

TAPS
Institute for Hope and Healing

Grief Dreams


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Presented by Boeing **BOEING**

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My Loss

- In 2008, my father passed away suddenly at age 52
- Three months after, I had a dream....

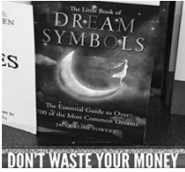


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Dreams

- A sequence of perceptions, thoughts, and emotions during sleep
- The Continuity Hypothesis:
 - Dreams reflect the dreamer's waking life
- Dreams can help solve problems (active)
- Dreams can be symbolic



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Forms of Grief Dreams (after Loss)


- Dreams that do not have the deceased present or mention them
- Dreams that do not have the deceased present, but others mention them
- Dreams that have the deceased present in the dream (e.g. in human form or in another)

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In Popular Culture

- Recent Movies
 - *Captain Marvel* (2019)
 - *Ant-Man and the Wasp* (2018)
 - *Justice League* (2017)
 - *War of the Planet of the Apes* (2017)
 - *Beauty and the Beast* (2017)
 - *King Arthur* (2017)
 - *The Shack* (2017)
 - *Ghost in a Shell* (2017)
 - *Manchester by the Sea* (2016)
 - *Collateral Beauty* (2016)
 - *Pete's Dragon* (2016)



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Big Bang Theory

- Season 7, Episode 22: Sheldon has two dreams of his deceased friend Dr. Proton
- Season 9, Episode 11: Dr. Proton gives relationship advice
- Season 11, Episode 6: Sheldon talks to Dr. Proton about his legacy


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The Wiggles

It's OK To Cry

Sometimes when I dream of you
 I ask for you to count with me
 1, 2, 3, 4, could it be
 That you will always be with me
(written by John Edwards)



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Let It Be

- On "The Late Late Show with James Corden," Paul McCartney discussed a grief dream he had of his deceased mom in the 60's
- She came to him in the dream and reassured him by saying "It's going to be OK, just let it be."


*And in my hour of darkness she is standing right in front of me
 Speaking words of wisdom, let it be*

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Judgments

- People can have a bias towards grief dreams (specifically dreams of the deceased)
- The bereaved can feel isolated, fearing people's judgments
 - Confusing within many religions



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Christianity

Are dreams of the deceased from the Devil?

- They can provide a deeper conviction of life after death
- They can help with the grief process

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Matthew 12:24-27

- The Pharisees told Jesus his healing powers came from Satan. Jesus explains that if Satan was casting out Satan his kingdom could never survive because they are fighting against themselves.
- Same thing for comforting grief dreams

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Dream

I had a dream from my deceased five-year-old daughter. She appeared to be floating near the ceiling of our bedroom. She was healthy, with curly hair (she died from cancer and was almost bald and severely jaundiced and bloated before death). She was smiling and beaming at me. She was holding Jesus' hand. There was a radiant light coming from between the two of them. She didn't speak but communicated to me "I am with Him!" She "told" me that she was better than fine. She was in an amazing place, seeing and experiencing amazing things.

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Common Question

Is it common to dream of your loved one after loss?


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Grief Dreams

Adults

- My PhD data
 - Spousal loss 86%
 - Pet Loss 71%
 - Pregnancy Loss 60%



Children

- 1 study in children show around 55% (Silverman & Nickman, 1996)

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Common Question

Why have I not had a dream of the deceased yet?


Black, J., Belicki, K., & Emberley-Ralph, J. (2019). Who Dreams of the Deceased? The Roles of Dream Recall, Grief Intensity, Attachment, and Openness to Experience. *Dreaming*, 29, 57-79.

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Remembering Dreams

- Value the dreams
 - Write them down
 - Talk about them
- When you wake up rehearse the dream



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Common Question

Are there different themes in dreams of the deceased?


Black, J., DeCicco, T., Seeley, C., Murkar, A., Black, J., & Fox, P. (2016). Dreams of the Deceased: Can Themes be Reliably Coded? *International Journal of Dream Research*, 9, 110-114.

