



## 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.

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!

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.

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

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 and empathy are the greatest healers of all.

Grief can be life's greatest teacher. Grief reveals you - It can DEFINE you or REFINE you.

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. We are grief illiterate!**

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 challenges of our time. We’ve all experienced heartbreaks that remain unresolved, and many of us have endured the isolation COVID created. If we want to grow, we must first understand ourselves—and that includes acknowledging and facing our grief. Through intentional grief practices, we can transform pain into wisdom and resilience.

## 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 of protecting ourselves from suffering more than 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

## Man's Search for Meaning

Viktor Frankl's work and life experiences profoundly speak to the themes of grief and meaning. As a Holocaust survivor, Frankl endured unimaginable suffering, including the loss of his wife, who was pregnant with their child, along with his parents and other family members. Despite these devastating losses, he emerged with a philosophy that centers on the power of purpose in overcoming adversity.

One of his most well-known insights encapsulates this belief:

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

Frankl's book, *Man's Search for Meaning*, was written in just nine days after his liberation from the concentration camps. This rapid creation underscores his unwavering commitment to sharing his insights on resilience, grief, and the pursuit of meaning.

His pioneering work in psychiatry led to the development of *logotherapy*, a therapeutic approach rooted in the belief that life inherently possesses meaning (*logos* is Greek for “meaning”) even in the most extreme circumstances. This approach asserts that our primary drive in life is not pleasure or power, but the discovery of meaning. We may not always control our circumstances, but we retain the freedom to choose our response to them.

Frankl's own survival reflected these principles. Even in the depths of suffering, he found purpose—whether through imagining future lectures on his experiences, comforting fellow prisoners, or even giving away his food despite his own hunger. His ability to reframe suffering as an opportunity for

growth offers a powerful lesson: grief, when approached with intention, can become a catalyst for transformation.

### The Space Between Pain and Response

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.*

### 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.

## **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:** Sadness can slow you down to assess where you are struggling and what might need some attention. 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.

**Loneliness and/or feeling alone:** Grieving can make you feel disconnected from others, even when you're surrounded by people. The pain may be so deep that it’s hard to put into words, leading to emotional isolation and a sense that no one truly understands your grief. The loss of a close relationship creates a profound absence, not just of the person, but also of the shared moments, conversations, and emotional support they provided.

Grievers may withdraw from social interactions, either because they feel overwhelmed or because they fear burdening others with their sadness. This withdrawal can perpetuate feelings of loneliness, making the grieving process harder. Additionally, grief often triggers existential questions about life’s meaning, one’s place in the world, or even faith, deepening the sense of loneliness.

**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.

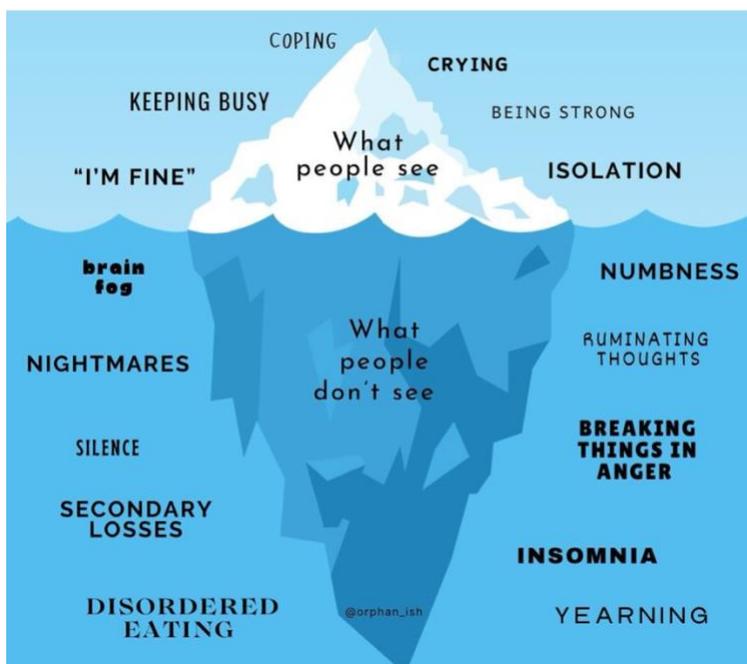
**Anger:** Regardless of how someone we loved died, anger often comes into play. You may be angry with the person for not being here anymore or with caregivers for not doing more. You may blame God or others. Or you may not be able to direct your anger against a specific source but find that daily, small injustices seem much more significant than they might have in the past.

**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 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.**



### When Grief Floods the Brain: Understanding the Neurobiology of Loss

Grief doesn’t just weigh on your heart—it floods your nervous system.

