



Build a Life
AFTER LOSS

THE WORKBOOK

A Personal Plan for Healing After Loss

JULIE CLUFF

Grief Healing Workbook



About the Author

Julie Cluff is a grief coach and a leading specialist in grief education. She's the founder of Build a Life After Loss, a company dedicated to providing uplifting and skilled grief support and education. She's an inspirational speaker, the host of the popular Build a Life After Loss podcast, the leader of the online community True Hope Club and trainer in grief coach education. She developed the Hope Model of Healing and the 5 Foundations of Growth to assist those who are grieving in their journey to healing.

In addition to training manuals, Julie authored the book *Miracles in the Darkness* in which she shares her personal story of tragic losses and hope-filled recovery after the divorce from her first husband, the suicide of her brother, and the death of her two youngest children in a car accident on Mother's Day. She's a frequent radio, podcast, and television guest.

Julie is the loving mother of 6, wife to Ron and grandma to 10 beautiful grandchildren. She and Ron live with their puppy Scout in Lehi, Utah. She loves reading, playing the piano, playing tennis and spending time with her fun, rambunctious family.

Links:

website: buildalifeafterloss.com

free webinar: buildalifeafterloss.com/gift

facebook: Build a Life After Loss with Julie Cluff <https://www.facebook.com/buildalifeafterloss>

instagram: [@buildalifeafterloss](https://www.instagram.com/buildalifeafterloss)

Disclaimer: This program is educational and self-directed. It is not meant to be a substitute for professional mental health therapy. If you are experiencing clinical depression or clinical anxiety or another mental disorder, we recommend that you seek the appropriate mental health support. You are responsible for your own feelings and decisions as it relates to this material.

Introduction

If you're reading this book, chances are you've experienced a loss. I too have lived through the pain of loss and grief which is why I'm here to support you.

I was recently rereading some excerpts from my book *Miracles in the Darkness: Building a Life After Loss* and I was remembering that excruciatingly painful period of my life after my daughter Carrie and my son David died in a car accident. (To listen to my story, visit <https://www.buildalifeafterloss.com/post/1> or you can read the full account in my book *Miracles in the Darkness*.)

This is what I wrote about that time of grief, guilt and shame after the accident.

"I was so consumed with self-reproach that I rejected any attempts of soothing. I was in no position to comfort another and witnessing my husband Ron's pain only increased my self-hatred. After all, I concluded, I was to blame for our suffering." (*Miracles in the Darkness*, pg 48)

"I blamed myself for every difficulty in our life. If Ron was stressed, it was my fault. If the kids were struggling, it was my fault. That's how I viewed my world." (ibid., pg. 55)

"I did not want to exist anymore. Living and breathing felt forced on me. Each morning I would wake up wishing I hadn't. I wondered why I survived the accident. I was convinced that everyone's life would have been far better had I died too." (ibid., pg. 60)

My condition was dismal, my pain incomprehensible and yet I was able to eventually recover and rebuild a life that I love through time and persistent effort.

In May 2020, I read someone's post in a group for bereaved parents. She expressed the agony of child loss and her despair. To offer hope, I shared my feelings about my experience with rebuilding.

This is what I wrote:

"Hi wonderful parents! This is the week my children died 13 years ago on Mother's Day in a rollover accident and I was driving the car. Carrie was 10. David was 8. The pain was worse than anything I could imagine. I kept asking myself how can a person possibly live with this much pain! It was excruciating! How can I survive? How *will* I survive?

"But I had things to live for, so I had to figure out how to live. The problem is I thought I had to change the situation to feel better, but I didn't. I couldn't change the situation! NOTHING was going to bring Carrie and David back. NOTHING!

"Little by little I reentered life. I learned how to live again. I learned how to appreciate what was in front of me. I learned how to think differently about what happened. I

learned to forgive myself.

