



Restoring the Soul – A Compassionate Journey with Grief & Loss

By Diane Mitchell-Miller

Grief – I don't see you but I feel you.

Grief Changes Shape, But It Never Disappears

Grief is not something we "get over"—it's something we learn to carry. When my mom died at just 35 years old, my grief felt like a **75-pound sack** strapped to my back. It was unbearable, pressing down on me every moment of the day. I cried at the most unexpected times—at the grocery store, in the middle of conversations, even when I thought I was "doing okay." The weight wasn't just emotional; it became physical. My body carried the grief just as much as my heart did, and I found myself navigating years of chronic pain as my loss settled into my muscles and bones.

At first, I didn't know how I could live with it. The burden felt too heavy, too relentless. But over time, with support, reflection, and healing, the weight shifted. Grief didn't go away, but it changed shape. The **75-pound sack** became a heavy tote bag—still there, but slightly easier to hold. Eventually, it transformed again into something smaller, like a purse. I still carry it every day, but now it feels more like a part of me rather than something crushing me.

This transformation was captured beautifully by writer and illustrator Mari Andrew in a simple hand-drawn image. She depicted grief as three bags of decreasing size: first, a heavy burlap sack, then a bulky briefcase, and finally, a small purse. Each bag was labeled "grief," illustrating how loss never truly leaves us, but it does change shape. Reflecting on her own journey, Andrew shared:

"Grief doesn't ever go away, but it does change shape and becomes something you can hold rather than something that overwhelms you—a part of you, rather than a burden."

Some days, grief feels light, barely noticeable, like a purse you carry without thinking. Other days, it's as if someone slipped a brick inside, making it unexpectedly heavy again. That's the nature of loss—it ebbs and flows, always present but not always overwhelming.



Suppressed Grief Suffocates!

Grief doesn't mean we are broken. It means we have loved deeply. And as we move forward, we don't leave our grief behind—we learn to carry it differently.

When we lose someone we love, we must learn not to live without them, but to live with the love they left behind

Don't fear pain and suffering; they are integral parts of life. Instead, fortify yourself mentally, emotionally, and spiritually to face them when they arise. There are no passive stages of grief. Grief moves forward, not on. Healing is about integration, not erasure.

Grief isn't a problem to be solved; it's an experience to be carried. You need tools to build a life alongside your loss, not make it disappear.

Grief is part of life's curriculum.

Death ends a life; but it does not end the relationship. Grief is sacred – it shows us that we have loved well and have had the privilege to love.

Time does not heal all wounds. It is what you do with your time that matters.

Toxic positivity helps no one. Compassion is the greatest healer of all.

Grief can be life's greatest teacher. It can be transformed into personal growth.

Grief can make you feel porous and vulnerable – everything affects you.

Grief is One of Life's Greatest Teachers

There is a grief that lingers in the shadows—a sorrow that does not come from a single loss but from something unresolved, unfinished, or slipping away. It's something we will all experience, yet we are rarely given the tools to deal with the burden it can create.

As a grief coach, I see this reality every day. Almost everyone I meet carries some form of grief or loss. Yet, most of us lack the tools or resources to talk about it—many of us were taught in childhood to suppress these feelings. Grief is a universal truth of life that cannot be avoided, yet few of us have been shown how to navigate it in a healthy and meaningful way.

Life is a journey of constant loss—from the tangible, like people, places, dreams, and health, to the intangible, like hopes and expectations. **Loss is not just the absence of something—it is the presence of a void, one that can leave us feeling stunned, confused, and uncertain about how to move forward.** For many, grief is learned behavior. We absorb it from our families and communities, often through avoidance. But what if, instead of avoiding grief, we embraced it as a teacher? What if we built foundational grief practices that allowed us to navigate life's inevitable losses with greater strength and peace?

I truly believe unresolved grief is one of the greatest epidemics of our time. We have all walked through heartbreaks that have never been reconciled. If we want to grow, we must first know ourselves—and that includes understanding and facing our grief. With intentional grief practices, we can transform our pain into wisdom and resilience.

