

Your Pathway to Healing

A Grief Workbook



The intent of this workbook is to provide a path for healing in the face of grief. It is not the only path, nor is it a linear path, as grief shapeshifts into different forms for every individual. A road without a destination, a journey that nobody ever asks to embark upon... completion of this booklet does not guarantee the fixing of your grief.

However...

what it does, or seeks to do, is offer you some solace, some guidance if need be. A simple invitation for you to take what you need. Perhaps through this, you will learn to carve a path for yourself (if you have not already) and navigate through the wilderness in your very own special, brave, and vulnerable way.





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What is Grief?

Grief touches us all, arriving at our doorsteps in many ways. As you probably know, the territory of grief is heavy. Even the word carries weight.

Grief comes from the Latin word “gravis” meaning “heavy”, “weighty” and “burdensome”. It invites gravity, substance and depth into our world. Part of understanding grief is not simply understanding it as an emotion, but as the core subscription to being human... for loss is unavoidable in our human journey. And where there is loss, grief follows.

Often associated with – although not limited to – the loss of a person, grief can encompass all kinds of losses: the loss of a significant relationship, the loss of one’s home, the loss of health, independence, role, job, etc. Essentially, grief can spring from any major life transition.

It is essential to recognize that grief is a highly personal experience. The experiencing and expression of grief can differ from person to person. Some individuals may feel or display intense emotions, while others may experience or show a more reserved response. There is no “right” or “wrong” way to grieving; it simply is.

What Does Grief Mean to You?

Grief is unique to every individual, circumstance, and time of life.
Take a few moments to reflect on what grief means to you:

Expectations of Grief

You may find that:

- Your grief will take longer than most people (including yourself) think
- Your grief will take more energy than you would have imagined possible
- Your grief will go through many changes and continuous development
- Your grief will show itself in all spheres of your life – psychological, social, and physical
- Your grief may depend upon how you perceive the loss
- You may grieve for many things both symbolic and tangible
- You may grieve for what you have lost already as well as what you have lost in your future
- Your grief may entail mourning not only for the actual person/situation that is lost, but also for all of the hopes, dreams, and unfulfilled expectations and needs you held for and with that person/situation
- Your grief may involve a wide variety of feelings and reactions, not solely those that are generally thought of as a grief, such as depressive symptoms and sadness
- Your loss may resurrect old issues, feelings, and unresolved conflicts from the past
- You may have some identity confusion as a result of this major loss and the fact that you are experiencing reactions that may be quite unfamiliar to you

- You may have a combination of anger and low mood - irritability, frustration, annoyance, or intolerance can be common
- You will likely encounter feelings of anger and guilt, or at least some manifestation of these emotions
- You may have a lack of self-concern
- You may experience grief spasms; acute upsurges of grief that occur suddenly without warning
- You may have trouble thinking (memory, organization and intellectual processing) and making decisions
- You may feel as if you are going crazy
- You may be obsessed or preoccupied with the loss
- You may begin a search for meaning and may question your religion and/or philosophy of life
- You may find yourself acting socially in ways that are different from before
- You may find yourself having a number of physical reactions
- Society may have unrealistic expectations about your mourning and may respond inappropriately to you
- You may find that there are certain dates, events, and stimuli that bring upsurges in grief; these are called triggers
- Certain experiences later in life may temporarily resurrect intense grief for you

Text adapted from T.A. Rando PhD,
"I laughed out loud today at something I knew you'd find funny"

