

Understanding Grief

The six needs of grief



Empowering you to navigate the terrains of grief
and growth through creativity, connection and
self-discovery.

www.griefsway.com

The Needs of Grief

Grief is a universal human experience, a response not just to death, but to change, loss, and transformation throughout life. Embracing grief can open the way to healing, meaning, and connection. Grief is also a deeply personal journey, one that brings a variety of emotions and challenges. Understanding the core needs of grief, and taking time to reflect on them, can help you process loss with compassion and resilience. This guide explains the six key needs of grief, offers journal prompts for each, and discusses why these needs can be difficult to meet in Western society.

Honouring the key needs of grief is important because it supports genuine healing and healthy adjustment after loss. When these needs are acknowledged and attended to, individuals are more able to:

Process Their Emotions: Allowing space for feelings such as sadness, anger, confusion, and even relief helps to prevent bottling up emotions that can later lead to mental or physical distress.

Integrate the Loss into Life: Grieving openly and meaningfully helps weave the loss into a new life story, rather than feeling stuck in the past or avoiding painful realities.

Maintain Connections: Remembering and honouring the person who died preserves a sense of ongoing connection, which is deeply comforting for many grievers

Protect Mental and Physical Health: Suppressed grief can lead to depression, anxiety, physical symptoms, and even long-term health issues. Meeting grief's needs helps protect well-being.

Support Resilience and Growth: Facing grief, searching for meaning, and accepting support can foster new strengths, insights, and deeper empathy for oneself and others.

Counter Societal Pressure: In cultures that may urge people to “move on” quickly, honouring grief's needs creates a healthier, more compassionate space for natural mourning.

By honouring these needs, individuals allow themselves to move through grief with honesty and care, making adaptation and future hope possible.



The Key Needs

“Our brain creates a model of the world that includes our loved one, and when that person dies, our brain must revise this model. But updating our expectations and habits does not happen instantly; it requires repeated experiences of absence. This is why months after a loss, you may still reach for the phone to call them or expect them to walk through the door. It takes time for our brain to truly comprehend the reality of their absence.”

(The Grieving Brain, Mary-Frances O’Connor, Ph.D.)

1. Acknowledge the Reality of the Loss

Coming to terms with the fact that the loved one has truly gone can take time. This process involves both intellectual acceptance ("I know they are gone") and emotional acceptance ("I feel and believe they are gone").

When did the reality of my loss first begin to feel ‘real’ to me?

Are there moments when I still expect my loved one to return?

What helps me acknowledge and accept this reality, even when it’s painful?



2. Embrace the pain of loss

The truth is that pain, just like love, must be felt. As much as we push it away, numb it or find a short cut around it, the only pathway through grief is to experience it.” David Kessler

Avoiding or supressing pain doesn't make it go away. Allowing yourself to fully experience the emotions of grief, such as sadness, anger, guilt, and even relief, without suppressing or ignoring them allows us to move through it and eventually find meaning.

What emotions have I been feeling most strongly since my loss?

Are there feelings I find myself avoiding? Why?

What would it look like to allow myself to feel my pain today?



3. Remember the person who died

“Your loved one’s story doesn’t end with their passing, it continues in your remembering, in your acts of honoring, and in the meaning you make from the loss” David Kessler

Remembering is not about holding on to pain, but about carrying forward the love and connection you shared. We can cherish memories and honor our loved one’s life while finding meaningful ways to maintain a connection, even after they are gone.

What are some of my most cherished memories with my loved one?

How do I want to honour or remember them moving forward?

What traditions or rituals bring me comfort as I remember them?



4. Develop a New Self-Identity

“Loss not only involves the absence of a loved one, but also frequently challenges the survivor’s sense of identity and meaning. In the aftermath, reconstruction of identity and a sense of purpose become a central task of grieving.” Robert Neimeyer

Loss can change who we are. Part of grieving is figuring out who you are now, in the absence of your loved one, and adapting to new roles or responsibilities. Grief requires us to re-examine and rebuild our sense of who we are in the absence of someone significant.