The Power of Acknowledging the Pain

Grief makes you feel porous—like the boundaries between yourself and the world have thinned, allowing everything to seep in and affect you more deeply. It's not just an emotional experience; it manifests on five levels. Physically, grief can bring exhaustion, aches, or a heavy weight in your chest. Mentally, it clouds focus and disrupts memory. Emotionally, it surfaces as waves of sadness, anger, or even numbness. Socially, it can create a sense of isolation or strain relationships. Spiritually, it may challenge beliefs or deepen the search for meaning. Grief is all-encompassing, reshaping how we move through the world.

Grieving vs. Mourning

We need to begin by defining key terms:

- **Grief** – The inner constellation of emotions that occurs naturally when we lose or are separated from someone or something near and dear to us. **Grief is loss of anything MEANINGFUL.** It is not just the death of a loved one. It is defined as the real or perceived deprivation of something that is meaningful.

- **Mourning** – The external expression of our internal experience of grief. It is how we give voice to our pain through tears, storytelling, journaling, rituals, or seeking social support.

While grief is what we feel inside, mourning is what allows us to process, release, and integrate that loss. Converting grief into mourning is essential for healing; without expression, grief can remain stuck, unresolved, and unprocessed.

Buried Grief Becomes Carried Grief

Grief is a silent epidemic because so many of us carry its unspoken weight. When grief is suppressed rather than expressed, it doesn't disappear; it embeds itself in muscle tension, chronic stress, and emotional numbness. Over time, unprocessed grief can harden into anger, resentment, or even physical illness. This silent epidemic of stuck grief affects individuals and entire communities, shaping how we relate to ourselves and others. True healing comes not from ignoring the pain but from acknowledging it, moving it through the body, and allowing it to transform.

By embracing both grief and mourning, we create space for healing, connection, and renewal.

Something has to break for us to experience a breakthrough.

When Grief Has No Name: Anticipatory Loss

In *Learning to Live with Unresolved Grief*, Pauline Boss introduces the concept of anticipatory loss—a type of grief that lacks closure or clear understanding. She describes two forms:

1. **Type One: Physical Absence, Psychological Presence** – When someone is bodily gone but still deeply present in our minds (e.g., adoption, divorce, missing persons).
2. **Type Two: Physical Presence, Psychological Absence** – When someone is physically here but emotionally or mentally absent (e.g., Alzheimer's, addiction, mental illness).

Boss argues that anticipatory loss can freeze the grieving process, making it difficult to adjust. When life no longer makes sense, we find ourselves longing for what once was. Yet even in these moments of uncertainty, we are not alone.

“The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.” – Psalm 34:18

God does not require our grief to be neatly defined before He offers comfort. He is the unchanging presence during life's uncertainties. And within our grief, we have a choice—not to erase the pain, but to decide how we will respond to it.

The Space Between Pain and Response

Viktor Frankl, in *Man's Search for Meaning*, reminds us:

“Between stimulus and response, there is a space. In that space lies our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom.”

Grief is the stimulus—it comes uninvited, shaping our days with sorrow and uncertainty. But in the space between our pain and our reaction, there is a **HOLY PAUSE**. A moment where we can either surrender to despair or step into faith.

Eckhart Tolle teaches that suffering isn't just in what happens to us—it's in how we cling to it. When we resist grief, we suffer more. But when we accept it, we open the door to healing.

“Be still, and know that I am God.” – Psalm 46:10

God does not promise us clarity, but He does promise we don't have to be ruled by our pain. Between our suffering and our response, He invites us to:

- **Pause in His Presence** – Instead of reacting in despair, rest in the assurance that He is working.
- **Choose Faith Over Fear** – Even when we don't see the full picture, we can trust the One who does.
- **Find Freedom in Letting Go** – Surrendering what we cannot control allows us to step into His peace.

A Prayer for the Space Between

Lord, in this space between my pain and my response, help me to choose YOU. When grief feels endless, **remind me that I am not trapped—I am held**. Teach me to embrace the present, to find You in uncertainty, and to trust that Your love is steady even in the unknown. **I surrender my need for clarity and control, and I choose faith instead**. Thank You for walking with me in this space. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Five Stages of Death



Dr. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross's famous five stages of grief may help us to name our feelings and experiences inside of grief, but they were never meant to be a step-by-step prescription for how to move forward. Acknowledging that you may experience some or all of these stages will help you understand what may be happening. And you should not pass judgment on yourself or allow others to — you have the right to grieve and to fully experience your grief. Your feelings are normal, and it's important to remember that at some point, it will get better. You may not get over your loss, but you will survive it. The five general stages of grief, as described by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross: (DABDA-M).

