

Bereavement Support

Living with Grief and Loss



Self-help Guide

A workbook for adults journeying through grief

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Introduction

As difficult as things might seem right now, you are on a journey of personal growth and rediscovery. It's important to remember that **this journey is as unique to you as your fingerprint**. Each person's grief journey is different.



Thank you so much for practicing self-care in your bereavement. The fact that you have started reading this workbook means that you've taken a really important first step on that journey.

You've probably got lots of questions, like:

- Are these feelings normal?
- Will I ever come through this?
- Am I going crazy?
- What on earth is my future going to be like?
- Will I ever be able to manage these feelings?
- Is there anyone who really understands what I am going through right now?
- Is this depression?
- Is there anything that will help me understand and manage my grief?

The road ahead might seem too difficult to travel at the moment. The best way to begin that journey is by taking a few steps. **One at a time.**

In choosing to access this workbook, you have revealed something really important: you believe that by taking certain steps, you can recover your emotional, physical, cognitive, and spiritual equilibrium after the death of someone close to you. You believe that you can put the bereavement you have experienced into perspective and discover your inner resolve to continue living, while adapting and growing around your grief.

First things first

It might seem a strange thing to say, but we need to understand what grief actually is. We sometimes use the word grief interchangeably with bereavement and mourning. It can be helpful to be clear what we mean. In a culture where we rarely talk about dying and death, having the right words is important.



Bereavement is what happens to us

Grief is what we feel in response to our bereavement

Mourning is how we express our grief – what we do

So, let's be clear. We can be bereaved under a wide range of circumstances, including (but not limited to)

- death of someone close to us
- death of a pet
- loss of role (redundancy etc)
- divorce
- house move

“Museum of Loss”

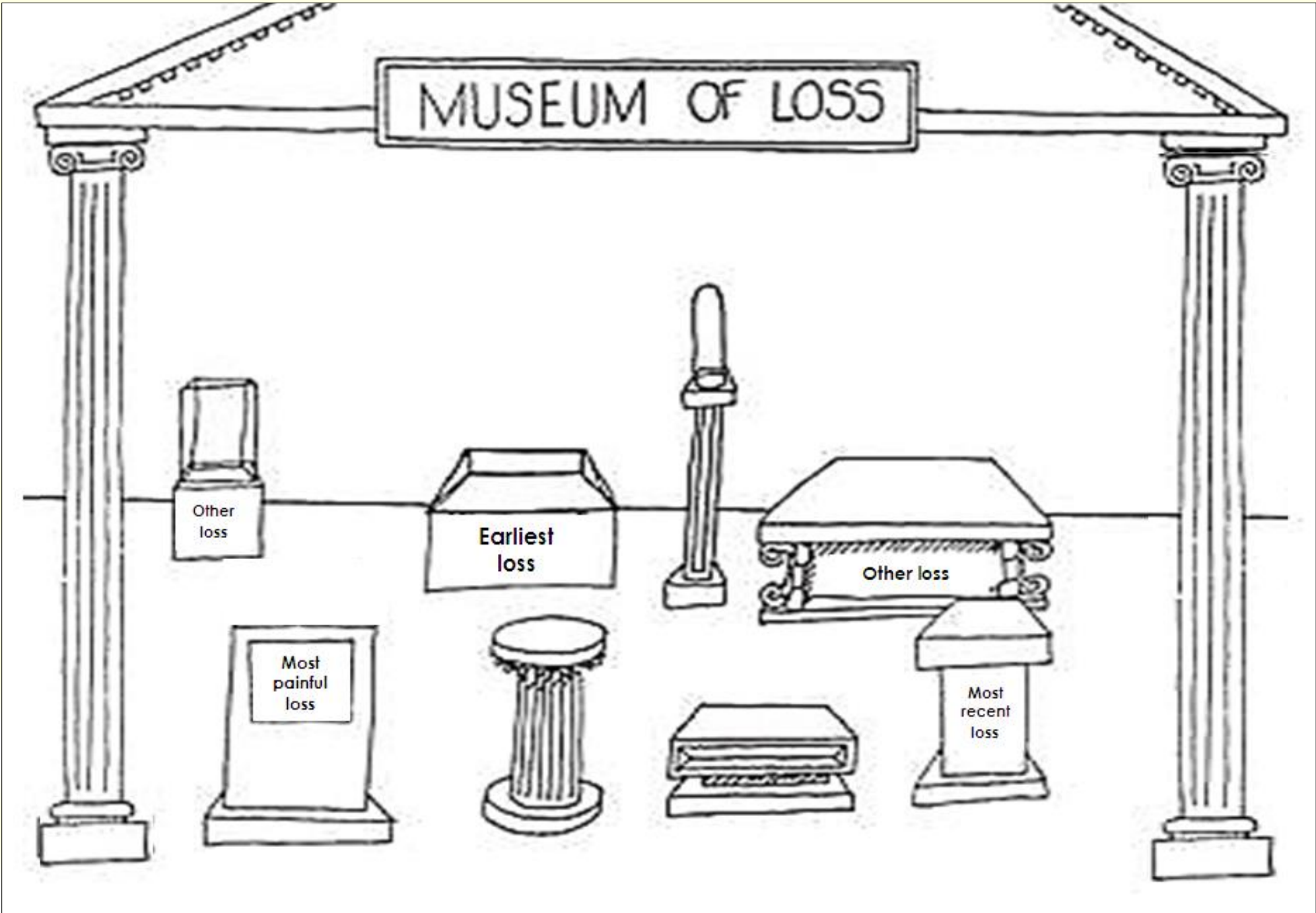
Some losses / bereavements are more acknowledged than others. Losses that are not fully acknowledged or recognised can become *disenfranchised grief*.

Throughout life we experience a range of losses. Each of these losses can leave a mark / imprint on our lives and affect how we cope (or not) with current and future losses.

You might like think back to the losses you may have experienced in your own life and how they are affecting the way you are experiencing your current bereavement.

The “Museum of Loss” exercise is an invitation to write out or draw some of the losses you have experienced in your life. Try not to judge or evaluate them, just note them, and acknowledge their presence in your life.

If this doesn't feel like the right time to do this exercise, please leave it for another time. You may wish to revisit it at another point in the future.



Identifying your hopes / goals for your support



Whenever you see this symbol, it indicates there is a writing / reflective task to complete.

So, here's the first one:

What do you hope to bring into your life by making use of this workbook?

Many people respond to that question by saying, "I just want to feel better", and that's enough. However, if you can identify the ways you might want to feel better physically, emotionally, cognitively (in your thinking), or spiritually, it can help you along the way. The stresses of grieving can be hard to bear and learning new ways to take good care of yourself can lessen their effects. Learning, once again, to enjoy the simple pleasures of eating, sleeping, and spending time alone or with friends; and tending to the care of your body are all valid desires. So, please do your best to be as specific as you can in order to answer that last question.