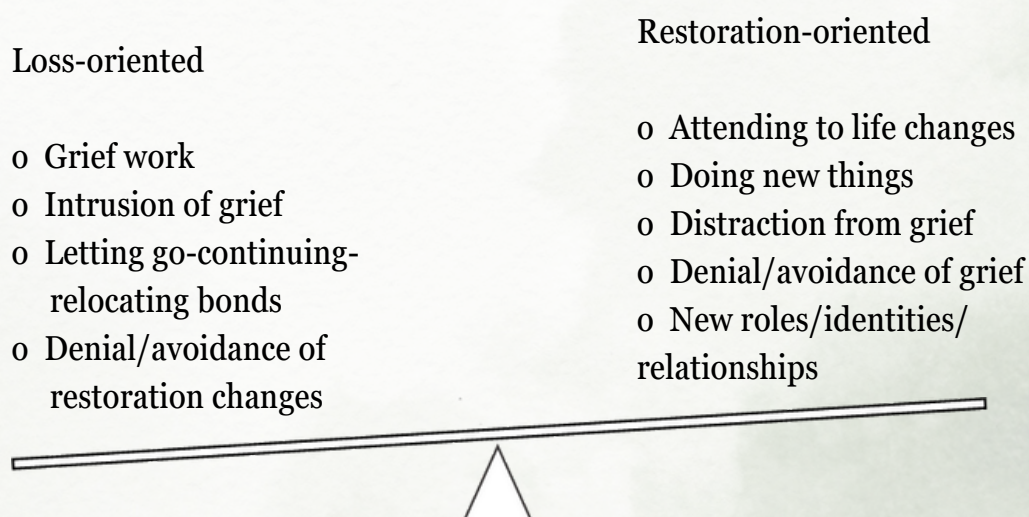
Dual Process Model of Coping with Grief

The dual process model of grief is one way of understanding how people cope with a loss. Imagine it like balancing a seesaw. On one end, you have the “Loss-Oriented” side, where you focus all your energy on what you have lost. You might feel sad, cry, reminisce, and yearn for what is now absent. On the other half of the seesaw is the “Restoration-Oriented” side. This is where you try to deal with the practical changes that the loss brings, such as daily tasks, work, and taking care of yourself and your responsibilities.

The model suggests that as we grieve, we move back and forth between these two sides. It is important to find a balance.

Spending too much time on just one side can lead to problems. For example, if you only focus on the practical things, you might avoid your feelings, but if you only focus on your emotions, you might neglect important responsibilities. Finding an equilibrium between honoring your feelings and handling the practical aspects of living can take some time, and is a healthy and natural way of dealing with grief.

Everyday Life Experiences



Taking Control – When Feeling Out of Control with Loss

Grief is a process that takes time, patience, and understanding. There are, however, some things you can do to take control during this painful time:

- Reduce caffeine intake – it acts as a stimulant and dehydrates
- Reduce sugar intake – it depresses the immune system
- Reduce alcohol intake – it acts as a depressant
- Drink 6 to 8 glasses of water a day – our bodies are 70% water system and depend on it
- Eat lots of juicy fruits and vegetables – a healthy diet
- Exercise daily – getting into a routine is important as well as getting your body to move and allows you to take control
- Don't isolate yourself – share your pain with a compassionate person
- Take it one day at a time – grieving takes time and attention
- Use a journal to ease the pain – make your journal a confidante; you can pour your feelings out without fear of evaluation
- Nurture yourself – use art, poetry, music, massage, or anything that makes you feel good
- Use rituals for healing and allow yourself time to mourn
- Meet your daily needs for survival – taking care of yourself, love through friends, family, higher power, fun, freedom, and accomplishment
- Believe in yourself and your ability to adjust to your pain
- Above all, be gentle with yourself

Text adapted from the course
“How to Facilitate a Grief and Loss Support Group”
by Living through Loss Counselling Society of BC

Community

“Shared joy is a double joy; shared sorrow is half a sorrow”
- A Swedish Proverb

Often times, grief can feel like a private matter – an overwhelming and isolating experience. Leaning into your social supports during this difficult time plays a crucial role when mourning.

Connecting with others not only reduces prolonged feelings of loneliness and disconnection from the world, but also provides:

- emotional support,
- validation (e.g., your feelings are not irrational/excessive),
- coping strategies,
- a sense of belonging,
- diverse perspectives, and
- practical assistance (e.g., making of meals).

Keep in mind, though, that quality triumphs quantity. Even being in the mere presence of another human being can offer much comfort. For instance, taking a walk with a friend without sharing any details of the loss can be as helpful as speaking about your loss.

Whether grief should remain private or communal largely depends on your preferences, cultural norms and personal circumstances. If you need moments of solitude for personal reflection, that is perfectly alright as well. In reality, many people find a balance between private and communal grief. Ultimately, the most important thing is to choose what feels right for you at the different chapters of your grief journey.

