

“You don’t get to go around or above your grief. You must go through it. And while you are going through it, you must express it if you are to reconcile yourself to it.”

Dr. Alan Wolfelt



ABOUT DR. ALAN WOLFELT
Alan D. Wolfelt, Ph.D., is a respected author and educator on the topic of grief. He believes that meaningful funeral experiences help families and friends support one another, embrace their feelings, and embark on the journey to healing and transcendence.

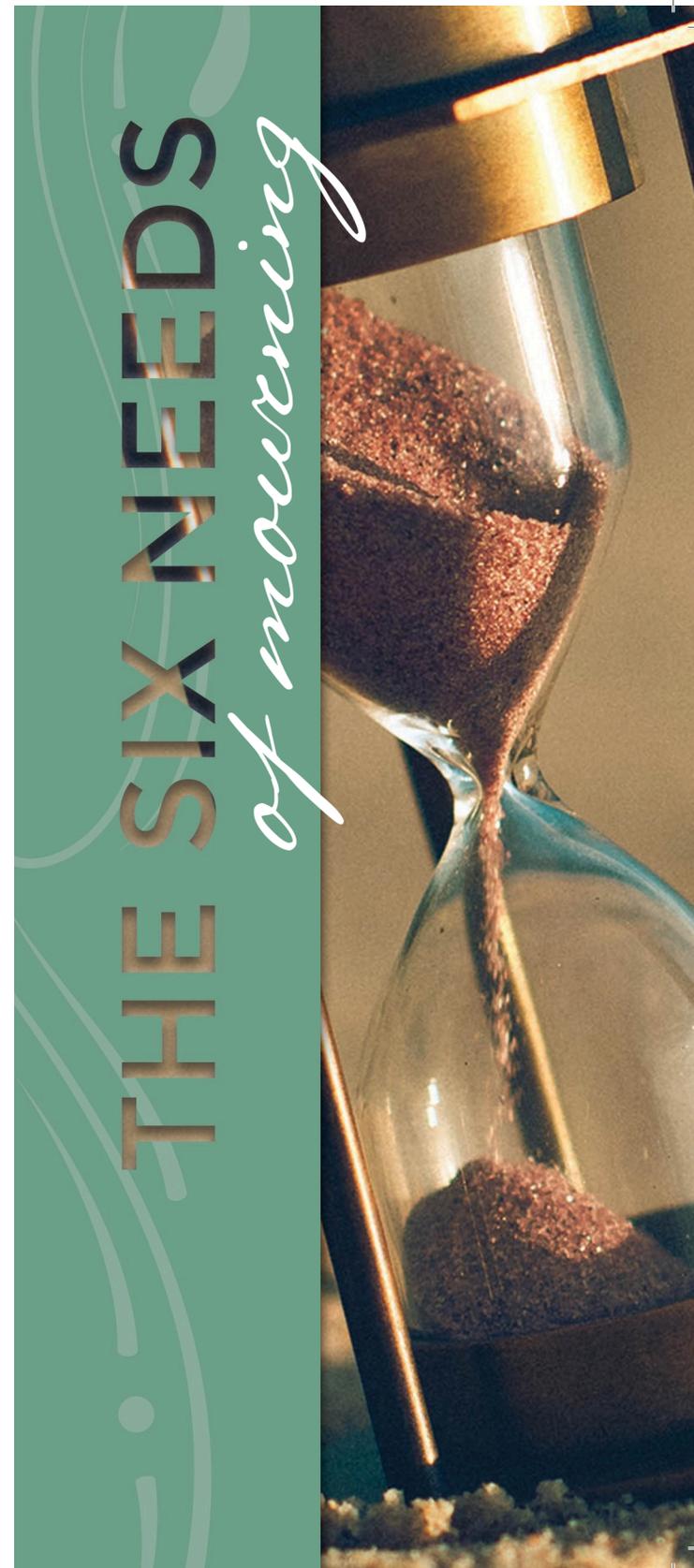
Recipient of the Association of Death Education and Counseling’s Death Educator Award, Dr. Wolfelt presents workshops across the world to grieving families, funeral home staffs, and other caregivers. He also teaches training courses for bereavement caregivers at the Center for Loss and Life Transition in Fort Collins, Colorado, where he serves as Director. Dr. Wolfelt is on the faculty of the University of Colorado Medical School’s Department of Family Medicine. He is also the author of many bestselling books, including Understanding Your Grief, The Mourner’s Book of Hope, and Creating Meaningful Funeral Ceremonies. For more information, visit www.centerforloss.com



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Losing a loved one leaves a deep hole in our hearts. For days, months, and even years to come, we may experience a wide range of emotions, like sadness, anger, guilt, regret, and relief. All of these are normal responses to grief, but how do we do the work of grief so that we can move toward healing?

Dr. Alan Wolfelt, a noted grief counselor, author, and educator, has spent years working with thousands of families. Let's learn from his experience and forge a path toward new hope and meaning.



THE SIX NEEDS OF MOURNING

Through the years, Dr. Wolfelt has identified six needs – a “to do” list of sorts – that he believes every person must experience in order to grieve well. He puts it this way: *“Everyone grieves and mourns differently, but there are some steps along the way that we all must encounter. I call these the ‘six needs of mourning.’ Meeting the six needs of mourning one day at a time will help you move toward a life of meaning and purpose again.”*

Let's review the six needs and what they mean for your grief journey.

Acknowledge the Reality of the Death

First, we must confront the fact that our loved one will no longer be a physical part of our lives. This one step may take weeks or even months to fully realize. To protect us, our minds try to push reality away, but to move toward full healing, we must face the reality of loss.

Embrace the Pain of Loss

We must embrace the pain we feel. As human beings, we often shy away from what we perceive as negative emotions, preferring not to deal with them because they're too painful. But in order to heal, we cannot go around what we feel. We must find a way to face it, own it, and process it. Don't try to face everything at once. Give yourself time and allow yourself to face your grief in doses.

Remember the Person who Died

Death doesn't end relationships – it simply changes them. While your loved one is no longer physically present, you still have your shared past, your memories, and even mementos. To heal, you must work on actively remembering and telling your story. The more you share, the less you hold inside. And over time, you will be more at ease talking about your loved one.

Develop a New Self-Identity

When you lose someone you love, you are confronted with a change in your identity. Perhaps you go from being a “wife” to a “widow” or a “husband” to a “widower.” At first, you may struggle with your new identity. Normal, everyday tasks may be a little harder because things are different now. But over time, if you do the work of grief, you will befriend your new self-identity and find a way to move forward.

Search for Meaning

Following a loss, it's natural to struggle with questions, your faith, and the meaning of life. Death reminds us of our powerlessness and lack of control, which is unsettling. Please know that this search for meaning is normal and a natural part of the grief journey. As you struggle, you will find new meaning and the momentum you need to move ahead.

Receive Ongoing Support from Others

Lastly, you need to accept support from the people who love you. While society puts a lot of emphasis on independence, it's not always well-placed. In order to heal, you must express what you feel to people who value you. Open yourself up to others and allow them to walk with you down the road of grief.