When you see this sign, we have included at this point a quotation to motivate or inspire.

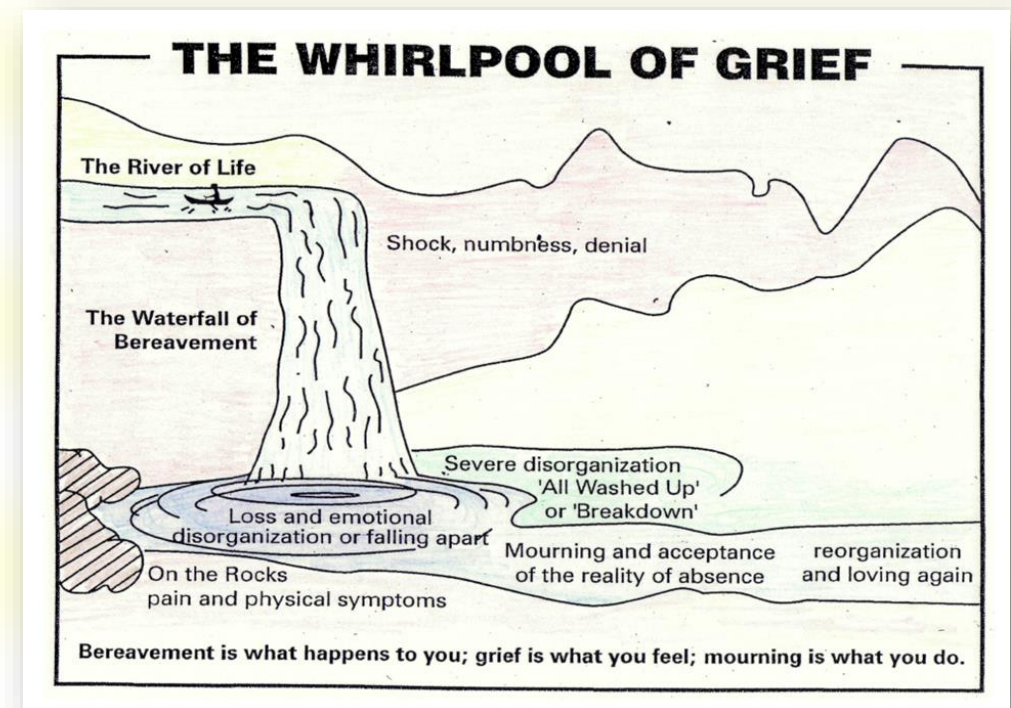
So, here's the first quotation:

"Grief is a most peculiar thing; we're so helpless in the face of it. It's like a window that will simply open of its own accord. The room grows cold, and we can do nothing but shiver. But it opens a little less each time, and a little less; and one day we wonder what has become of it."

Arthur Golden

Memoirs of a Geisha

Sometimes, a visual image to express some of what you might be feeling can help. Some people find "The Whirlpool of Grief" a helpful visualisation. Is there anything in the picture you identify with?



Setting out on the Journey

We generally have a need to categorize our collective experiences. Over the years many people have come up with all sorts of theories around grief and bereavement. There have been theories involving the idea of stages, tasks, and phases – but when you are in the middle of grieving a major loss, does it really help to know about any of them?

Perhaps it does, to a degree. It can help us understand grief a little better. It can help us better understand where we are on the journey towards acceptance and adjustment. It can also be valuable to know that some theories do not actually 'fit' with your bereavement experience. And that it is ok.

One theory, developed by Elizabeth Kubler-Ross proposed there are 5 key stages to grief – and you may have been told or know about these phases or stages already:

Denial **Anger**
Bargaining **Depression** **Acceptance**

She intended them to describe **the journey undergone by terminally ill patients in relation to their own death.**

This means that **the 5 stages are not so important to us here.**

It might be a little more helpful to recognise where you are at terms of 3 key phases:

Phase 1

This describes the early days after the death of someone close. This involves the developing and deepening awareness that the person has truly died. Even if you were expecting the death, it can still come as a shock once it arrives. This phase is characterised by a bittersweet mixture of feelings and activities. It may bring feelings of numbness, shock, relief. There are tasks to be done: let people know about the death, as well as practical arrangements to be managed. For some people, the need for solitude can be overwhelming in this early phase.

Phase 2

This can be a lengthy intermediate period lasting from between a few months to potentially many years. It is the period in which we adapt to the situation of not having the person who has died in our day-to-day life. It's a period of transition from the early days of coping with the immediate issues of arranging a funeral and dealing with legalities, to the assumption of some of the roles played by the person who has died. This phase has all elements of practical tasks to be done as well as tending to the emotional and physical needs of self and others. Often it can be a period when people around us stop asking about us; when people assume we are 'moving on' and 'normal' life resumes. There can be a sense of silence around, even from those we thought cared the most.

Phase 3

This period of accommodation and adjustment can be seen as lasting until our own death. It is not a phase of 'closure', 'resolution', or 'healing'. It is more concerned with the integration of the loss into our on-going daily life. It is the phase in which we learn to 'live with our grief', while everyone else may be busy assuming we've "moved on".

This phase can be more concerned with how we learn to spend the rest of our lives with the memories, celebrating our shared positive moments, while accepting the less-warm pieces of our co-created history with them.

Take a moment to think about where you feel you might be at the moment. Remember, the phases are not fixed in any order and we can move in and out of them at any time. Grief is as unique to us as our fingerprint.



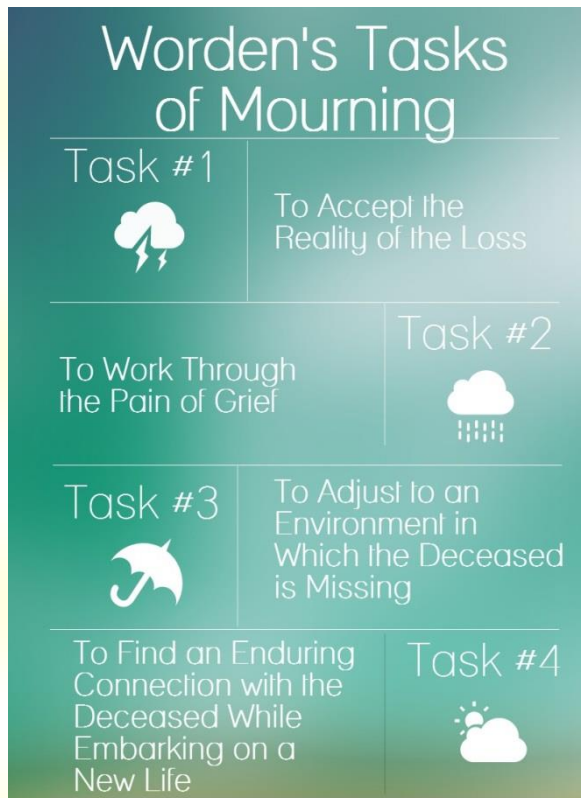
I'm probably in Phase right now

Four Tasks of Grieving

For many decades it has been understood that grief is hard work.

