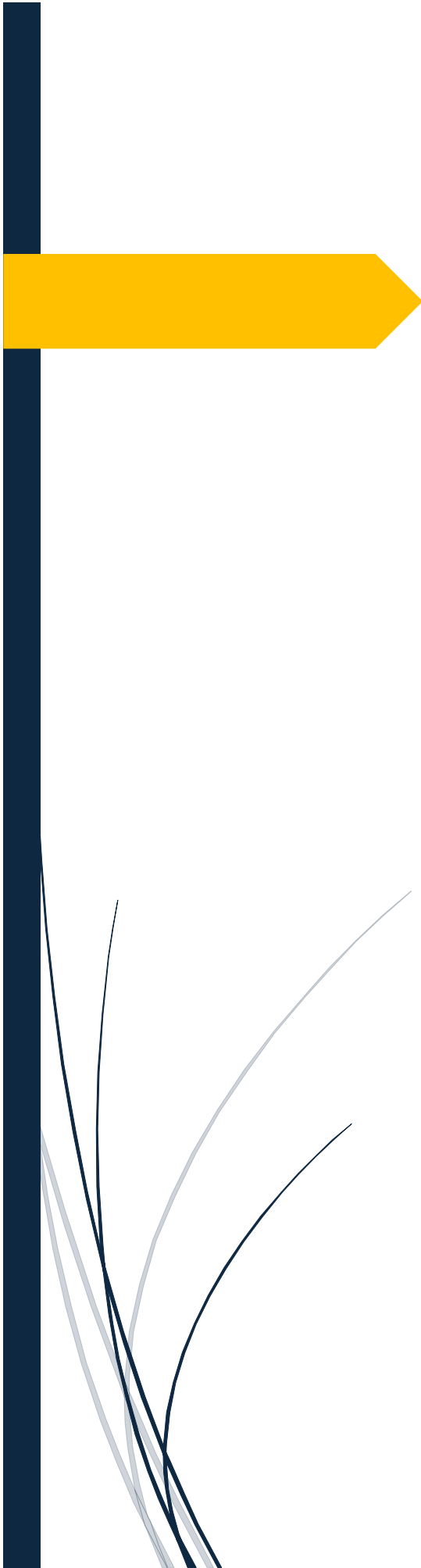




Grief & Loss

Living with What Changed

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Grief is often associated with death, but grief can emerge whenever we experience a meaningful loss or significant change.

Sometimes the loss is obvious.

A person dies. A relationship ends. A job is lost. A family changes.

Other losses can be harder to recognize.

We lose an expectation. An identity changes. Our health changes. A friendship fades. A child grows up. We move away from a familiar place. A future we imagined no longer seems possible.

Some losses are permanent. Others represent transitions.

All can create grief.

Grief is not simply about **letting go**.

It is the process of recognizing what has changed, understanding what the loss means to us, adapting to what is different, and discovering how we want to carry forward what still matters.

Big “G” and Little “g” Grief

Not every loss looks the same.

Big “G” Grief

Some losses are clearly recognized as significant:

- Death of someone important
- Divorce or separation
- Serious illness or injury
- Pregnancy loss
- Loss of a career
- Loss of a home
- Major financial loss
- Loss of independence
- A traumatic event
- A significant family change

These losses are usually visible. Other people often understand why we are grieving.

Little “g” Grief

Other losses may receive much less recognition:

- A friendship changing
- Children becoming more independent
- Aging
- Moving
- Changing careers
- Retirement
- Losing a routine
- A change in physical ability

- Giving up an activity
- Losing connection with a community
- A relationship becoming different
- An opportunity that didn't happen
- Realizing life isn't unfolding as expected
- Becoming someone different from who you once were

These losses can be easy to minimize.

We may tell ourselves:

- **“It shouldn't bother me this much.”**
- **“Other people have it worse.”**
- **“Nothing terrible happened.”**

But grief doesn't measure the objective size of an event.

It responds to **meaning**. If something mattered to you, losing or changing it can matter too.

What Did I Actually Lose?

Loss is rarely only about the thing that disappeared.

A job may represent: **Income + identity + competence + routine + relationships + purpose**

A relationship may represent: **Partner + companionship + belonging + intimacy + shared history + imagined future**

A health change may represent: **Ability + independence + confidence + identity + freedom + expectations**

A child leaving home may represent: **Daily connection + parenting role + routine + purpose + family structure**

This is why grief can feel larger than the event itself. You may be grieving several losses at the same time.

Explore the Loss

- What changed or was lost?
- What did this person, role, relationship, ability, experience, or opportunity provide for me?
- What else changed because of the loss?
- What do I miss most?
- What surprised me about this loss?

The Loss Beneath the Loss

Sometimes what we initially identify isn't the deepest loss. Consider what may exist underneath it.

CONNECTION

Did I lose:

- Companionship?
- Belonging?
- Affection?
- Intimacy?
- Someone who understood me?
- A community?
- A shared experience?

IDENTITY

Did I lose part of:

- Who I thought I was?
- A role I valued?
- How others saw me?
- Something that made me feel capable?
- A version of myself?