- **Denial:** it is a natural reaction when we hear about a loss and is a way to escape from the unbearable pain. It is a way or protecting ourselves from suffering more that we can handle.
- **Anger:** Why did this happen? Who is to blame?
- **Bargaining:** Make this not happen and I will...
- **Depression:** I can't bear this; I'm too sad to do anything.
- **Acceptance:** I acknowledge that this has happened, and I cannot change it. This choice comes from the heart – it is when you decide either to be a prisoner of your pain or move forward with healthy coping skills. It is not a life sentence with no parole! We cannot change anything until we accept it. Avoidance does not liberate – it oppresses.
- **Finding Meaning:** Turn this into something valuable and meaningful. Begin to find closure.

“There are really only two stages of grief;

who you were before and who you are after” —Ted Rynearson

Grief is a Full Body Experience

Grief is universal and experience by everyone yet very few of us have been taught to deal with it in healthy ways. In fact, many have been taught to “sweep it under the rug” and move on. **What we ignore doesn't cease to exist – it is only repressed and will manifest in other ways.**

Family of origin is typically the environment that shapes our understanding of “normal” coping skills. This is fundamental to understanding your ways of expressing and articulating grief. Consider how your family dealt with some early losses (animals, grandparents, friends) and how you see that showing up today.

Grief is a full-body experience. There's a reason you're so tired. Your entire system is working really hard just so you can survive each day. Your mind will go offline so that you can heal. This is why we oftentimes feel wonky brain, lack of focus or energy, or the brain power to get through daily tasks. If you get one hundreds units of brain power each day the trauma of grief can take 99% of those energy units.

Grief erupts into life and rearranges everything we know. Losing someone or something important to us brings home the fact that there is much in life we cannot control. Control is something we thought we had, but ultimately there are many things in life we cannot control. We must grieve that sense of loss but not dwell in it, which leads to anxiety.

A powerful metaphor for grief is a roller coaster ride – it’s unpredictable and full of sudden, unexpected stops, unlike the steady, predictable journey of a train. I vividly remember riding the Space Mountain roller coaster at Disney World. In just a minute, I went through a whirlwind of fear, emotions, and darkness. There was also a fleeting high when I thought the ride was over, only to be plunged into another drop. Grief can feel similar – just when we think we've moved past the pain, it can reappear in surprising and unforeseen ways.

Turn your focus to things you can control. There are many things, including how you think, where you place your kindness, and how you care for your body. You will be amazed and empowered by focusing on things you can control.

Man’s Search for Meaning

As mentioned, Viktor Frankl's work and life experiences profoundly speak to the themes of grief and meaning. As a Holocaust survivor, Frankl faced unimaginable suffering and loss. His quote,

“When we are no longer able to change a situation – we are challenged to change ourselves,”

encapsulates the essence of his philosophy. This perspective encourages individuals to look inward and redefine their identity not by their losses but by their intrinsic values and purpose.

Frankl's book, *Man’s Search for Meaning*, was written in just nine days after he was freed from the concentration camps. This rapid creation highlights his fierce desire to give back and share his insights on finding meaning in the face of extreme adversity.

Frankl's pioneering work in psychiatry led to the development of logotherapy, a therapeutic approach rooted in the belief that life inherently possesses meaning, even in the most extreme situations. His theory emphasizes that finding purpose is crucial for overcoming suffering and adversity, reflecting his own experiences and survival during the Holocaust.

This approach to psychotherapy asserts that our primary drive in life is to find this meaning, and we possess the freedom to choose our response to any situation, including those involving unchangeable suffering. By finding ways to readjust to life and embracing it with renewed purpose, individuals can transform their grief into a source of strength and growth. Frankl himself demonstrated this by

finding purpose in his suffering, such as giving away his food in concentration camps, which provided him with a sense of meaning and hope.