Grief Rituals

Since ancient times, rituals have been used (both communally and privately) to alleviate the burden of grief after loss. A grief ritual promotes acceptance of loss, emotional expression and a feeling of control.

But what is a ritual?

A ritual is any event or activity with structure, intention and an element of sacredness. A popular example would be to sing “happy birthday” at a celebration. Regardless of content, rituals create a space to honor what matters most and to welcome insight, growth, and healing.

Rituals for grief offer a powerful means of working with and healing from loss that can be incorporated into daily life. It can help maintain a bond with what has been lost and provide an opportunity for reflecting on how to go forward. Your grief ritual should be unique to your loss, beliefs, cultures and preferences.

Here is how you can personalize your own grief ritual through these steps:

1. Choose a meaningful object
2. Make it sacred
3. Incorporate movement
4. Interact with chosen object
5. Create closure and repeat

Steps taken from <https://www.therapistaid.com/therapy-article/grief-rituals>

1. Choose a Meaningful Object

Grief rituals benefit from incorporating a meaningful physical object connected to your loss. If grieving a loved one or relationship, consider using their cherished jewelry, clothing, gifts, letters, or photographs. Even if the loss isn't a person, you can find an object related to the experience, such as a pen if it's about a job loss, or a decorative piece in your old home if it's about a move. If you are unable to think of an object, you can choose something with symbolic value from the natural environment – a rock, flower, seashell or feather.

2. Make it Sacred

Rituals should have an element of sacredness to distinguish them from mundane activities, such as getting dressed, cleaning, or commuting. Note that “sacred” does not have to be religious, although some people find that religious ceremonies can help too. Lighting a candle, visiting a special place, or reciting a prayer or intention are all good options for marking the start and conclusion of your ritual, and accentuating its sacredness.

3. Incorporate Movement

Research suggests that connecting with your body can help with expressing and processing difficult emotions, which is one of the most important benefits of a grief ritual. Incorporating movement into your grief ritual can be an effective way to do this, like a walk in nature.

4. Interact with Chosen Object

Rather than simply having an object present, it is encouraged for you to use the object in some way to symbolize moving the pain of grief to a place where it can be worked with and transformed. For instance, if you wrote a letter expressing your feelings about a lost relationship, you could shred and bury it to release emotions. If you selected a rock, imagine your burdens absorbed by it, then drop it into water to let go. For a feather, place it in a stream and watch it fade away. Take time to feel and express emotions during the grief ritual.

5. Create Closure and Repeat

After performing your ritual, create a sense of closure before returning to your day. Some good options are reciting a mantra, expressing an intention, praying and meditating. This helps mark the end of your ritual and the return to your normal activities. In addition, rituals often increase in power and significance when repeated. If your ritual is elaborate or time-consuming, it may make sense to repeat it on an occasional basis, such as on the anniversary of the loss. But simpler rituals can often be integrated into your daily life. For example, you could go on a short walk in the evenings as a way of reflecting on your loss. Experiment with what works best for you to facilitate your healing process.

Overall, a meaningful grief ritual is one that is done without judgment or evaluation. The focus should be to experience the moment.

Some other examples of grief rituals:

- Journaling
- Letter writing
- Plant a tree or indoor flower
- Carry a remembrance item
- Create a memory book
- Redecorate your home
- Storytelling (keeping history alive)
- Visit a place to remember what you've lost
- Meditation
- Prayer

There are so many ways to honour loss. Be creative in designing your own grief ritual. However, to give you a starting sense, the next few pages of this booklet will introduce you to journaling – one of the common examples for grief rituals.

Introduction to the Realm of Journaling

"Writing is the hand that reaches out when grief silences the voice within"

– Alice Walker

Journaling is a comforting and safe grief ritual often used as a means to reflect and process through significant emotions and thoughts. It is also an effective way to record and rethink events or memories that is sometimes difficult to voice. The overall intention of journaling is to acknowledge our loss, rather than to have it bottle up inside us. To journal, set aside a dedicated time and space. This could be a few minutes each day or a longer session once a week. You will be given the opportunity to try some journaling over the following pages.