In recent times, Professor **James Worden** chose to see the work of bereavement as **task-oriented**. He outlined 4 tasks:

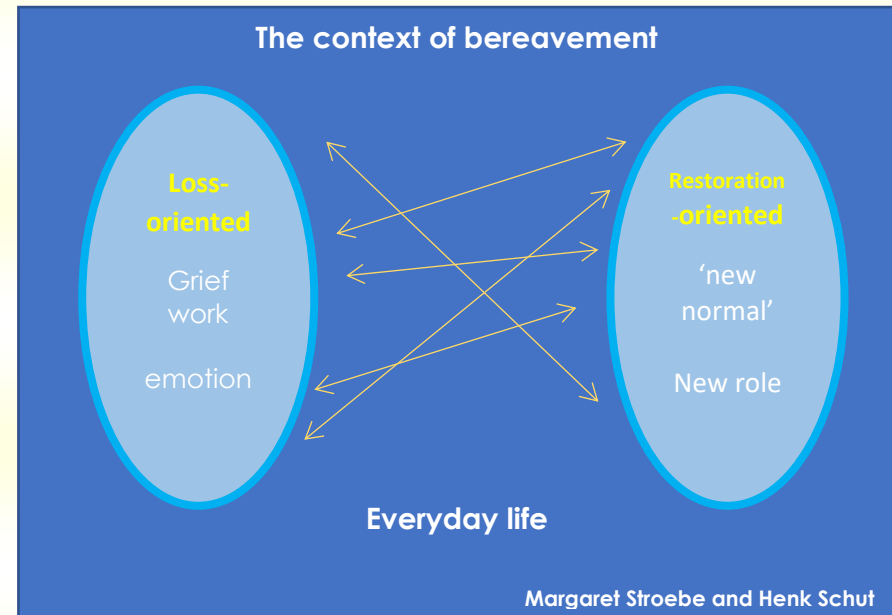
1. To **ACCEPT** the reality of the loss
2. To **process** the **EMOTION** of loss
3. To **ADJUST** to a world without the deceased
4. To find an **enduring CONNECTION** with the deceased while also embarking on a new life



Working through this workbook can help you find your way through these tasks.

The tasks might not follow any order, since grief is not a linear journey. In fact, most people in grief naturally fluctuate between sadness and 'normality'. It is a process of adaptation between loss-oriented activities (processing the pain of grief) and restoration-oriented activities (adjusting to a 'new normal' without the person who had died). This is known as the,

Dual Process Model:



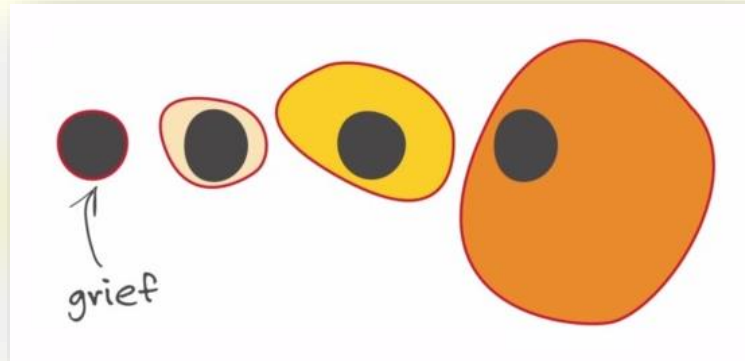
While not referring to the work of grief and bereavement, the French writer **Honoré de Balzac** captured the value of grief work when he said:

“All happiness depends on courage and work”

Other Models of Grief

There are many models of grief. Some are more helpful than others. There is no 'right' or 'wrong' model...just the one that connects with you and your experience.

Lois Tonkin's model resembles a fried egg, and one that many people find helpful:



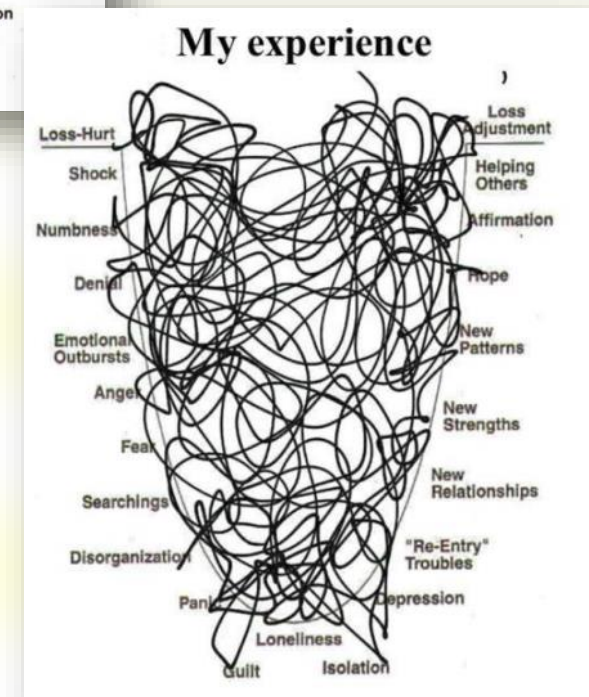
In this model, grief can feel like it eclipses the whole of life. Some people assume that, over time, grief somehow shrinks or slowly disappears. For many, the reality is that *it is our life around our grief that grows*. The grief remains an ever-present reality,



It really does take both courage and hard work to successfully adapt to the loss of a significant person in your life.

'Stage' Theories

For many people, theories about stages make less sense. The journey is rarely a straight line or simple:



How do you feel about grieving?

Before we go any further, let's take a moment to examine the way we think about grief. It is important to do this to ensure we are moving forward with an open mind for the work ahead.

Please answer the following questions. **There are no right or wrong answers.** Your responses will help reveal what you believe about grief and loss.