“The very first anniversary of their death my older daughters surprised us by flying home from college to spend that painful weekend with us. That weekend I learned I could grieve and feel joy! I sat in church with my children who were still with us and I allowed myself to feel so grateful to be a mother – to be the mother of my living kids and my kids who went to heaven ahead of us. I allowed myself to feel joy. It changed the way I felt about Mother’s Day. This horrible day that could have been horrible the rest of my life changed into a day of tremendous love and gratitude.

“Overtime, I began to allow more joy. I allowed the sadness. I allowed all of it to heal my broken heart. I allowed God to reign. I stopped arguing with him. I accepted his will for me, for my kids, for everything. I completely reframed my thinking around everything that happened. Now I truly believe life happens for us.

“Someone posted they just wanted to die. I remember feeling that way in the early days. I remember feeling like life could not and should not exist as it existed right then. It’s a horrible place to be. It’s excruciating.

“Please, please get the support you need to live. Please open your heart to hope that there are better days ahead. I stand as testament that there are better days ahead.

“I love my life now. I live in joy and peace although not without struggle. I have purpose. There is a reason I’m still here. There is a reason *you’re* still here!

“Please be good to yourself! Be compassionate and loving to yourself! Remember you are loved and cared for. You are worthy of love and care. Practice believing it. Everything can change. How you feel today is not how you’ll feel tomorrow. Hold on! Stay in the fight. Believe that it’s possible tomorrow could be a better day.

“I love you and I believe in you and in your healing, because I’ve experienced it myself! Be good to yourself! You deserve your best care.” (Facebook post May 5, 2020)

Healing your grief is a journey worth taking. Despite the emotional wounds you’ve suffered because of loss, there is hope. This program is all about hope and the steps you can choose to take to heal your broken heart. We’ll provide the tools and the support to help you along the way. I’m glad you’re here. Let’s get started.

Love, Julie

A Brief Overview

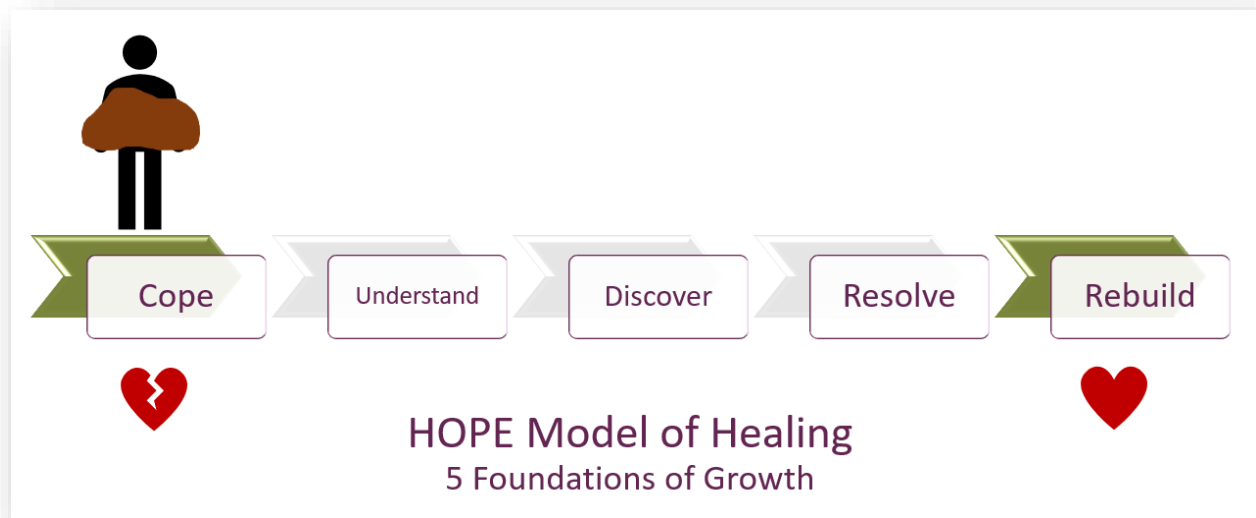
The Hope Healing Model includes the 5 foundations of growth. Each phase of healing will be presented in this program with specific information, tools, and action steps. The truths you integrate and the skills you develop will be a part of you for the rest of your life. You will use this knowledge and experience again and again as you navigate life's ups and downs.