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Seven Common Themes

- Rationalization
- Dead, dying, or ill
- Discomfort
- Comfort
- Healthy and happy
- Help-crossing-over
- Separation



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Grief Dreams

After Spousal Loss (note: similar results after pet loss)

- 35.4% - Dead, dying, or ill
- 22.4% - Acting/speaking in a way that was upsetting
- 89.0% - Healthy and/or happy
- 82.1% - Acting/speaking in a way that was comforting

- 44.3% - Negative theme
 - 94.5% also had a positive themed dream
- 91.5% - Positive theme (unusual)

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Common Question

Why am I having negative dreams of the deceased?

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Negative Dream of the Deceased


... I ask him where he has been, and why he let me think that he had been dead all this time. I get angrier and angrier as he tells me that he faked his death, and it was all just a plan to get the money from the business and insurance, and that now he wants to resume our relationship again. I tell him that I have moved on with my life, that I am now in a new relationship and that I'm happy – I tell him I can't go back in time and be with him again. He gets very angry and tells me that the real reason he is back is because he wants all the money that I inherited – that if I give it to him he'll leave me alone. I get very upset, telling him that he is a terrible heartless mean person to do something like that to me.

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A Child's Negative Dream

- Flintstones example



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Common Question

Are dreams of the deceased helpful in the grief process?

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Grief Dreams

- Continuing bond
- Judy Hinderer (Episode 114 – *Grief Dreams Podcast*)

I was in a forest at some park. There was a little bridge amongst the trees. My Dad was on the other side. He said "You know. You can cross the bridge by yourself. You can do it."
(age 13)

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Loss Story (from the *Grief Dreams* Newsletter)

My father passed away 22 years ago. About seven years ago I was home recovering from surgery. I was taking a nap which I had to do in an inclined position due to the nature of the surgery. I can not sleep on my back because I tend to stop breathing but as long as I am inclined, I'm okay.

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Grief Dreams

I dreamt that I was with my father at the grocery store helping him do his shopping...There was only one checkout and a turnstile to my right, my father was dressed on the suit that we buried him in and everything was white in the background.... He said that I should go, he was very insistent. I asked him what he was talking about and started to walk toward the turnstile. He again insisted that I not go through the turnstile and that I had to go back. I turned to look beyond the turnstile and there was no grocery store, just misty, white clouds. We went back and forth, him telling me to go back, that it wasn't time yet and me saying that we had to get on with it. As I stepped over and put my hand on the turnstile, he yelled something to me. I asked him to repeat what he said. "WAKE UP!" he yelled.

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Grief Dreams

Which is what I did. I took a deep ragged breath and found that I had slipped off my pillow and was flat on my back. My lungs ached because I had stopped breathing, my heart was pounding.


I think my father saved my life!

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Grief Dreams

- Continuing bond
 - Judy Hinderer (Episode 114 – *Grief Dreams Podcast*)
- Provide comfort (emotion regulation)



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Grief Support

Serena Dyer (Episode 76 - *Grief Dreams Podcast*)


In the dream, Mason told her to hold his hands, and his energy was so joyful and funny. He then got very serious and told her that she needed to stop with the guilt. He told her that guilt was soul-sabotaging and pointless. He said that everything in his life was the culmination of choices he made... He then told her to be careful with thoughts she was choosing and decisions she was making that were self-harming because, as he explained, the purpose of living is to love, and it must start with the self. He then laughed a little more and released her hands.

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Hearing Loving Words

My husband came and sat down by my bed and said "I've been to the end of time and back and you know what? I still love you."