SAFETY

Did I lose:

- Predictability?
- Stability?
- Financial security?
- Physical security?
- Emotional safety?
- Trust?
- A sense that things would be okay?

PURPOSE

Did I lose:

- Something meaningful to work toward?
- Responsibility for someone or something?
- A sense of contribution?
- A reason to get up and engage?

ROUTINE

Did I lose:

- Familiar habits and traditions?
- Daily contact?
- Places I regularly went?
- Activities that structured my day?

FUTURE

Did I lose:

- Plans?
- Dreams?
- Expectations?
- Possibilities?
- A future I assumed would happen?

Sometimes grief becomes easier to understand when we can identify **what the loss represented**.

Grief Doesn't Move in a Straight Line

Grief is often described as a series of stages. Real grief is usually less orderly.

You may experience:

Sadness

Anger

Relief

Fear

Guilt

Loneliness

Numbness

Confusion

Longing

Regret

Gratitude

Resentment

Peace

Sometimes several of these occur at once. The past, the present, and the future all rinse through you at the same time.

You may feel okay for several days and suddenly struggle again.

A song, smell, place, anniversary, holiday, photograph, conversation, or unexpected memory can bring the experience back quickly. This doesn't necessarily mean you're going backward.

Grief can be **episodic rather than linear**. The goal isn't to complete grief perfectly.

The work is learning how to experience it without requiring yourself to follow a particular timeline.

Both Can Be True

Grief often contains emotional contradictions.

You can:

- **Miss someone and be angry with them.**

- Love someone and feel relief after they are gone.
- Know a change was necessary and still grieve it.
- Feel grateful for what happened and wish it had been different.
- Want to move forward and still want something back.
- Be excited about a new chapter and sad about the one ending.
- Accept reality and still dislike it.

These experiences do not cancel each other out.

Grief often requires learning to hold **two truths at the same time**.

What two truths are you carrying?

I feel _____ AND I also feel _____

Grief Happens in the Mind AND the Body

Grief isn't only emotional. Loss can affect the entire system.

You may notice changes in:

BODY

- | | | |
|------------|----------------------|-------------------------|
| • Fatigue | • Muscle tension | • Reduced energy |
| • Sleep | • Restlessness | • Increased sensitivity |
| • Appetite | • Physical heaviness | |

MIND

- | | | |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------------|
| • Difficulty concentrating | • Difficulty making decisions | • Replaying conversations |
| • Forgetfulness | • Questioning what happened | • Searching for explanations |
| • Rumination | | |
| • Intrusive memories | | |

EMOTIONS

- | | | |
|-----------|----------------|------------------------------|
| • Sadness | • Loneliness | • Emotional unpredictability |
| • Anger | • Numbness | |
| • Fear | • Relief | |
| • Guilt | • Irritability | |

BEHAVIOR

- Withdrawal
- Staying busy to avoid thinking
- Changes in routines
- Reduced self-care
- Increased distraction
- Avoiding reminders
- Seeking reminders

RELATIONSHIPS

- Wanting more support
- Wanting more space
- Feeling misunderstood
- Becoming frustrated with how others respond
- Connecting more deeply with some people
- Distancing from others

Understanding these reactions can help us ask: **“What does my system need right now?”**

rather than: **“Why am I not handling this better?”**

What Do You Need?

Different people need different things while grieving. And what you need may change from day to day.

You may need:

TO FEEL

- Cry
- Talk
- Write
- Remember
- Express anger
- Sit quietly
- Allow emotions without solving them

TO REGULATE

- Sleep
- Eat
- Move
- Walk
- Breathe
- Spend time outdoors
- Reduce stimulation
- Maintain basic routines

TO CONNECT

- Talk with someone
- Spend time with family
- Be around people without talking
- Ask someone to listen
- Join a support group
- Spend time with people who knew what was lost

TO HAVE SPACE

- Be alone
- Reduce obligations
- Say no
- Take a break from explaining
- Limit emotionally demanding interactions

TO REMEMBER

- Look at photographs
- Tell stories
- Visit meaningful places
- Maintain traditions
- Create something
- Write a letter
- Keep an object
- Celebrate an anniversary

TO MOVE

- Build a new routine
- Try something different
- Reconnect with people
- Explore a new role
- Create new experiences
- Begin imagining the future again

There is no single correct way to grieve.

Part of the work is discovering **what support actually works for you.**

Translate Your Support

People often care about someone who is grieving but don't know what to do.

They may offer advice when you need listening.

They may give space when you need company.

They may avoid talking about the loss because they are afraid of upsetting you.

Don't assume others automatically know what support looks like.

When possible, **translate it.**

I need...

- “I don't need you to fix this. I just need you to listen.”
- “I'd like some company, but I don't really want to talk.”
- “Please ask me about it. You're not reminding me—I already remember.”

- “I need some space today.”
- “Could you help me with something practical?”
- “I don't know what I need yet. Just stay close.”
- “I'd like to do something normal and not talk about it for a while.”