In its simplest form the Hope Model of Healing looks like this.

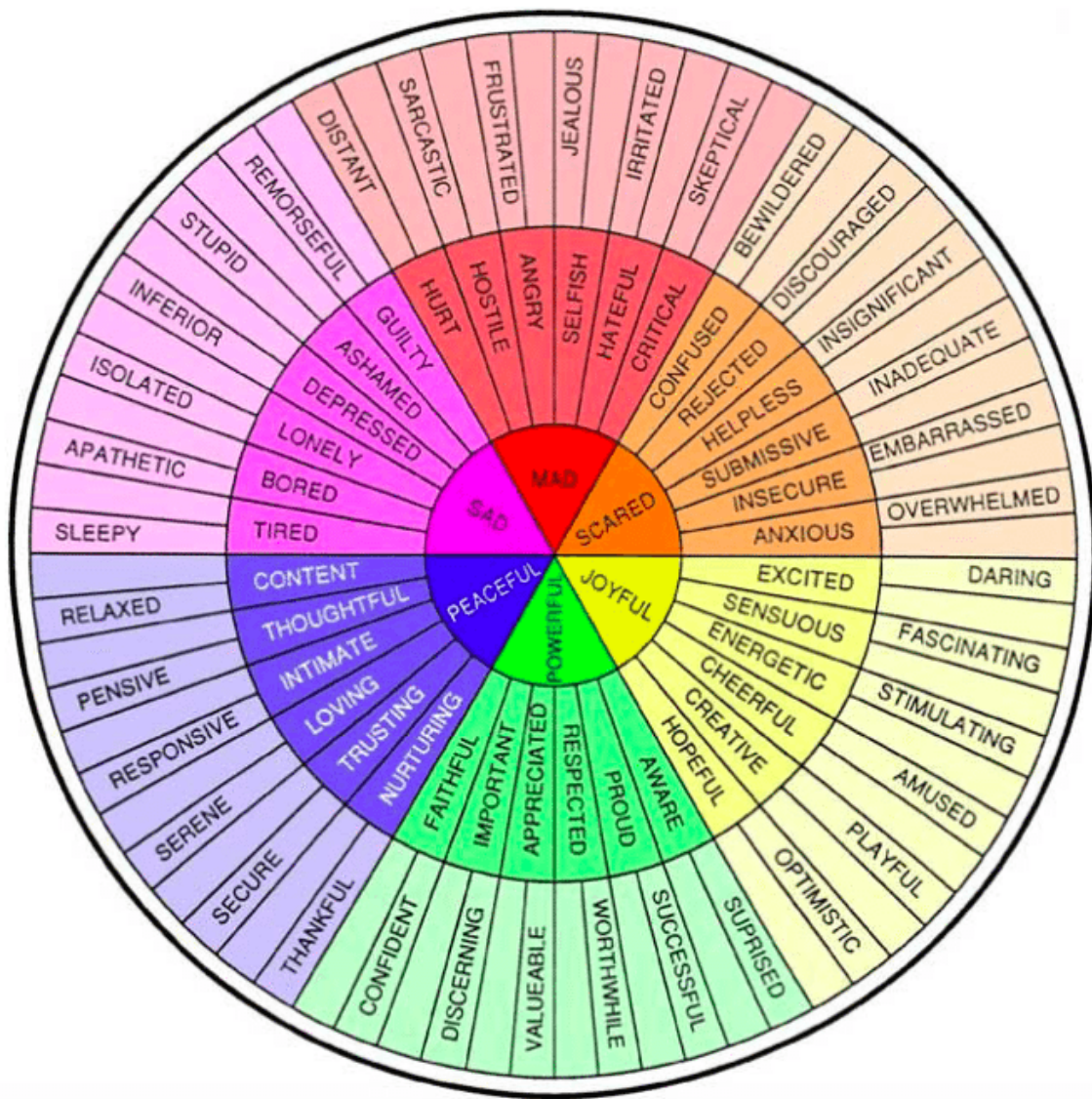


This workbook and program will provide the details of what each phase looks like and how to apply it. We'll start with preliminary information which will lay the foundation and then we'll dive into each phase of healing. The actual experience of each phase is not linear. However, in this program each phase will lay the groundwork for the next.