Many people describe feeling foggy, forgetful, or like they’re “not themselves” in the wake of loss. It’s not just emotional—it’s biological. When we’re deeply stressed or overwhelmed, the brain's thinking center (the prefrontal cortex) goes offline, and the survival brain—specifically the amygdala—takes over. This is known as an amygdala hijack.

The amygdala is the part of the primitive brain responsible for fight, flight, freeze, or appease responses. It's hardwired to keep us alive. So when we experience deep emotional pain—like the kind that comes with losing someone we love—the amygdala activates to protect us. We feel flooded, reactive, disconnected. Rational thought becomes difficult. Emotional regulation feels out of reach. We might lash out. Or withdraw. Or simply shut down.

It's like a pot of water filled to the brim on the stove.

When the heat is low, the water simmers—stable, contained. That's your brain when emotional intensity is manageable. But when the heat cranks up—when grief surges—the pot boils over. Everything spills. You lose access to the calm, reflective part of yourself. And even after the spill, it takes time for the system to settle again.

This is what's happening when we say we have “grief brain.” You're not imagining it. You're not weak. Your brain is doing what it was designed to do: protect you from overwhelm.

And it doesn't stop there. When the amygdala goes into overdrive, it activates the **limbic system**, which stores emotional memory. Once triggered, the brain begins recalling similar past hurts and losses, weaving them into a kind of internal movie. Without realizing it, we may begin projecting old pain onto new situations—shaping today's experience through the lens of past sorrow.

This is one of the reasons grief can feel so all-encompassing. It's not just *this* loss—it's *every* loss, echoing in the nervous system.

### **The Wisdom of the Heart: Heart-Brain Coherence**

While the brain is powerful, it isn't the only organ that feels loss. The heart plays a key role too. Research from the HeartMath Institute shows that the heart is not just a pump—it's a source of wisdom and intuition. It communicates directly with the brain. When we feel threatened or overwhelmed, the heart sends distress signals to the amygdala, amplifying emotional reactivity. But when we feel safe, supported, or connected—even briefly—the heart sends calming signals that help restore emotional balance and bring the thinking brain back online.

This state is called heart-brain coherence—when your heart rhythms, breath, emotions, and cognitive function are in sync. It's not just a feeling. It's a measurable, physiological state of inner alignment. It allows us to think clearly, regulate emotions, and connect with others—even in grief.

When you're in this state:

- Your thoughts become clearer
- Your empathy increases
- Your nervous system begins to settle
- You respond with intention, not just reaction

In moments of loss, our nervous system often needs more regulation—not more pressure to “be okay.”

The good news: the body can be guided gently back to a place of grounding. Through breath, presence, and self-compassion, we can begin to soothe the overwhelm and come home to ourselves again.

### **Ongoing Triggers for Grief**

Grief doesn’t follow a timeline. Even after the initial waves have passed, certain moments can pull you right back into the depths.

These are called grief triggers—and they can show up in expected and unexpected ways. Sometimes it’s an obvious milestone like a birthday, a holiday, or the anniversary of the death. Other times, it’s subtle and catches you off guard: the scent of a familiar perfume, the sound of a song, or the smell of a favorite meal cooking. Suddenly, you’re transported—grief rises again.

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.

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.



## The Power of Acknowledging and Expressing the Pain

Grief makes you feel porous—like the boundaries between you 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.

### Grief is a Full Body Experience

Grief is a universal experience felt 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.

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 hundred 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.

### **Grieving vs. Mourning**

- Grief – The internal experience of emotions that naturally arise when we lose or are separated from someone or something deeply meaningful to us. Grief is not limited to the death of a loved one; it encompasses any form of loss that affects us profoundly. It’s the emotional response to the real or perceived deprivation of something that holds value in our lives.
- Mourning – The outward expression of grief. It’s how we process and release the pain of loss, through tears, storytelling, rituals, journaling, or seeking social support. Mourning allows us to give voice to our grief and process it in healthy ways.

While grief is the internal experience, mourning is the act of externalizing that experience in ways that foster healing. Transforming grief into mourning is essential for recovery; without expression, grief can become stuck and unresolved. “E-motions” have energy and releasing them is a critical part of healing.

### **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.*

## Grief Style

Grief styles refer to the different ways people process and express their emotions after a loss. Two common styles are **external grievers**, who are emotionally expressive and seek connection by talking through their feelings, and **internal grievers**, who process grief more privately and focus on problem-solving or understanding the loss. Understanding these styles helps provide tailored support for individuals navigating their unique grief journey.