1. Following the death of a close family member, how long might you expect someone to grieve?

- a. 0-3 months
- b. 3-6 months
- c. 6-12 months
- d. 1-2 years
- e. 2+ years

2. How long would society expect them to grieve?

- a. 0-3 months
- b. 3-6 months
- c. 6-12 months
- d. 1-2 years
- e. 2+ years

3. Would you express intense personal feelings of grief publicly?

- a. No
- b. Yes
- c. Depends

4. How long after a death would you begin to worry that someone is grieving 'abnormally'?

- a. 8 weeks
- b. 3-6 months
- c. 6-12 months
- d. 1-2 years
- e. 2+ years

5. Which age / gender of griever do you feel is at greatest emotional risk during grief?

- a. Older male
- b. Older female
- c. Young male
- d. Young female
- e. Young child
- f. Older child
- g. depends

6. After what period of time would you consider it acceptable for a grieving adult to...

- a. Re-marry _____
- b. Return to work _____
- c. Go on a date _____
- d. Stop grieving _____

7. What is the most important task a griever must complete in order to 'heal'?

- a. Accept reality
- b. Detach from the past
- c. Keep busy
- d. Experience the pain
- e. Set new goals
- f. Don't know



Grief Education

The Journey of Grief....What to Expect

Grief has been described as a journey, as a natural part of life, as the internal thoughts, feelings and meaning given to a person's experience when someone dies. The emotion of grief enters a person without permission.

Each person's experience will be influenced by a variety of factors, including:

- the relationship with the deceased person
- the circumstances surrounding the death
- the grieving person's emotional support system
- cultural and spiritual background

Grief takes time and hard work.

Time, on its own, is not necessarily a 'great healer'.

Grief takes courage and strength.

Grief often changes you. Grief is a healing process.

How You Might Be Feeling

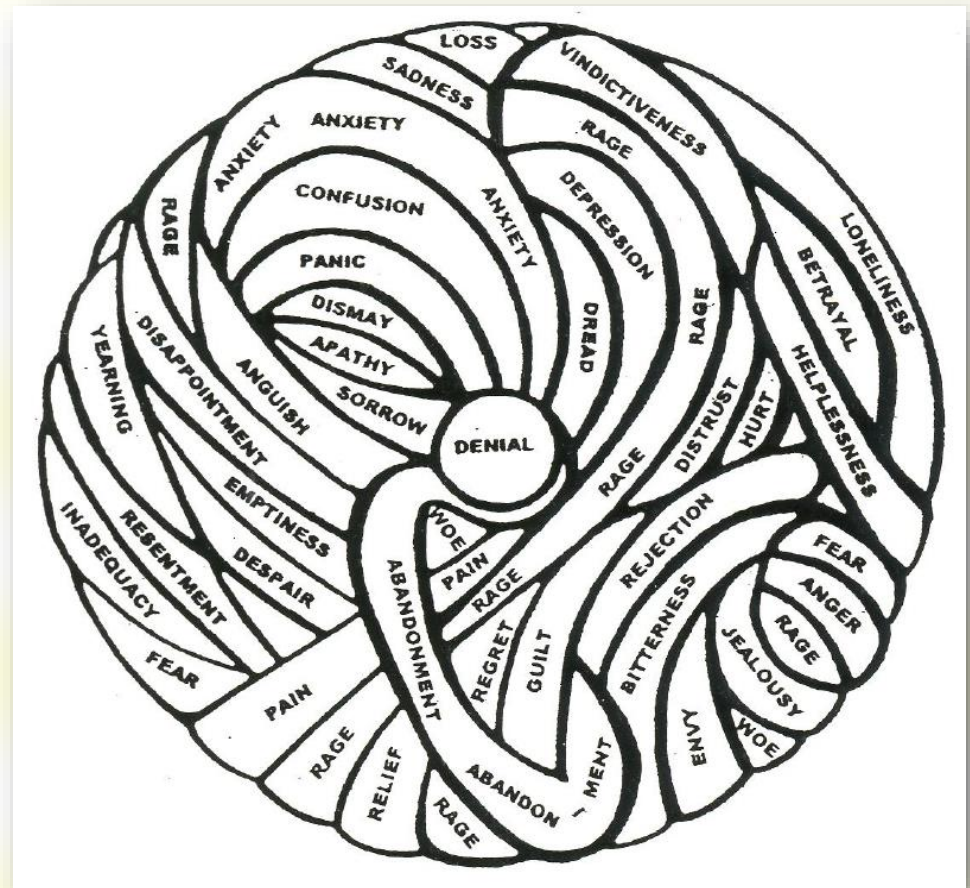
In times of loss, it is helpful to know that the reactions you are experiencing are **natural and healthy** and normal. Your loss is worthy of a response. While each person experiences grief differently, you may find comfort knowing that others share similar loss responses.

You may experience some or many of the following:

- shock, numbness, disbelief
- sadness, guilt, confusion
- anxiety, irritability, anger
- depression, fatigue, low energy
- loss of appetite, interrupted sleep
- upset stomach, headache, joint pain
- feelings of being lonely, helpless, unsafe

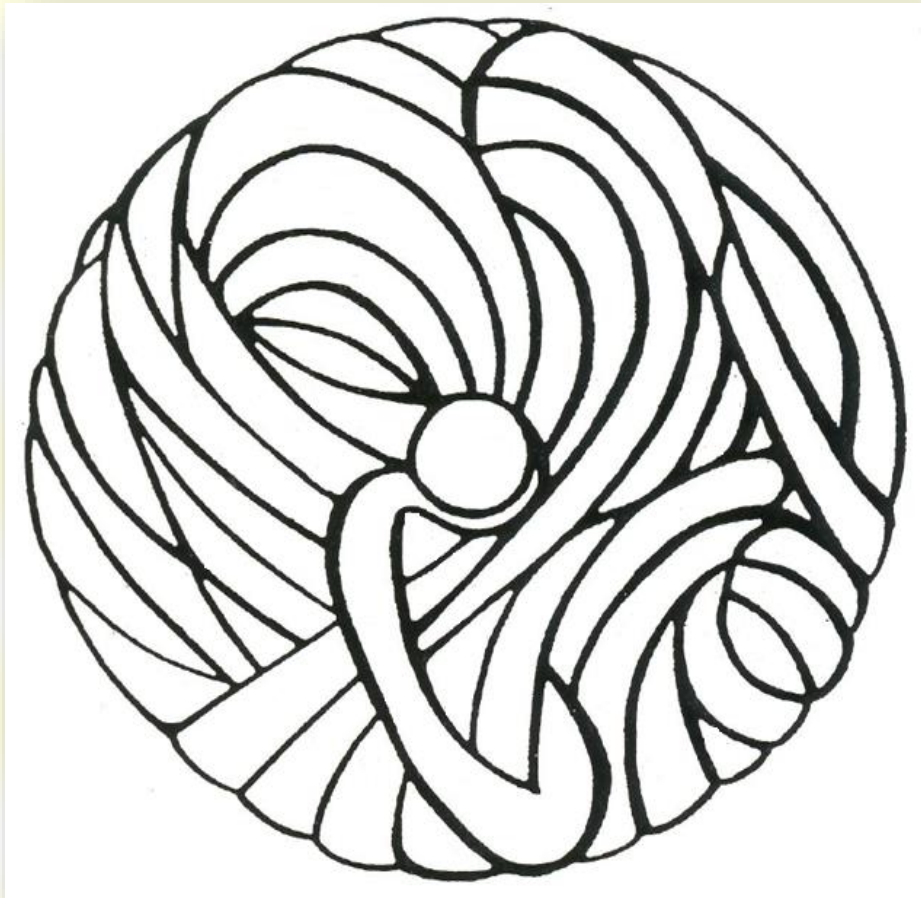
- difficulty focusing, remembering, concentrating
- questioning of priorities, values and beliefs
- searching for meaning and purpose