If journaling brings up emotions that are more intense than you feel ready for, consider reaching out to:

- Counsellors in Residence: <https://tinyurl.com/SHCSCiR>
- Counselling Services:
<https://students.ubc.ca/health/counselling-services>
- Here2Talk: <https://here2talk.ca/main>
- UBC Chaplains: <https://students.ubc.ca/campus-life/religion-spirituality/chaplains>

Journal Prompt 1.0

“Grief is the price we pay for love”
- Colin Murray Parkes

My grief is...

Journal Prompt 2.0

"There is a sacredness in tears. They are not the mark of weakness, but of power. They speak more eloquently than ten thousand tongues. They are the messengers of overwhelming grief, of deep contrition, and of unspeakable love"
- Washington Irving

Sometimes I feel the pain is so great I...

Journal Prompt 3.0

"Fear, like grief, is a passage to understanding the depths of our courage"
- Rupi Kaur

The thing that makes me the most scared is...

Journal Prompt 4.0

“Amidst the shadows of sorrow, a cherished memory dances like a flickering candle, illuminating the heart with the warmth of joy once shared”

- Maya Angelou

My favourite memory....

Journal Prompt 5.0

“Happiness is a choice that requires effort at times”
- Aeschylus

What brings me the most comfort is...

Journal Prompt 6.0

“Grief is like the ocean; it comes in waves ebbing and flowing. Sometimes the water is calm, and sometimes it is overwhelming. All we can do is learn to swim”

- Vicki Harrison

One thing I learned from this loss is...

Journal Prompt 7.0

"In the midst of winter, I finally learned that there was in me an invincible summer"
- Albert Camus

To my future self....

More Journal Prompts, If You So Wish

Right now, I feel...

I feel the saddest when...

When was the hardest time of today?

Since the loss, things have been different because...

My worst memory is...

If there something that you need to forgive yourself for?

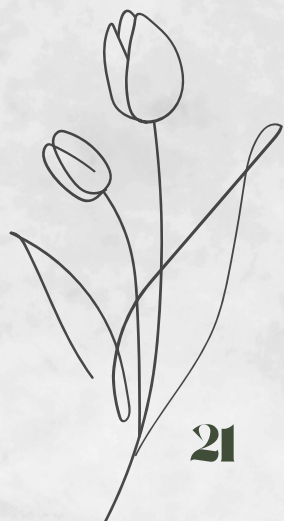
What tends to trigger your feelings of grief?

How can I honor this loss?

What do you need to do more of or less of to show yourself
compassion?

What do you need to remind yourself of to cope with difficult times?

Write a mantra you can use when you feel overwhelmed by grief.