- External grievers are typically focused on sharing their feelings, talking through their grief, and seeking emotional support from others. They may be more likely to seek out social support groups, friends, or family to discuss their grief. They may also find comfort in rituals or communal grieving.
- Internal grievers are typically focused on problem-solving or trying to understand the "why" behind the loss. They might not express their emotions outwardly as much and may keep their grief more internalized. They may focus on **practical aspects** of the loss, such as organizing affairs or figuring out how to move forward.

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

Self-care or Soul-care: holistic (mind-body-spirit) intentional kindness and empathy. Be fierce about caring for yourself in the five levels of symptoms.

### 1. Physical Symptoms & Care

- Healthy Eating – Fuel your body and brain to function at your best.
- Take a Shower – Water has a natural way of cleansing not just the body, but also the weight of emotions we carry. The warmth can soothe tense muscles, while the act of washing can symbolize letting go of grief, even if just for a moment. Envision the water carrying away your pain, refreshing your spirit, and offering a small yet powerful reset.
- Somatic practices - Engaging the body to release stored tension and regulate the nervous system. This may include grounding exercises, progressive muscle relaxation, or gentle movement to restore a sense of safety in the body.
- Stretching – Releases built-up tension and promotes relaxation.
- Just Breathe – Deep breathing resets the nervous system and reduces stress.
- Water Yourself – Staying hydrated supports cognitive and physical well-being.
- Exercise and Walking – Movement helps process grief and improves mood.
- Rest and Sleep – Prioritizing quality sleep is essential for healing and emotional resilience.

### 2. Mental Symptoms & Care

- Determine Your Board of Directors – Building a support system to help navigate grief.
- Write Your Loved One a Letter – Express thoughts and emotions through writing.

### 3. Emotional Symptoms & Care

- Connect with a Friend or Family Member – Socializing helps counter isolation and provides emotional support. Grief cannot be done alone.
- Meditation – Cultivating mindfulness to process emotions.
- Prayer – Finding comfort through spiritual connection.

- External Expression – Talking, crying, journaling to release emotions.

#### 4. Spiritual Symptoms & Care

- Go Deeper into the Spiritual Dimension – Seeking meaning and guidance through faith or personal beliefs.
- Meditation & Prayer – Practices that provide presence, solace, and perspective.
- Writing to a Loved One – A ritual that fosters connection beyond physical presence.

#### 5. Social Symptoms & Care

- Engage with Pets – Animals provide unconditional comfort.
- Shared Activities – Talking, creating, and spending time with others to foster connection.

### Journaling

When you lay it all out of paper it oftentimes allows us to see things clearer. 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 life well lived?
- 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 (mourning)?
- 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....

- 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**

Mindfulness is the practice of being fully present, aware, and accepting of the moment without judgment. 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 calmer. Outside 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 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.

### **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. Borrowed Tears – Using external sources (movies, music, books) to access and process emotions.

## 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 person 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 reveals deeper connections to ourselves and others. Explore how this period of mourning can serve as a catalyst for personal growth and future goals. What new insights about yourself or your purpose have emerged during this time?

**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.

## 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 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 and strive to keep active at a new speed. 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!
- **We rise by lifting others. Serve. Helping others, helps us.** Once again, the trusty old research shows us that volunteering is shown to increase all 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.** 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 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.

### Meaningful Quotes Exercise

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?

### Powerful Quotes

"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.**



"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 forward." —Soren Kierkegaard

"Grief is the price we pay for love." – Queen Elizabeth II

"To live in hearts we leave behind is not to die." – Thomas Campbell

### Finding Grief Support

**Grief demands a witness.** Grief is a deeply personal and emotional experience that often requires others to be present and acknowledge it. This may involve a person or community to witness their pain, feelings, and process, rather than facing it in isolation. One of the critical factors in healing from

grief is the support of other people (board of directors). 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.

Faith, spiritual practices, and community support, such as prayer, church, meditation, or mindfulness, can help individuals cope with the intense emotions of grief. Drawing on one's faith and spiritual upbringing can promote emotional balance, provide a sense of calm, and foster a connection to something greater, which is especially valuable during times of overwhelming sorrow.

Places you may find grief support:

**Support and faith-based 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. 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 growth and understanding.