Sometimes, grief can feel like a '**tangled ball of emotions**':



**Does it feel like that for you?
What might your tangled ball of emotions look like?**

If it's helpful, you can add your own emotions to this tangled ball



Moving Through Grief

For a while, your grief may feel like an intensely personal and confusing experience. Signposts along the way will inform you that you are living your grief and, at your own pace, moving toward adjusting to life without the person you are grieving for.

Each person's grief experience will be unique, and the process may not necessarily unfold in a predictable pattern. There may be recognisable aspects to your grief and understanding this may help guide you along the way. You will have already read in this workbook about some common phases and some of the tasks of grieving.

You may find yourself asking questions – perhaps deep questions about life, why these things happen and what it all means for your own life going forward. This is a normal part of the healing process. Explore the questions and allow yourself to be with what they have to teach you.

When you are ready, reach out to others and allow others to support you. Seek a compassionate, non-judgmental listener. It is important to know that the intensity of grief will lessen over time. Remind yourself that you do not stop loving someone because the person has died. The work of grief includes finding new and healthy ways to continue the relationship.



“And when we have remembered everything, we grow afraid of what we may forget: a face, a voice, a smile, a birthday, an anniversary. No need to fear forgetting, because the heart remembers always.”

Author unknown

The Path to Healing

Each person has an individual style of coping with painful experiences. The list below may help you generate ideas for managing your feelings of grief:

- Be kind and patient with yourself.
- Accept your feelings.
- Try to understand the processes and tasks around grief (information in this workbook will help you)
- Care for your physical self with good nutrition, exercise and rest.
- Be flexible in your routine.
- Tell your story; write about your feelings.
- Seek good listeners.
- Involve yourself in work or meaningful activity.
- Identify important dates that may be difficult, and plan ahead.
- Begin to create goals and meaning in your life.
- Embrace your spirituality.
- Again, be kind and patient with yourself.

Grief is a process. There is no single and correct timetable for the waves and reactions of grief. Yet, as you work through your grief, you will regain balance, develop a sense of completeness and re-engage in life in a deeper way.

It takes courage to accept and face the difficult emotions of loss. It takes patience to discover life again.



“The experience of grief is powerful. So, too, is your ability to help yourself heal. In doing the work of grief, you are moving toward a **renewed sense of meaning and purpose** in life”

Alan Wolfelt



Myth-busting

The myths and misinformation about grief can create a great deal of harm and prevent others from helping you through the grieving process.

Below is a list of common myths.

Ask yourself, "Do I believe any of these to be true?"

Be honest with yourself. Tick any that might have influenced your thinking / beliefs about grief and grieving.

MYTH #1

The goal of grief is to get over it.

This is simply not true. The goal of grief is to "find an enduring connection with the person who has died while also embarking on a new life." This means working towards a "new normal" and learning to live with grief.

MYTH #2

If you ignore grief, it will go away.

Unfortunately, choosing to ignore grief will usually end in more emotional pain, "What we resist will simply persist" is an important phrase worth remembering. It is exhausting to keep up the mental and emotional walls required to ignore something as big as grief. It is better to acknowledge and move through grief.

MYTH #3

Staying busy is a good way to cope.

Just like Myth #2, this is foolhardy thinking and leads to exhaustion. There is no way that choosing to stay busy will help you to complete the essential tasks of grieving; it will only distract and postpone the work of grief and mourning.

MYTH #4

Grief is purely an emotional reaction to loss.

The mind and body are closely related, which means grief involves the whole body and impacts us emotionally, physically, cognitively, and spiritually.

MYTH #5

Grief is a predictable, ordered process.

Just like most other personal and emotional experiences, it is rarely predictable. Just like the love you shared, your grief can feel very much like a roller coaster ride. It follows no timeline and is not necessarily logical.

MYTH #6

Grieving involves the person "letting go" of the person who has died.

We never let go of those we love! Bereavement involves accepting their death in the process of creating an enduring emotional, psychological, and spiritual connection.

MYTH #7

Grievers should choose to be left alone.

While sanctuary and solitude can be very important, the bereaved need a balance of opportunities to share their feelings, concerns, memories as well as to receive support from others.



Grief work and growing stronger

One of the many parts of grief work is that of building resilience. If you are not familiar with what resilience is, consider this imagery:



“The oak fought the wind and was broken;
the willow bent when it must, and survived.”

Robert Jordan

The Fires of Heaven

Resilience is the ability to experience adversity so that we come through it either unharmed or somehow better off for the experience.

It requires us to be courageous and patient.

It is our resilience that allows us to rebound from distress and trauma.

Telling our story is one of the techniques we can use in bereavement to help nurture resilience.



“When we put our traumatic experiences into words, we tend to become less concerned with the emotional events that have been weighing us down.”

James Pennebaker

Writing to Heal:

A Guided Journal

for Recovering from Trauma and Emotional Upheaval

Just Breathe – mindful breathing

When we are under stress, it is easy for us to forget to breathe properly. Take a few moments, right now, to notice your breath so that you become aware and mindful as it moves through you.