How has my sense of self changed since my loss?

What roles or routines have I had to take on or let go of?

What qualities do I want to nurture in myself during this new chapter?



5. Search for meaning

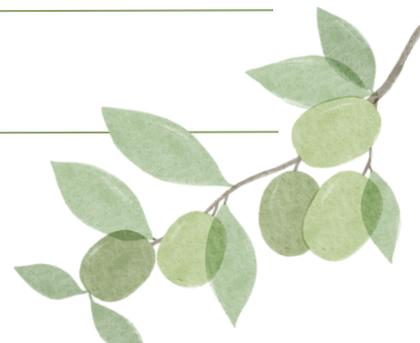
“Grief has always led us to the edge of meaning. It is here in this raw and uncertain territory, that we are invited to listen deeply, to shape a story that can hold our sorrow with dignity.” - Francis Weller.

Grieving is not just about saying goodbye, but about finding new meaning in a world profoundly changed by loss. When we are able to find meaning in personal ways Many people try to make sense of their loss, asking why it happened and what it means for their future. This search can help you integrate your grief into your life and find purpose moving forward.

What questions or “why” thoughts have come up for me during my grief?

Have I found any meaning or insight from this loss?

How has the loss changed the way I see life, death, or relationships?



6. Receive Ongoing Support from Others

“Grief must be witnessed. It needs community. You don’t have to grieve alone. Healing happens in the presence of others who can hold your pain with compassion.” - David Kessler

Grief can feel isolating, but connection is healing. Letting yourself seek and receive care, comfort, and understanding from others. Friends, family, community, or professionals is vital for moving through grief and healing.

Who has been supportive to me during my grief?

Is it hard for me to ask for help or accept support? Why or why not?

What kind of support would feel most nourishing to me right now?



Barriers to healthy grieving

Why these needs are often unmet in western society.

Western societies often prioritize self-sufficiency, productivity, and emotional restraint, which can unintentionally undermine healthy grieving.

- Pressure to “move on”: There is often an expectation to return to “normal” quickly, leading people to suppress or rush their grief.
- Discomfort with strong emotions: Open expressions of sadness, anger, or pain are sometimes discouraged, prompting people to grieve quietly and alone.
- Stigma around seeking support: Asking for emotional support or professional help can be seen as weakness or a burden to others.
- Loss of mourning rituals: Traditional mourning practices have lessened, leaving fewer avenues for shared remembrance, public mourning, or community support.
- Emphasis on productivity: Work and daily demands may not leave enough space or time to attend to grief.

Recognizing these cultural barriers can empower you to honour your own grief journey and advocate for the support you need

Grief is a natural, ongoing process and not a problem to be fixed, but a journey to be honoured. Engage with these needs and allow space for your unique experience. If you need support, consider reaching out via email to support@griefsway.com.



Griefs Way

Healing Arts



Griefs Way Healing Arts is dedicated to supporting individuals on their grief and loss journey through a holistic approach. I offer specialized education, art therapy programs, and immersive nature retreats alongside individualized grief-focused art therapy sessions. My mission is to foster a more grief-literate society, empowering people to understand and navigate their grief and transitions with compassion and resilience.

Griefs Way empowers you to navigate the complexities of grief and loss with compassion, creativity and connection. through a unique blend of Art therapy, holistic Counselling, ecotherapy and grief education.

Griefs Way offers

- Weekly grief support groups.
- 6-week art therapy program.
- Arts therapy, nature retreats and workshops.
- Nature based psychotherapy sessions
- Individualised arts therapy and counselling sessions.
- Personalised creative ritual
- Grief yoga

Email Emma Swan at support@griefsway.com to discuss the best way forward for you on your grief journey or go to www.griefsway.com to make a booking.