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Hearing Loving Words

*My father tells me in the dream,
"I love you. I see you every day. You are so beautiful."*

Judy Hinderer (Episode 114 – *Grief Dreams Podcast*)

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Voicing Love

My brother came to our door and when I saw him, I ran to him, so happy, saying things like "I'm so happy to see you!" and "I'm so glad you're here!" and "It's been so long, why did you wait so long to come see me?" We hugged and laughed and smiled. I told my brother that I had planned what I'd say to him if I saw him again. Suddenly, my brother and I were sitting on the couch in my living room. He was sitting close to me, with his arm around me, comforting me. He was so at ease, so gentle, relaxed, and secure. He sat very still with me, and he calmly and gently asked me, "What do you want to say to me?" Like no matter what it was, it was okay. I paused and thought about it. And it was like all those conversations in my head didn't matter. I replied, "Just, I love you."

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Love Changes Us

- Feelings of love and peace (never felt before)

Love is the Strongest Medicine

Neem Karoli Baba



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Profound Change - Loss Story
(from the *Grief Dreams* Newsletter)

About 10 years ago I lost my best friend, the type of friend you look up to, the life of the party, in a band, in the army traveling the world, someone whom always seemed happy. We were best buddies since we were in grade school. I was the best man at his wedding. Well I guess I was wrong as he unfortunately died by suicide two years after his wedding. To this day I have no idea why, I felt like he had everything. I really did not take it all very well at all. Alcohol or drugs, whatever I could get my hands on to numb the pain walking through life like a numb zombie. Thankfully, I had a wife that kept me from taking it to a dangerous level, however it was everyday. I was just done; nothing made me smile.

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The Dream

I found myself back in my grade 1 class. All my friends and buddies were there, we were all kids again. I was seeing one old friend after another in this classroom setting. I knew I was dreaming, and I knew my deceased best friend could be there like everyone else. I looked and looked, turned around and he was sitting directly behind me with the most amazing smile and his thumb up just like he was telling me he was ok. The dream felt so real, so vivid; I can still see his smile. I woke up that morning feeling incredible, like I had a new lease on life. I felt joy again and got my life together. The dream helped me out of my darkest days.

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Common Question

Do you believe this dream was a visitation?

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Common Question

Do these dreams change over time?

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Grief Dreams

- Dream themes may change as grief changes

Black, J., Murkar, A., & Black, J. (2014). Examining the healing process through dreams in bereavement. *Sleep and Hypnosis, 16*, 10-17.

- In the dying, they can help reduce fear of dying which can help with the transition from life to death
 - Dr. Pei Grant (Episode 121 - *Grief Dreams Podcast*)
 - Dr. Christopher Kerr (Episode 73 - *Grief Dreams Podcast*)


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Grief Dreams

Different type of loss


- Spouse
- Child
- Parent
- Pregnancy
- Pet
- Type of death (e.g., suicide)



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Children's E-Books on Amazon



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Just ask the question



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Something To Reflect On

Rebecca MacDonald's Grief Dream
(Episode 109 – *Grief Dreams Podcast*)

**My grandfather said to me,
"Even in sadness there is beauty."**

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About the TAPS Institute for Hope and Healing®

Launched in March 2018 through an alliance with HFA, the TAPS Institute for Hope and Healing® serves as a resource and training center, providing programs for both professionals working in the field of grief and loss and the public.

Presented by Boeing

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Upcoming TAPS Institute Programs

- July 10 — *Understanding Toxic Exposure Illness*
 Presenter: **Coleen Bowman**, TAPS Senior Advisor on Toxic Exposure Loss
 Moderator: **Grace Seamon-Lahiff**, TAPS Program Evaluation Manager, Impact Assessment and Research
- July 30 — *Intimate Partners and Suicide: Finding Hope When the Unthinkable Happens*
 Presenter: **Shauna Springer**, PhD, Senior Director, TAPS Suicide Prevention and Postvention
 Moderator: **Kim Ruocco**, MSW, Vice President, TAPS Suicide Prevention and Postvention
- August 13 — *Building Your Circle of Support After a Loss*
 Presenter: **Denise Rollins**, PhD, Executive Director, Whole Heart Grief & Life Resource Center

Visit taps.org/institute to learn more and RSVP!

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