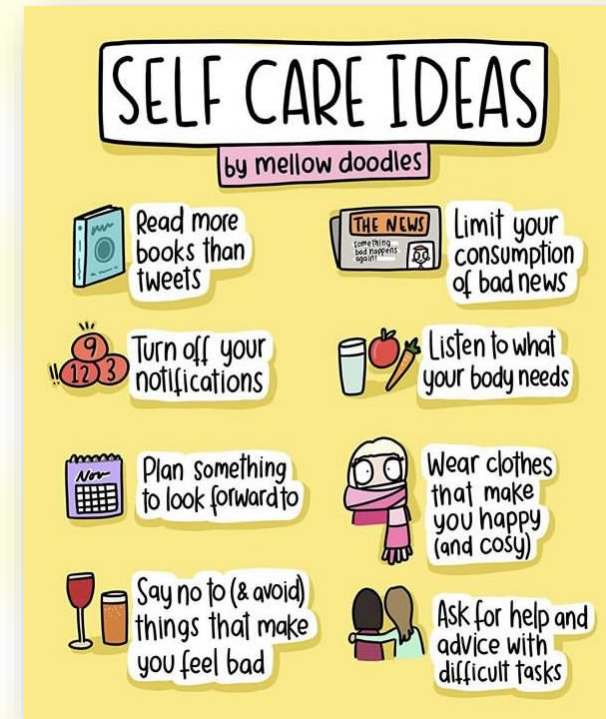
The following 4 simple steps will bring you greater peace of mind while nourishing every cell in your body:

- Sit in a comfortable position. Where ever you are sitting, your spine should be long and straight, yet relaxed.
- Find a comfortable position for your hands, either folded gently in your lap or resting on your thighs or knees with palms up or down.
- Close your eyes if that feels comfortable. If you'd rather keep them open, find a spot on the floor a few feet in front of you and allow your gaze to soften. As you sit, begin to notice the temperature of the air around you and notice any sounds you can hear. Also, notice your body's weight and feel the floor / seat beneath you, holding you. This is an exercise in expanding your awareness without feeling the need to change anything.
- Focus your attention on the movement of your breath as it moves in and out of your body. As you inhale, notice the temperature of the air as it flows through your nostrils on its way to your lungs. Notice your tummy, your ribs, and your chest and shoulders as they gently expand and raise. As you exhale, take notice of the same things.

If you're ready to tackle the first journal writing prompt, then do so now. If not, it's enough to step back from this part of your grief work and just breathe. You may want to consider other self-care ideas:

Self-care ideas:

- Turn off your phone for an hour, if you can, to protect you from interruptions – this is *your* time, for **you**.
- Wrap yourself up in a nice warm blanket / duvet and have a nice warm milky drink – especially towards the end of the day – it can aid sleep
- Make sure to look after your physical needs – eat a healthy and well-balanced diet; limit alcohol consumption
- Indulge in a good book
- Do something you are good at or enjoy to clear your mind of other thoughts that may be crowding in on you at the moment
- Take a short nap in the sunshine (when the sun shines!)
- Limit your consumption of bad news – our TV, radio and newspapers and social media can be full of it
- Reach out for help if you need it.



Journal Writing

While you may not consider yourself an avid writer, the tool of journal writing can be really helpful and healing.

You might like to consider buying yourself a special notebook or beautifully decorated journal for your writing. Why not buy some really nice pens and coloured pencils too? As you write in your journal, you might want to plan in this way:

- Try to write continuously for 15 minutes
- Write only for yourself
- If you feel like you are going to crash, emotionally, then switch topics or change your focus for a while

When you finish your 15 minute writing session, you might like to ask yourself the following:

- To what extent was I able to express my deepest thoughts and feelings?
- To what extent do I currently feel sad or upset? (You might like to give yourself a 'mood score' out of 10 – 10 being the highest positive score, 1 being the lowest)
- To what extent was today's writing valuable and meaningful for me?



Through journal writing, you have an unparalleled opportunity to look inward to identify your greatest strengths and reflect on your challenges and opportunities. It can help build resilience and grow stronger for your life ahead.

Writing out our losses can be very therapeutic. The word *therapy* comes from the Greek word *therapei* which means the kind of attention one gives to something sacred. The way your life was connected with the story of the person who died is a sacred story of the unique journey you walked. Keeping a journal is a powerful way to honour that journey.



"And what, you ask, does writing teach us? First and foremost, it reminds us that we are alive and that it is a gift and a privilege, not a right."

Ray Bradbury
Zen in the Art of Writing

WEEK TWO...or whenever you're ready

Developing Self-Awareness: What's going on in my head?!

Throughout your bereavement journey, you may discover that 'purging' on the page can be a remarkable way to 'dump' your thoughts and feelings, giving them a little more order. Sometimes it's confusion; other times it's a rush of fear and anxiety, and there might also be a growing sense (however tiny) of gratitude and appreciation.

A little reminder:

What 3 words would you use to describe how you are feeling right now?

What mood score (out 10) would you give yourself right now?

Use the space below (or in your journal) to write about your thoughts and feelings:

WEEK FOUR ...or whenever you're ready

When I think about you, I feel....

You're getting to the heart of it now. This prompt can be used time and time again because your feelings can and will change often. Early on in your grieving, you may notice that your feelings can change many times in a short period of time. As you journey through your grief work, these fluctuations and changes may slow and your emotions stabilise. Until then, using this prompt regularly can heighten your awareness about exactly how you are feeling at any given time.

A little reminder:

What 3 words would you use to describe how you are feeling right now?

What mood score (out 10) would you give yourself right now?

When I think about you, I feel....

WEEK FIVE ...or whenever you're ready

If I could talk to you again, I'd tell you...

Your journal can be a creative way to explore this powerful and emotive question. What would you say? A word of kindness and love? Or some words of rebuke. A chance, maybe, to speak your mind about a particular matter. No one will see what you write here, so please be honest and true to your heart.

A little reminder:

What 3 words would you use to describe how you are feeling right now?

What mood score (out 10) would you give yourself right now?

If I could talk to you again, I'd tell you.....

WEEK SIX ...or whenever you're ready

One of my fondest memories of you is...

Like sugar on the tongue, a sweet memory can enliven the heart and cause our spirit to soar once more. Take a moment or two to note down one of your most treasured memories.

A little reminder:

What 3 words would you use to describe how you are feeling right now?

What mood score (out 10) would you give yourself right now?

One of my fondest memories of you is....

What emotions do you feel when looking back on this memory?

WEEK SEVEN ...or whenever you're ready

One of my least favourite memories is....

Life is full of contrasting experiences. Sometimes we have difficult memories that evoke pain and sadness, regret and remorse.

A little reminder:

What 3 words would you use to describe how you are feeling right now?

What mood score (out 10) would you give yourself right now?

One of my least favourite memories of you is....

What emotions do you feel when looking back on this memory?

WEEK EIGHT ...or whenever you're ready

Capturing Dialogue: chronicle your wishes and regrets

This is a similar exercise to "If I could talk to you again, I'd tell you...." This time, you are encouraged to write down the things you wished you had said when they were alive – maybe in the time just before they died and/or throughout your shared time together. It can also be valuable to write about those things you wished you had not said. But it's OK to leave that for another time, if you wish.

A little reminder:

What 3 words would you use to describe how you are feeling right now?