Grief Indicators - Common Signs and Symptoms of Grief

Shock and disbelief: It's hard to accept death. You may feel numb and question whether the loss really happened — this isn't unusual. Some have noted their initial reluctance even to notify others of a loss in case it turned out to be untrue. This is a normal reaction, as it is still expecting your person to call, write, or show up, even if intellectually you have accepted their death.

Sadness: Profound sadness is a universal experience and can often lead to feeling aloneness or isolation. We sometimes believe that no one can understand the depth of our grief, which drives us deeper into sorrow.

Guilt: You may feel guilt over things you said or did — or those you didn't and thought you should have. In cases of suicide, many people question whether they could have changed the outcome somehow. Yet nothing can stand in the way of death or a final decision made by someone else to die, and over time we have to acknowledge and accept that. Still, it's challenging to do in the early days or months of grieving.

Shame. *The difference between shame and guilt: shame means I AM bad, and guilt is I did something bad.* According to Brené Brown, shame is an intensely painful feeling or experience of believing that we are flawed and therefore unworthy of love and belonging. After the death of a loved one, shame can manifest in various ways, such as feeling that one's grief is excessive or inappropriate, or blaming oneself for not preventing the loss.

Anger: Regardless of how someone we loved died, anger often comes into play. You may be angry with the person for not being here anymore or with caregivers for not doing more. You may blame God or others. Or you may not be able to direct your anger against a specific source but find that daily, small injustices seem much more significant than they might have in the past. This is normal, and no one should tell you that you must stop or let go of your anger — that will happen eventually as part of your process, on your timeline.

Anger comes from unmet needs or is a response to sense of injustice. The event doesn't seem fair. Boundaries have oftentimes been crossed. Anger deserves respect and respect to express. Anger tells the story of need for connection, love, and belonging.

Rage — anger denied/silenced for too long.

Fear: A loss can trigger anxiety on many levels — fear of your mortality, losing those you love, and facing life without the person who died. It can include fear of the future and the uncertainty you may now feel about your life’s plans, knowing that someone close to you has died.

Physical pain: We often think of grief as emotional, but it can also manifest physically. Symptoms can include nausea, fatigue, lowered immunity, weight loss or gain, insomnia, aches and pains, and more. Although it can be pretty difficult, it’s essential to do what you can to maintain your health during grief. **The body keeps the score and it doesn’t lie.**



Ongoing Triggers for Grief

During grief and after, many things can trigger a return to intense grief — ordinary things like a birthday, a holiday, or the anniversary of the death. Or more subtle experiences like catching a scent of perfume or cologne that reminds you of your person or the smell of their favorite food cooking. These are “grief triggers,” and they can be long-term challenges.

A common trigger may also be “secondhand” grief. Someone you hardly knew dies, and your grief is triggered again. All of this is normal, expected, and something you should allow yourself to feel; do not judge yourself for reacting or not reacting to any of these triggers. Developmental issues can also trigger grief, especially for children — when a girl must start high school without her mom; when a boy turns 16 and doesn’t have his dad to teach him how to drive. Even smaller events, like a young girl missing her big sister’s support as she’s about to become a Girl Scout, can trigger a feeling of loss.

It’s important to know that grief triggers exist and may affect you. They are normal, but if you’re aware of them, you may be able to take steps to keep them to a minimum. Perhaps if you’re planning

to share a holiday or other significant event with relatives, talk to them ahead of time about expectations. Suggest and agree on strategies that will honor the person you loved while allowing you to support each other compassionately.

If you take nothing else from this section, please remember this: treat yourself with kindness, compassion, and without judgment. You have the right to grieve, and no one — including yourself — can tell you when it's time to end that process.



Finding Grief Support

One of the critical factors in healing from grief is the support of other people (hall of allies). Support from your family, friends, church, or a community of others who have also experienced grief allows you to feel that someone else “gets it.” In addition, being able to share your story or your feelings is vital to the healing process. Places you may find grief support:

Faith-based groups: If you are religious, you may find support in your community or from the leader of your church or temple. They may be able to provide suggestions for rituals or prayer that can help. In addition, because of their role in the community, they may have extensive experience with loss.

Support groups: There are many types of support groups for both general and specific types of loss. If this feels intimidating, remember that you can attend a group and just listen. You won't be forced to speak until you're comfortable, and you may draw comfort from being in a community of others who have some understanding of the depth of your grief.

