

Ride and Restore: A Grounding Technique for Grief Waves

Developed for moments of intense emotion or tears, this short practice helps your body and mind process grief in a safe, complete way. Use it anytime you feel a wave coming on — it takes only a few minutes.

1. Recognize — “This is a wave, not forever.”

Say (out loud if possible): “My body is processing love and loss. This wave will pass.” This reminds your emotional brain (amygdala) that you are safe even while feeling deeply. You’re anchoring your prefrontal cortex back online.

2. Anchor to the Present — Engage Your Senses

Pick one item from each sense:

- Sight: Name 3 colors in the room.
- Sound: Identify 2 steady sounds.
- Touch: Feel the texture beneath your hands or the weight of a blanket.
- Smell: Take in a comforting scent (essential oil, coffee, or your loved one’s cologne).
- Taste: Sip water or tea slowly.

This engages the sensory cortex and redirects your attention from pain circuits to grounded perception.

3. Breathe to Reset the Vagus Nerve

Try 4-7-8 breathing:

1. Inhale through your nose for 4 seconds.
2. Hold for 7 seconds.
3. Exhale through your mouth for 8 seconds.

Repeat 3–4 times. If you sigh or yawn, your parasympathetic system is re-engaging — that’s healing in action.

4. Gentle Containment — Hand Over Heart

Place one hand over your heart and one on your abdomen. Say softly:

“I’m safe. I’m loved. I miss him — and that’s okay.”

This combination of soothing touch and kind language lowers cortisol and increases oxytocin. You may feel warmth spread across your chest — that’s your vagus nerve calming your body.

5. Reorient and Restore

As the wave subsides, slowly look around and notice:

- Where you are
- What time it is
- Something gentle to do next (wash your face, stretch, step outside)

Then complete one neutral, physical action — fold a towel, light a candle, or pet a dog. This signals to your brain that the wave has completed.

Optional Add-On: Link It to Love

Once calm, recall a memory that brings ‘smile tears’ — something simple like a laugh or phrase your loved one used. This helps your brain associate the memory with comfort instead of pain over time.

Created for: Dr. Cindy H. Carr

“Ride each wave with grace; every tear is love transforming.”