What mood score (out 10) would you give yourself right now?

I wish I had told you...

Tracking your progress

It can be really helpful to keep a track on where you feel you are each week / fortnight / month.

Below are two possible tools to help you do this.

You might want to talk with a Bereavement Supporter or Therapist, if you have one, as you prepare to complete these.

Grief Wheel

Mark on the wheel where you think you are in each category.

1 is least positive
10 is most positive

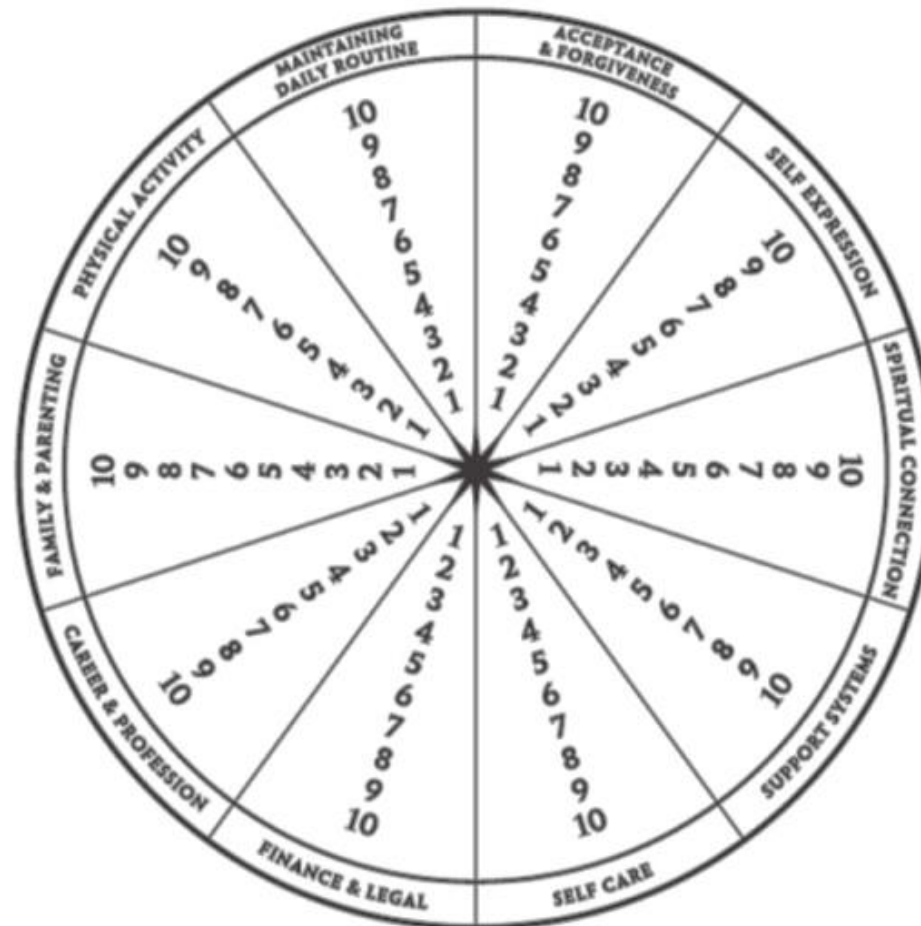
Use a different colour each time you do this exercise. Join the scores in each category with the same colour pen.

There is a colour key set out below.

If you prefer, you could use the Grief Recovery Star instead.

Choose whichever suits you best.

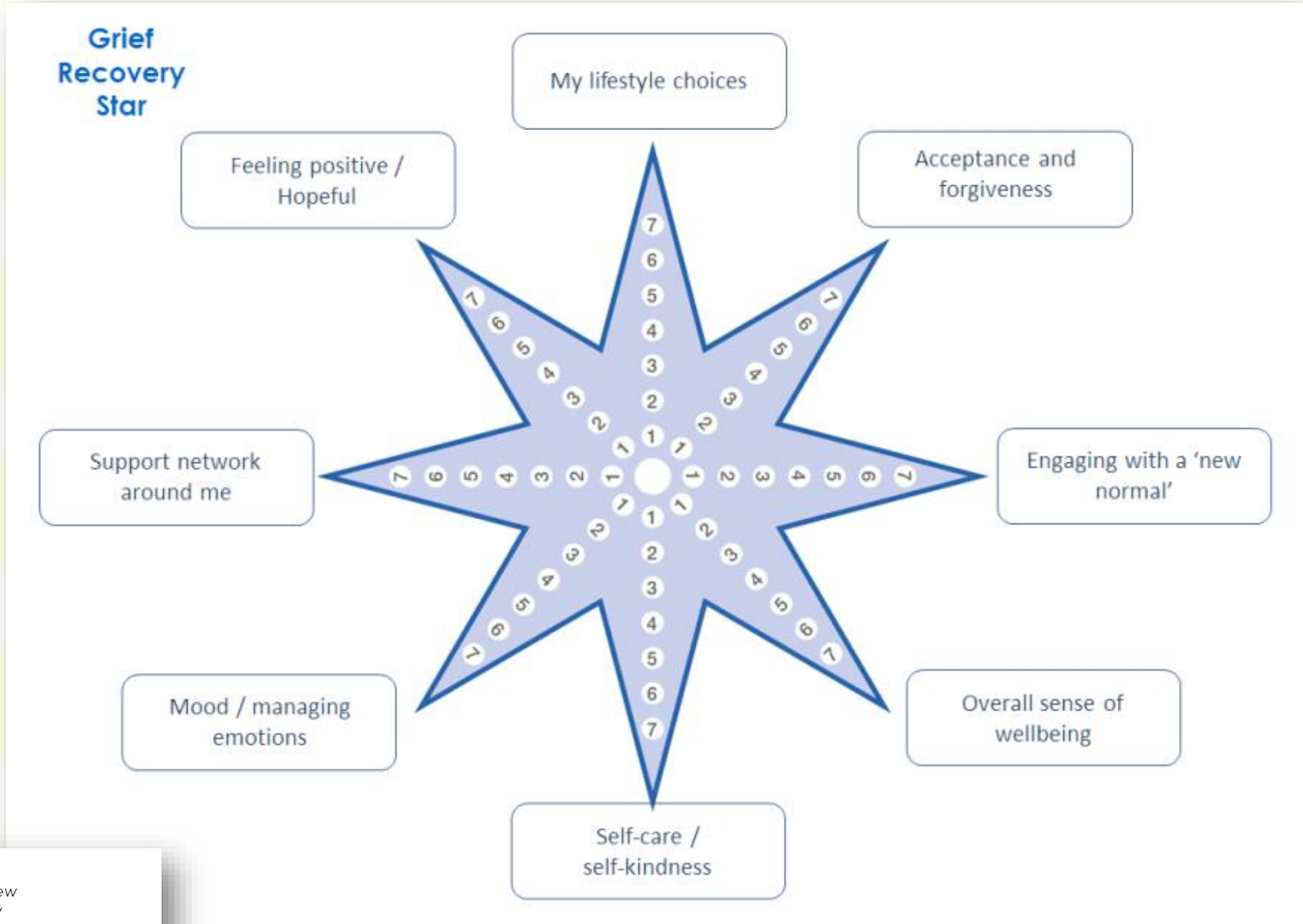
There is an example completed Recovery Star for you to see below too.