Therapists or counselors: Sometimes, talking to a professional with experience in grief counseling can help you work through some of the intense emotions you may be feeling. It's normal to feel vulnerable during grief, and you might not always want to share your thoughts with the people in

your daily life. A compassionate third party who has grief experience may help you overcome obstacles to your healing.

A Grief Coach: Although they may not be licensed professionals, grief coaches are compassionate individuals trained with a deep understanding of grief, and they understand the impact a death loss has on every part of one's life. A coach's main objective is to help plan for your new life in a purposeful and meaningful way to benefit healthy post-bereavement growth.

Tangibly express your feelings: This can be done in many ways, depending on your creativity or usual means of expression. For example, you can write about your loss in a journal or send a private note to the person you've lost. In addition, you can make a scrapbook, photo album, or create an online memorial celebrating that person's life. You can also get involved in an organization or philanthropy that was meaningful to them or donate in their name.

Be physically healthy: Your mind and body are connected, and physical health helps with emotional healing. It's natural to feel sluggish or low energy, but if you're able to take a walk or a run, it will promote the process. Combat your fatigue with an appropriate amount of sleep and choose foods that provide you not just with comfort but energy.

Don't judge yourself or let others judge you: You can grieve for as long and as deeply as you need to. No one — including yourself — can tell you when to “move on” or “get over it.” It's okay to be angry, to cry, not cry, or even laugh — you need to allow for moments of joy in your grief and feel no guilt for having a moment without pain.

Soul-Care/Self-Care – Put on Your Oxygen Mask

Self-care or Soul-care: intentional kindness and empathy. Be fierce about caring for your soul and body.

- Borrowed tears. **Borrowed tears** are those prompted by an external source, not directly tied to our personal loss, but they offer a safe pathway for release. A song, movie, book, or show that deeply moves you can unlock the emotions building inside. External sources can trigger the tears in a way that is both helpful and healing.
- Determine your hall of allies or board of directors – grief is not made to do alone. Cultivate a support system that nourishes you and allows a safe space to share your thoughts.
- Go deeper into the spiritual dimension. You also need spiritual tools to survive a loss. This is really what got me through the loss of my mom.
- **Healthy Eating.** We need to fuel our bodies and brains so they work to their full potential. They may not always be the healthiest meals – but we can keep working on it! Let's start by caring enough to nourish ourselves.

- **Take a shower** – Morning, noon, or night. Whatever works for you! Let's get rid of the toxins, stress, and whatever else seems to be holding on. It's amazing what a little soap and a lot of water can do for our mood.
- **Stretch!** Do you know how much tension you hold in your body? The answer is LOTS! Stretching doesn't just have to be a post-workout routine. Try gentle stretching even at work, during class, or in bed.
- **Just Breathe** – Taking a few minutes at different times throughout the day to focus on taking a few deep breaths can help to reset your system and get the oxygen flowing again. Breathe in slowly while counting to ten, then exhale slowly to the count of ten. Do these three or four times. Feel your body relax and your system recharge.
- **Water yourself** – Did you know that water makes up 55-60% of our bodies? Cool, right? But this water is easy to lose through stress, activity, or just being. Our brains and bodies function better when we stay hydrated throughout the day so stop at that water fountain or fill up that bottle!
- **Connect with a friend or family member.** Thanks to technology, connection is literally right at our fingertips. Take a moment to call, text, Snap, etc. someone important to you. Let them know you are thinking about them, share a funny meme, or just say a quick hello. Humans are built for connection with others (even our furry 4-legged friends) and it can be too easy to isolate ourselves during stressful times.
- Meditation.
- Prayer.
- Exercise. Walking.
- Write your loved one a letter
- Scrapbook

Other Mental Fitness Activities

- **Spend time outside.** Recent research from the EPA shows that most Americans spend around 93% of our lives indoors. It's called the *great* outdoors for a reason people! Whether you take a walk, a hike, a swim, join a community garden, or just take some time to sit outdoors – you'll gain the benefits of some natural vitamin D, fresh air, and so much more!
- **Try something new.** Have you ever had your eye on a new hobby? Did you know that our brains are still actively growing until around age 25? There's always time to learn something new and fun. Take the plunge and try that art class, rock that climbing wall, or crush those ukulele lessons! Don't want to do it alone?
- **Get your hands dirty.** Ever try gardening? Baking or cooking? Art? Building? There are so many ways to work with your hands that have nothing to do with technology (*hint: we are asking you to unplug yourself for a while*). Working with our hands has been shown to help reduce stress. Do something you already love or delve into something new that could become a fun new skill!