### **If it Costs you Peace, it's too Expensive.**

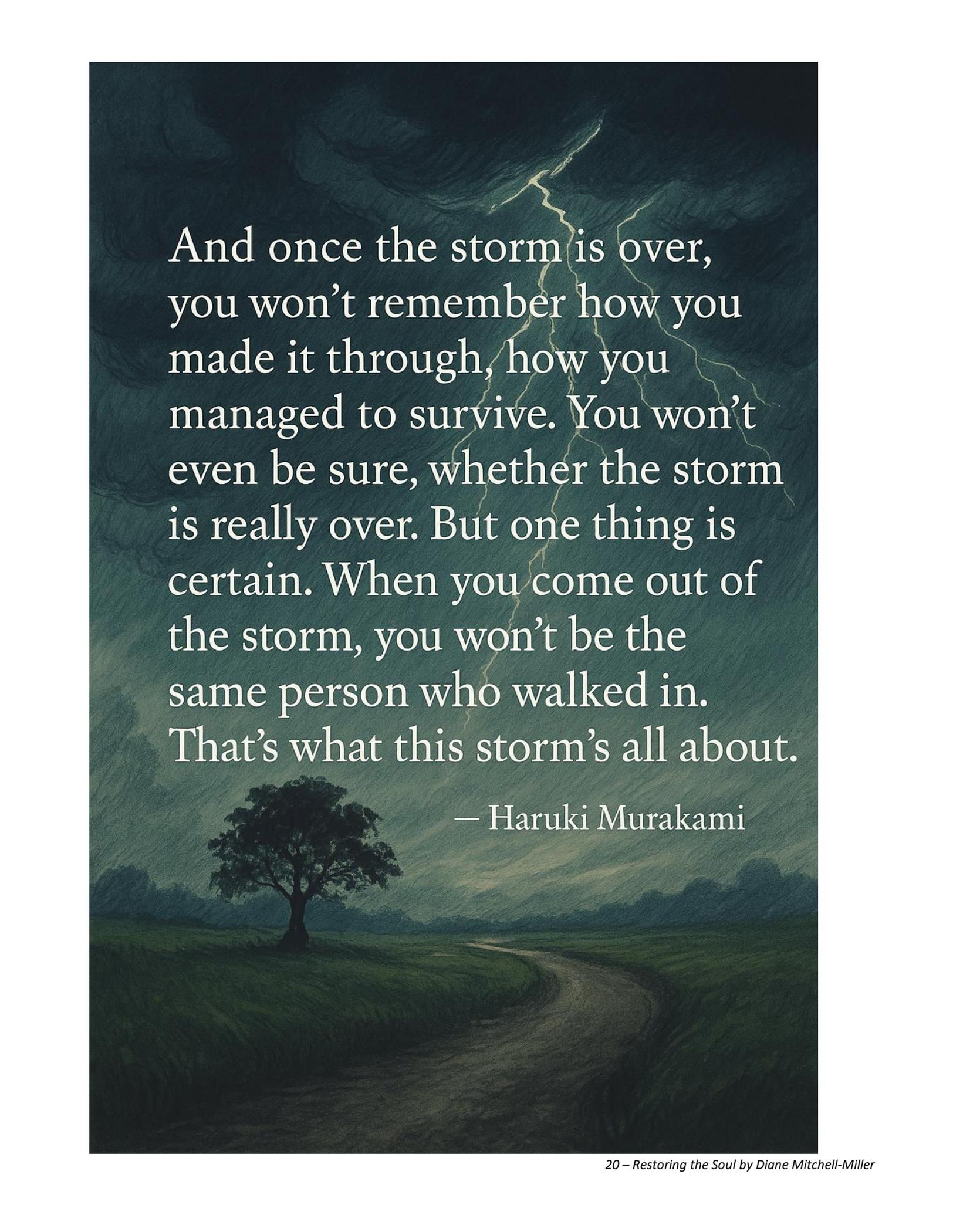
There comes a time when moving forward creates new hope, new meaning, and a life that feels whole again—not because the grief is gone, but because you have learned to carry it differently. **Healing is not about forgetting; it's about integrating.** Grief will always be a part of you, but so will love,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

*"The pain of grief is just as much a part of life as the joy of love. It's all a package"*

*– Dr. Robin F. Goodman*

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."*

A dark, stormy landscape with a lightning bolt striking down and a lone tree in the foreground. The scene is rendered in a painterly style with deep blues and greens, creating a somber and dramatic atmosphere. The lightning bolt is a bright yellow-white streak cutting through the dark sky. The tree is a dark silhouette against the lighter, hazy ground. The overall mood is one of quiet intensity and reflection.

And once the storm is over,  
you won't remember how you  
made it through, how you  
managed to survive. You won't  
even be sure, whether the storm  
is really over. But one thing is  
certain. When you come out of  
the storm, you won't be the  
same person who walked in.  
That's what this storm's all about.

— Haruki Murakami

## **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**

[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](#)