Key to Lines

- Initial view
- 2nd View
- Review
- Preferred (realistic) future

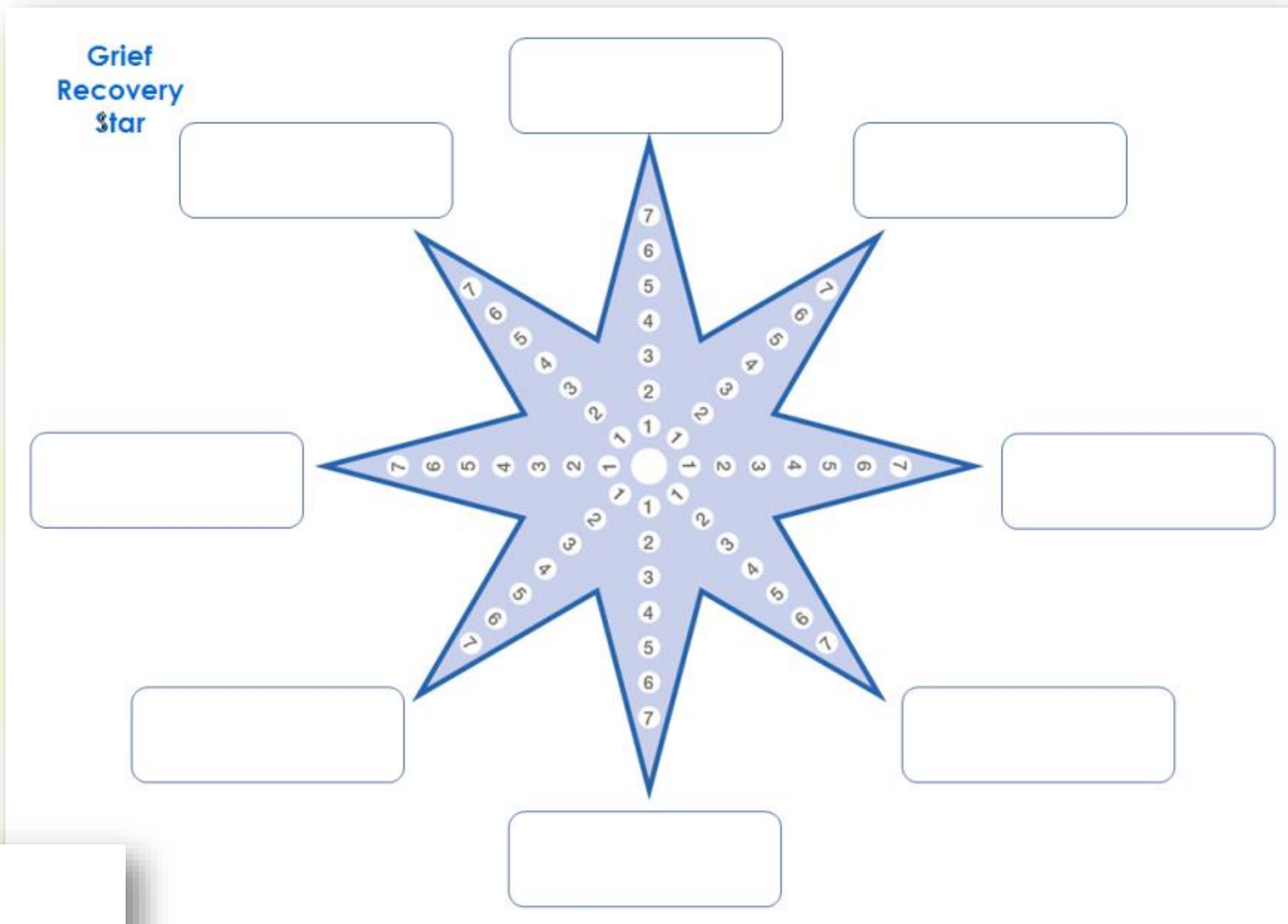
Or this:



Key to Lines

- Initial view
- 2nd View
- Review
- Preferred (realistic) future

If you'd prefer to use your own headings for each point of the Star, here's a completely blank one:



- Key to Lines**
- Initial view
 - 2nd View
 - Review
 - Preferred (realistic) future

Learning to live with your grief

Thank you for spending time with this workbook. It has probably only skimmed the surface of the complex emotions, anxieties and concerns you feel today and may continue to feel in the future.

Please be gentle with yourself in your grief work. If you need to take a break from it, that's OK.

Think of this workbook and your journal (if you're keeping a separate one) as a container for your grief.

To help honour the journey of your grief work, here are a few hints and tips that you might like to bear in mind:

- Always be gentle with yourself – grief work is part of a healing process
- Listen to your favourite music as you think, write and reflect
- Limit your journaling time – maybe to a maximum of 45 minutes
- Develop a ritual for your journal time
 - Try lighting a candle at the beginning of each session
 - End with a few moments of quietness and mindful breathing

The routine will help you to honour this is a 'sacred' space and time with your grief.



“This is what rituals are for. We do spiritual ceremonies as human being in order to create a safe resting place for our most complicated feelings of joy or trauma so that we don't have to haul those feelings around with us forever, weighing us down. We all need such places of ritual safekeeping. And I do believe that if your culture of tradition doesn't have the specific ritual you are craving, then you are absolutely permitted to make up a ceremony of your own devising, fixing your broken-down emotional systems with all the do-it-yourself resourcefulness of a generous plumber/poet.”

Elizabeth Gilbert

Eat, Pray, Love

Not the last word....

Learning to live with your grief is achieved by a series of small steps and action choices.

You are amazing! You have chosen to seek support and guidance along the journey of grief. That is a really important step to take.

If this workbook has been a useful tool to accompany you, then that is really wonderful.

If you have ideas or suggestions for its development, we would be pleased to hear from you.

If you would like to talk to someone about your grief, do please contact us here at Emmanuel Church, Staunton by emailing us via: eecsrector@gmail.com

Thank you.