- **It's time to play!** So many of us believe that play is reserved for kids. Other than being a source of fun, do you know what else play does? It helps our brains process the tough stuff. It's time to remember that the term adult really just means, "big kid" and play in your own way! Are you a creative player? A team player? Or do you need to re-learn how to play? Don't worry ... it's just like riding a bike!
- **Get active.** Sometimes we feel like our grief brain can slow us down. One of the best things you can do for yourself is to learn that it's ok to slow down, but strive to keep Actively Moving Forward® at whatever speed is right for you. What kinds of things did you like to do before your person died? Here are some ideas to kick it off: kayaking, workout classes, swimming, walking, biking, hiking ... now it's your turn!
- **Serve. Helping others, helps us.** Once again, the trusty old research shows us that volunteering is shown to increase all of those feel-good chemicals in our brains to help us feel happier! So pick a cause that really matters to you and find out how to get involved. This is like a BOGO (buy one, get one) deal for your brain!
- **Pamper yourself.** This means different things to different people. Maybe you go get a haircut or it can be as simple as taking the time to shave. Try a nice face mask, paint your nails, or learn how to do some simple reflexology on yourself. Have you tried just laying a face towel soaked in warm water on your face? It sounds weird, but it's pretty relaxing! When you feel great, you look great.
- **Read. Learn.** You remember the last time you read a book for fun? If so, good for you! If not, you are not alone. It can be hard to find time to read for pleasure. Choose a book that piques your interest and find little opportunities to read it throughout the week. Perk: reigniting our imagination while reducing harmful blue light, just in time to sleep a little better.
- **Express yourself.** There are so many ways we can express ourselves —have you tried music, writing, art, movement, or talking? These are just some of the ways we can let our thoughts be heard. Expressing ourselves doesn't just have a brain benefit, it also has a body benefit. When we keep things bottled up, it can affect how our bodies function. So do yourself a favor – find an outlet that's right for you ... and then use it.

Reminder: Rome wasn't built in a day, so don't expect your self-care to be either. It's all about taking it slow and steady to build these skills and practices into your life. Just remember, it's easy to tell yourself that you can start tomorrow, but your brain, body, and soul will appreciate any little start you make today!

Sharing Death with Young Children

- Talk to children about death in simple but matter-of-fact terms. Normalize death ("it happens to everyone and every living thing, but usually when we are very old") and be clear about what it means.

- Use truthful words like “dead, dying, died” and “buried, cremated.” “When someone dies, it means that their body stopped working.” It may seem gentler to make death sound less final, but that can confuse a child.
- Allow for questions. Keep your answers brief but clear. Be honest about what’s happened and encourage questions.
- Show your emotions — being authentic and honest provides a meaningful model for your child.
- Show patience, reassurance, and calm support as often as you can. A return to their everyday routines will help children feel some normalcy. It will also help ease some of their fear of death, even while they begin to understand its permanence.
- Common adult phrases for death — “resting in peace,” “in eternal sleep” — are confusing for a young child, so don't say that Grandpa is “sleeping” or “has gone away.” Your preschooler may worry that going to bed at night means she'll die, too, or that if you leave for the office or the store, you won't come back.
- Offer ways to remember if it comes up. You can suggest looking at photos, videos, drawing pictures, or telling stories about happy memories with their grandpa.

Activities to Cultivate Healing

Journaling

Begin your journal with something creative to get you out of your thinking mind into the deeper truth of your heart. This can act as daily anchor allowing you to circle back to the prompts and activities in order to process fully the magnitude of your feelings.

Translating your inner emotions into words and pictures can be messy. A little time-share in this world allows you to name the emotions: name it to tame it!

Journal Prompts:

I begin with this prompt in new coaching relationships:

- What are the elements of a good life? Beautiful life?
- What would healing look like?
- In what ways do you feel stuck?
- Do you allow your thoughts to have power over the quality of your life?
- What kind of person do you want to be?
- What do you HOPE for?