Without the structure of the model, we try to cope and then rebuild, completely skipping the important pieces in between. Going from coping to rebuilding without the important steps of understanding, discovering, and resolving makes rebuilding very difficult. This approach is seldom successful because we bring so much pain into the rebuilding phase.



Ultimately, most people get discouraged trying to rebuild while carrying so much grief with them that eventually they give up and decide they must stay in coping and live with the pain of grief for the rest of their life. But with time, proper understanding, tools and effort, you can let go of the pain of grief and gain wisdom, increased joy and a greater sense of confidence and purpose.



Emotions Wheel

Being able to name your specific emotions helps you to better navigate thoughts and feelings.

Chapter 1 Grief Defined

Loss is hard. Grief is painful. It feels terrible to experience the many losses that occur in a lifetime. You just want to get out of the painful spin and to feel better. You're weary from the constant barrage of grief. Like the waves of the ocean, the emotional waves of grief just keep crashing on you and taking you down again and again.

Each time a grief wave crashes on you, you start to question whether you will ever feel whole again. You wonder if you could thrive again or if feeling continuous grief is your lot in life. The more you question your own ability to handle your grief the more you spiral down. You start to heap more pain on top of the pain of grief with your judgment of yourself and your inability to manage your thoughts and emotions.

The purpose of this workbook is to increase your understanding of grief and to walk you through the five Foundations of Growth – coping, understanding, discovering, resolving, and rebuilding. These foundations are not bound by time but by lessons learned, applied and integrated, which can set your heart and mind up for emotional healing.

Grief, Mourning and Bereavement Defined

While extremely painful, grief is normal. It is the reaction that we have to loss. People who have a healthy mind experience grief. Loss can be defined as a change in circumstances. The old adage says the only constant in life is change. Some changes just feel like inconsequential bumps in the road while others create feelings of grief. These changes *require* grief and mourning which can lead to resolution.

Grief is the signal that attention is necessary. We often associate grief with death but there are dozens of life changes that create feelings of grief. Grief is the deep sorrow that we feel when we experience loss of any kind, such as death, divorce, illness, moving, pet loss, a breakup, crime, a house fire, financial loss, career loss, etc. Grief also encompasses the many varied and conflicting emotions associated with loss, which includes guilt, shame, fear, confusion, loneliness, etc.

In our society which is overly focused on positivity, grieving can feel like it's not normal. You may feel like you need to get over it as soon as possible. This feeling that you must get over it quickly can lead to additional pain as your efforts to force yourself to move on are unsuccessful. On the other hand, you may feel tremendous resistant to societal expectations and become more attached to your pain as a way of proving you have a right to grieve. This leads to victimhood. In some cases, such as losing a child, your friends and family may reinforce the idea that you will never get over your loss. While you will never get over your child or anyone else you've lost, you can get over the unrelenting pain of loss. No matter how you have responded to your grief in the past, there are answers for you to help you move through your pain with more acceptance and less resistance. By accepting your grief, you will start to feel better and will be able to use your grief to assist you in healing.

Many people will suggest that you must carry your grief with you forever and build around it. While it's true that your losses will always be a part of your story, the deep sorrow associated with grief does not have to continue for the rest of your days. In this workbook, we'll be looking at grief as a season and exploring the difference between the deep, aching sorrow of grief and the sadness you may experience occasionally after you have done the work of healing.