Parting Words

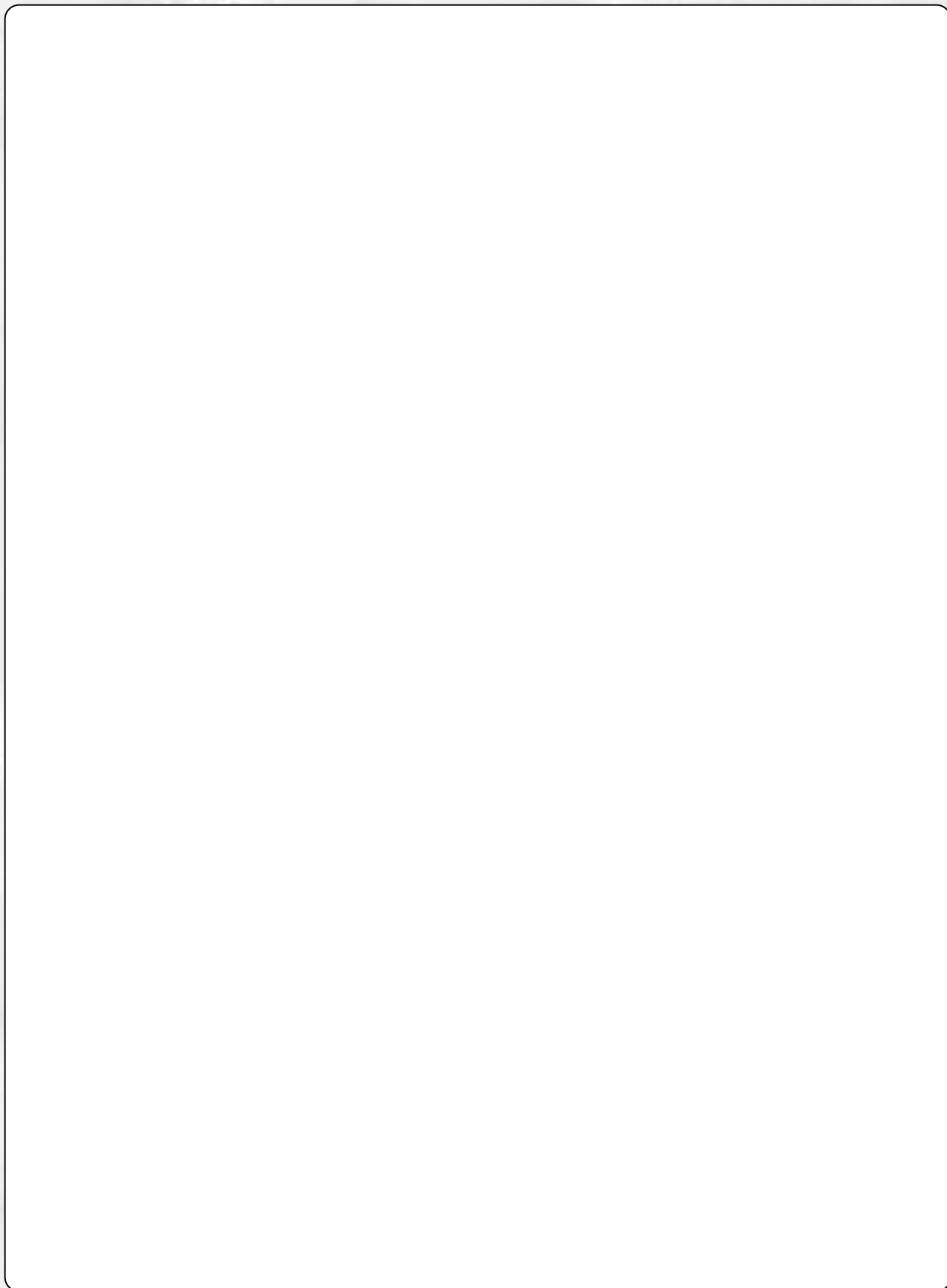
“How lucky I am to have something that makes saying goodbye so hard”

- A.A. Milne

The journey through grief is a disorienting and tumultuous one, marked by sorrow that can feel insurmountable. Yet, within the depths of this struggle lies a transformative potential. In times of grief, we are remade – broken apart and reassembled. It is hard and painful. A reminder that grief is a testament to the love, connections and values that define our lives. When you acknowledge and embrace this grief, to mourn and remember, you take a courageous step forward – for grieving requires confronting the darkness that often accompanies loss. Take a moment to thank yourself today for the level of care and work you’ve placed in your path of healing.

Self-Reflection Corner

Self-Reflection Corner

A large, empty rectangular box with rounded corners, intended for self-reflection. The box is white and occupies the majority of the page below the title.

"In nature, nothing is ever lost, but only transformed, and grief finds solace in this eternal cycle"

- Ralph Waldo Emerson

Being in nature can serve as a powerful catalyst for processing and healing grief. It offers a nurturing environment that coaxes one to open up and explore their emotions without judgment; it soothes where the pain can be too unbearable. There is something about nature's inherent cycles of growth, change, and renewal, which mirror the transformative nature of grief – wild and organic – reinforcing the idea that healing is only a natural and gradual process.

Please refer to the QR code below for a map showcasing some spots around the UBC campus where you can immerse yourself in nature. However, know that anywhere that feels right for you is what truly matters. Even 10 minutes of accessing nature can enhance your wellbeing in a meaningful way.

We would like to acknowledge that all marked spots are located on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territory of the Musqueam people. Please note that not all routes are fully accessible to everyone; sites that may pose potential challenges have been highlighted in the map.



This grief workbook was created by UBC Counsellors in Residence (Serena Ewe, Freeman Woolnough & Sabina Lupasco) as part of the “Grieving in Nature, a Pathway to Healing” experience. You are welcome to send along any questions or comments to counsellor.residence@ubc.ca.