to express to the person who died what could not be said (gratitude, regret, anger, forgiveness, goodbye), in the form of an unsent letter.

WHO IT IS FOR

Sudden death, impossible goodbyes (pandemic, distance, living abroad), unfinished or conflictual relationships.

DURATION

20-30 min, in one or several sittings

HOW TO RUN IT

1. Suggest writing directly to the person, addressing them as “you”.
2. The themes are free: what was loved, what is regretted, what hurt, what you would like them to know.
3. The person chooses what to do with the letter: keep it, read it at the grave or aloud, burn it, share it.
4. Go back over what they felt in session.

POINTS TO WATCH

Writing can rekindle strong emotion: suggest doing it at a time when the person won’t be alone afterwards, or in session. If the relationship was abusive, the letter can also express anger, with no obligation to forgive. Grief is not an illness: these worksheets offer support and must not push the person to “move on”. Watch for signs of prolonged grief (at least 6 to 12 months of intense, pervasive yearning with impairment) and for suicide risk, especially the wish to be reunited with the person.

REFERENCES

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PSYCHOLOGIST’S NOTES

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WORKSHEET 144 · WORKSHEET TO HAND OUT

The letter I couldn’t give

Sometimes we couldn’t say goodbye, thank you, sorry, or what we had inside. Writing a letter to the person, even if they will never read it, can help you set down what was left unsaid.

1. Write directly to the person, as “you”.
2. Tell them what you loved, what you regret, what hurt you, what you would like them to know.
3. Take your time: you can write it in several sittings.
4. Choose what to do with the letter: keep it, read it, leave it somewhere, burn it.

What I want to tell you	What I feel as I write it

What I chose to do with my letter, and how it felt:

These exercises do not replace therapy. If you are in distress or having suicidal thoughts: 112 (European Union), 3114 (France) or the emergency number of the country where you live.

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