Draw a very distinct line between grief and occasional sadness. Experiencing sporadic, short-lived bouts of melancholy is not the same as daily carrying around the burden of deep sorrow which is grief. Often people will say, "of course, you will always grieve." But it's not true. The occasional sadness that you may continue to feel a few times a year, specifically on anniversaries of tragedy and loss, is not grief and mourning. Through grief healing, grief no longer needs to be your daily, weekly, or even monthly companion. You can release the grief so that you can make space for the good that is all around you. Carrying around heavy grief for years, blocks you from the joy in life, it stops you from pursuing passions and it keeps you from genuinely enjoying happy memories.

Alan Wolfelt wrote in *The Journey Through Grief* referring specifically to the grief following death, “grief is what you think and feel on the inside after someone you love dies. Mourning is the outward expression of those thoughts and feelings. To mourn is to be an active participant in our grief journeys. We all grieve when someone we love dies, but if we are to heal, we must also mourn.”

Sometimes the words mourning, and grief are used interchangeably but mourning is the expression of your grief. Examples of mourning may include crying or wearing black. These are outward expressions of the inward deep sorrow.

Bereavement is the state of grief or the period of grief. No one can say how long this period of grief will last. You may have heard to give it a year and things will get better. Or you may have heard the second year is worse or that the pain will continue for years. It’s not valid to give your grief or bereavement a time boundary. Each person’s experience is different as is their relationship to the loss. It’s important to respect your own process and the process of others.

Lessons from Physical Pain

One day while in college, I bounded up a flight of concrete stairs barefoot. Just before I reached the top, my right foot collided painfully into the concrete. The pain stopped me immediately. My roommates helped me to a car and drove me to the walk-in clinic on campus. My foot was examined and x-rayed and not surprisingly I learned that I had fractured the bone just below my small toe. They casted my foot and ankle to limit mobility, gave me a protocol for healing and sent me home.

When we experience physical pain, we understand the need to slow down, seek answers and get support from those who can help us. Unfortunately, when we’re in emotional pain, we believe that we need to keep busy and that time will heal our wounds. Imagine applying that to a physical injury.

In the experience of breaking my foot, to keep busy I would have ignored the pain and ran up two more flights of stairs to prove that I could. It’s ridiculous to consider.

If I was to just wait for time to heal, I would have just sat down and waited. Now the pain may have eventually gone away but without the care and protocol to encourage healing I probably wouldn’t have healed well or completely. Again, it’s a ridiculous way to approach a physical injury, especially a severe one.

Physical pain is there as a warning. Imagine if you didn't experience pain when you broke your ankle or had an appendicitis or any number of injuries or disease. Without the warning of pain, you wouldn't know that something is wrong and that it needed to be addressed.

This program is like casting a broken ankle and following a protocol for healing. The setting of the bone, the casting of the ankle and the protocol don't heal the ankle. Your body holds the miracle of healing. The cast and the healing protocol work with your body to promote healing. Likewise, this program offers education and tools to help you work with the healing properties that already reside in your body, mind and spirit.

Just as physical pain is a warning, emotional pain is a warning that your emotional health needs attention. Let's look at the 3 S's that we naturally apply to caring for physical pain and how that relates to emotional pain.

1. **Stop and slow down.** In a world that asks, "what have you done for me lately?" it feels hard to stop and slow down and give your emotional wound the time and attention it needs. However, if you don't, it will fester and become infected. Your grief requires space to express your grief and to work through the many emotions and conflicts that your loss experience has triggered.
2. **Seek answers.** Grief is not a topic taught in school. It's also not a topic of conversation or exploration in general. Therefore, when you find yourself in the pain of grief, you don't know what to do or what's normal. Grief is a topic of great importance to understand but you don't know you need that understanding until you find yourself in the middle of it. One important component of this program is to offer more knowledge about grief. As scientists better understood gravitational laws, they were able to work with the laws of gravity to fly a plane and launch a rocket. As you better understand your grief, you will be better equipped to travel through it and eventually thrive, not merely survive.
3. **Get Support.** Think of all the areas of your life in which you have sought support. If you wanted to learn a new skill, you found a teacher who could teach it to you. If you wanted to learn to lift weights, you hired a personal trainer. If you wanted to develop greater spirituality, you found a church or a preacher or spiritual guru. If you hurt yourself, you saw a doctor or a specialist. Why is it we're hesitant to find support for our emotional pain?