More prompts:

- If you are stuck in your emotions start with, “I need to tell you what happened....”
- I find the most comfort in...
- How do you express your grief?

- I carry grief in my body...
- What do I find most helpful in my grief?
- Reasons why you loved them...
- Your favorite qualities about them
- Some of the ways I practice emotional and social self-care
- These are some activities that keep me distracted...
- My current way of coping is....
- I'm thankful for....
- Today I feel....
- I really miss....
- What thoughts or situations trigger your anxiety? (Anxiety is a natural part of the grief experience. For some, it may become problematic, interfering with daily life.)
- What were the gifts that you received from the deceased? How might you celebrate those teachings and gifts?

Letter to the one you have lost

Dear _____. I am writing to you because I have so much to share with you. I am more aware of _____. I want to share what I have learned:

Write a letter to the deceased expressing your love, concern, any thoughts that come to mind.

Mindfulness Prompts

Sit comfortably and focus your attention on the sense of sounds around you. Resist interpreting or analyzing what you hear. When you become distracted (and you will) just start over.

Notice what you are hearing with your ears, feeling in your body, seeing with the eyes, smelling with your nose, tasting with your tongue, and thinking in your mind. How does coming to your senses influence how you live your days? Your moments?

Acceptance

We can sometimes treat a beloved friend better than ourselves. Imagine a friend is going through exactly what you are going through. Knowing you cannot change the situation, what would you say to help them feel heard and understood (SEEN) if they came to you for comfort? (Read what you write out loud to yourself – what is it like to receive this type of support from yourself and others?)

Centering Activity

Draw or write a circle. On the inside write or draw the things that CENTER you, that nourish you, and/or make you more calm. Outside of the circle write the things that throw you off balance.

Nourish vs Calories Activity

Numbness can sometimes take over because grief is so intense. You need relief but think through what might be too much. Map out some of your usual activities by charting how often you do it, what's the result, and the emotion you are feeling preceding the events.

- Activity:
- How often:
- Result:
- I felt:
- I wanted or needed:
- I chose instead:
- Impact of choosing more nourishing activity:

History of Loss

This reflection will help you get in touch with your history of loss and transformation. By understanding our family of origin coping skills we can begin to refine our own.

- My first loss:
- Age:
- My response:
- My family's response:
- These strengths helped me:
- I had the following challenges:
- Do you still experience a sense of invalidation when sharing this loss?
- Does this loss still feel tender?
- How has this influenced your life?

Laughter is Good Medicine

One of the greatest questions some of my clients have is whether it is ok to laugh and smile again. Moving forward and also living with joy doesn't mean you are leaving your loved one behind! Allow yourself the healing power of humor. Watch a comedy and give yourself permission to feel the full range of emotions including joy.

Holistic Full-Body Grief

How are you expressing grief in all areas of your life.

- Physical:
- Emotional:
- Social:
- Spiritual:

GRIP – Gratitude, Relax & Release, Intentions, PurposeFULL

- Gratitude practice: Taking a few minutes each morning to express gratitude for the things in your life can help to improve your mood and outlook for the day.
- Relax & Release – voluntarily give up or let go of something, often with the intention of creating space for something new or different.
- Intentions and goal-setting: Taking time in the morning to plan out your day or set goals can help to improve productivity and focus throughout the day.
- Purpose-FULL living & giving–True joy comes from giving and gets us out of our head. Volunteering or performing acts of kindness for others can help to promote a sense of purpose and joy.

Distraction from Grief

Distraction from grief is a very healthy coping strategy and a way to relax the brain. It is not necessary to experience grief intensely 100% of the time to move through it in a healthy way. Taking a break is a good coping skill.

If grief emotions become overwhelming, watching a funny movie, calling a friend, or becoming absorbed in a book are all healthy forms of distraction.

Waves of Grief

When a wave of grief strikes, fight the urge to avoid and run away. Remain on the shore and allow the wave to wash over you. Remind yourself that you won't drown, and that the wave, like a tide, will go out again and you will have survived it. This is the natural ebb and flow of the current.