For me, support looks like:

Support does NOT look like:

People I can ask for support:

Avoiding vs. Pacing

Sometimes we need distance from grief.

Watching a movie, going to work, exercising, spending time with friends, playing a game, or focusing on something else isn't necessarily avoidance.

Our systems cannot remain immersed in grief continuously.

Healthy grieving often moves between:

LOSS - Feeling it. Remembering. Talking. Crying. Reflecting.

And

LIFE - Working. Playing. Connecting. Resting. Laughing. Creating. Doing ordinary things.

The question isn't: “**Am I thinking about the loss enough?**”

A better question may be: “**Am I allowing myself access to the loss AND access to life?**”

If we only stay with the loss, we may become overwhelmed.

If we only stay busy, grief may have nowhere to go.

We often need both.

What Remains?

Loss changes something.

It doesn't necessarily erase everything connected to it.

A relationship may end while the memories remain.

A person may die while their influence remains.

A career may end while the capabilities developed through it remain.

Children may leave home while the relationship continues in a different form.

A physical ability may change while other capabilities remain available.

A chapter can end without making the chapter meaningless.

Ask yourself:

- **What did this experience give me?**
 - **What did I learn?**
 - **What qualities or capabilities did I develop because of it?**
 - **What memories do I want to keep?**
 - **What traditions or practices do I want to carry forward?**
 - **What part of this remains part of me?**
-

Rebuilding After Loss

Moving forward does not require leaving everything behind.

Over time, grief may involve creating a life that has room for **both what was and what is becoming**.

Consider four questions:

- **What was lost?**
- **What remains?**
- **What needs to be rebuilt?**
- **What might become possible now?**

That last question doesn't have to be answered immediately.

Sometimes the first task is simply learning how to live in the changed landscape.

Possibility can come later.

When Grief Changes Identity

Some losses don't simply change our circumstances.

They change the answer to: **“Who am I now?”**

After a major loss, you may no longer be:

- Someone's spouse
- A caregiver
- An employee
- An athlete
- A student
- A parent with children at home
- Part of a particular community
- Physically capable in the same way

When a role disappears, identity can temporarily feel uncertain.

Ask:

- **What part of my identity changed?**
- **What parts of me existed before this loss and still exist now?**
- **What capabilities remain available to me?**
- **What parts of myself have I neglected that I might reconnect with?**
- **What new parts of me may be developing?**

You don't have to immediately reinvent yourself. Identity can be rebuilt gradually.

Grief & Meaning

Some losses eventually lead people to search for meaning.

Others don't.

You do not have to find a lesson in everything that hurts.

Meaning isn't necessarily: **"This happened for a reason."**

Meaning can simply be: **"Because this mattered to me, I want to decide how I carry it forward."**

That might mean:

- | | |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| • Living differently | • Sharing a story |
| • Changing priorities | • Continuing a tradition |
| • Repairing relationships | • Developing a capability |
| • Helping others | • Becoming more intentional |
| • Protecting something important | • Appreciating something differently |
| • Creating a ritual | |

Meaning doesn't erase grief. It can give grief somewhere to go.

When Grief and Depression Look Similar

Grief and depression can overlap.

Both may involve sadness, fatigue, disrupted sleep, changes in appetite, difficulty concentrating, withdrawal, or decreased interest in activities.

Grief, however, is typically connected to a meaningful loss or change and may come in waves. People can often still experience moments of connection, humor, pleasure, or positive memories alongside the pain.

Depression may become more pervasive and begin affecting how someone experiences **themselves, their life, and their future** beyond the loss itself.

You don't need to diagnose the difference yourself.

If grief feels increasingly overwhelming, persists in a way that significantly interferes with functioning, or begins to include profound hopelessness, worthlessness, or thoughts of death or suicide, professional support may be important.

Your Grief Map

Take a moment to bring the pieces together.

- **THE LOSS** - What changed?
- **THE MEANING** - What did it represent to me?
- **THE DISCONNECT** - What have I become disconnected from because of it?
- **THE NEED** - What does my system need right now?
- **THE SUPPORT** - What would helpful support from others look like?
- **THE REMAINS** - What do I still carry with me?
- **THE REBUILD** - What might need to be rebuilt, rediscovered, or created?
- **THE NEXT STEP** - What is one thing I can do now?

Living With What Changed

Grief is not necessarily something we **get over**. Some losses become part of our story.

Over time, however, our relationship with the loss can change. What once occupies nearly all of our attention may eventually occupy less space.

What initially feels impossible to carry may become more familiar.

We can remember without always becoming overwhelmed.

We can experience joy without betraying what was lost.

We can build new relationships, identities, routines, experiences, and possibilities while still honoring what mattered.

The goal isn't forgetting.

The goal isn't pretending it didn't hurt.

The goal isn't returning to exactly who you were before.

The work is learning:

- **What changed?**
- **What did it mean to me?**
- **What do I need?**
- **What remains?**
- **What do I want to carry forward?**

And who am I becoming as I learn to live with what changed?