Hero or Role Model Exercise

Identify a role model or hero in your life that behaves and lives the way you wish to behave. This persona could be someone you know, a public figure, or an author/tv character. Think about specific instances where their behavior or decisions have inspired you to overcome challenges, adopt new perspectives, or take meaningful action. For example, a public figure known for their resilience in the face of adversity might inspire you to persist through difficult times, while an author or TV character's ethical choices could influence your own moral compass.

Purpose Exercise

Grief often forces us to confront the core of our existence and reevaluate our life's purpose. In this reflection, consider the following prompts to help navigate this profound journey:

Personal Contribution: Reflect on the unique contributions you wish to make in life. What are the values and passions that drive you? How can these be honored or expressed in the wake of your loss? For example, if you value compassion, consider how you might extend this quality in ways that create a positive impact on others.

Legacy and Meaning: Think about the legacy you want to leave behind. How can you ensure that your actions and choices are aligned with the meaning you wish to impart to your life? Reflect on how this loss might inspire you to live more fully or differently in honor of those who have passed.

Connection and Growth: Grief can reveal deeper connections to ourselves and others. Explore how this period of mourning can serve as a catalyst for personal growth. What new insights about yourself or your purpose have emerged during this time? How can these insights guide your future actions and goals?

Action Steps: Define specific actions you can take to embody your purpose. Whether it's through helping others, pursuing a passion, or making meaningful changes in your life, set clear steps that align with your reflections. For instance, you might decide to volunteer, start a new project, or deepen relationships with loved ones.

Meaningful Quotes

Quotes are transformational and impactful because they distill complex ideas into concise, memorable statements that resonate deeply with our emotions. They can stimulate the mind, reinforce our beliefs, and inspire change by providing clarity and motivation. Quotes often use powerful imagery and well-structured messages that can have a lasting influence on our thoughts and actions. I would encourage you to display this somewhere as a constant reminder of hope and healing.

- What is a meaningful quote for you?
- What does it mean to you?
- How can you apply it?
- Why is it important in your life?



forward.” Soren Kierkegaard

Powerful Quotes

“And if I go, while you're still here...
Know that I live on, vibrating to a different measure
Behind a thin veil you cannot see through.
You will not see me, So you must have faith.
I wait for the time when we can soar together again, Both aware
of each other.
Until then, live your life to the fullest And when you need me,
Just whisper my name in your heart...I will be there” — Colleen
Corah Hitchcock

“Life may be understood backward, but it must be lived

A hole ripped through the very fabric of your being.
The hole heals along the jagged edges that remain. It may even shrink in size.
But that hole will always be there.
A piece of you always missing.
For where there is deep grief, there was great love.
Don't be ashamed of your grief.
Don't judge it. Don't suppress it. Don't rush it.
Rather, acknowledge it.
Lean into it. Listen to it. Feel it. Sit with it.
Sit with the pain. And remember the love. This is where the healing will begin.

If it costs you peace, it's too expensive.

There comes a time when moving forward creates new hope, new meaning, and a life that feels whole again—not because the grief is gone, but because you have learned to carry it differently. Healing is not about forgetting; it's about integrating. Grief will always be a part of you, but so will love, resilience, and the ability to build something new.

You are not leaving your loved one behind—you are carrying them forward in a way that honors both their memory and your own continued journey.

Romans 15:13 – *"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace."*

Resources

Websites

[Transform Your Life After Loss by Heather Stang](#) (Mindfulness & Grief Podcast)

[Loss of a father](#)

[Open to Hope Online Website](#)

[Center for Loss & Life Transition](#)

[Refuge in Grief – Megan Devine](#)

[Speaking Grief](#)

Video

[Speaking Grief Documentary](#)

[A Journey Through Life and Grief - TedTalk](#)

[We Don't Move on From Grief, We Move Forward - TedTalk](#)

[How To Help a Grieving Friend – 3 minute video by Megan Devine](#)

Podcasts

[Terrible, Thanks for Asking](#)

[Grief Unfiltered](#)

[It's Ok to Not be Ok by Megan Devine](#)

[Mindfulness & Grief Podcast](#)

Books

[It's Ok not to be Ok](#)

[How to Carry What Can't be Fixed – A journal for Grief by Megan Devine](#)