You cannot face your new challenges with the same level of support you had before your loss. Your support needs to be greater than your challenge. I'm confident that because you are here, you understand the need to seek support in your grief and healing journey. Trust the process and lean into this experience of growth and healing.

Questions to Consider

1. What ways have I slowed down and given my grief space? _____

2. How do I feel about slowing down and paying attention to my grief? _____

3. In what ways have I sought for answers? _____

4. How do I feel about asking for help? _____

5. Where have I received support? Are there other ways I would like to seek support? _____

Responsibility and Choice

In Viktor Frankl's book *Man Search for Meaning*, he writes about the suffering in his years in Nazi concentration camps that he and his fellow captors endured.

He said,

“We who lived in concentration camps can remember the men who walked through the huts comforting others, giving away their last piece of bread. They may have been few in number, but they offer sufficient proof that everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms — to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way.”

In this oft-quoted, powerful statement, Frankl emphasizes the power of responsibility and choice. You are not in a concentration camp. Your circumstances are different than Frankl's, but you have found yourself in a position of pain that is calling for you to choose to learn and grow.

The program before you is both educational and a plan for you to learn and explore your own experience with loss and grief. You are taking responsibility for your own experience. You are choosing to face your pain rather than ignore it.

You have felt powerless in your grief but now is the time to choose to take back your power by facing your pain and addressing it with patience and self-compassion.

Viktor Frankl also said, “Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom.” Losses and the resultant grief are the stimulus, now you get to choose your response, and choose to take responsibility for your response.

You take responsibility as you open your heart and mind to the possibility of healing. I have experienced this healing through learning and exploring and being willing to look at things differently.

Your Soul Expanded

Bad things happen. They happen all the time. As listed before there are many loss events that you may experience. People we love get hurt or ill, or die, boyfriends or girlfriends leave, marriages end, people are sometimes mean and cruel, we lose a job, we lose a home, we move. There are dozens of events in life that cause feelings of grief. As human beings on the planet we are built for this. How do we know this? Because bad things have been happening since the world began. What this tells us is that even though loss and grief are painful you can learn to cope and then move through the pain of grief.

When you experience grief, it takes you to a new level of pain that you haven’t experienced before. It stretches you and expands your soul. The expansion of your soul is painful, but it can lead to greater joys and meaning in the future.

We tend to think that when bad things happen that we need things to go back to our old normal so that we can start living again. Then one day we wake up to the idea that living through grief, and learning to cope, understand, discover, resolve, and rebuild *is* living. Without exception these are the times when we have lived the most, when we have had to dig deep, find our resolve, pick up our courage and travel forward.

Life never goes back to your previous normal after a painful loss. But life can be different *and* good. You can work through your grief and rebuild your life. On the other side of the pain, like emerging from a dark room, the sun is brighter, the joy is deeper, and the triumphs are greater. No matter where you find yourself on life’s timeline of loss and gain, know that you are living life right now.

Questions to Consider

1. How do I feel about taking responsibility for my response to my grief?

2. How do I feel about being open to learning and growing in my grief and through my healing journey? _____

3. Am I committed to my healing? In what ways am I willing to take responsibility for my learning and growth?

Suggested Build a Life After Loss Podcast Episodes

Ep 33 Avoiding Victim Mentality

Ep 64 The Power of Choice

Ep 50 Take 1% Responsibility

Ep 77 Moving Through Grief

Chapter 2: The Challenge of Grief

Understanding Emotions

Emotions make us human and yet we have the least amount of understanding of our emotions. We spend years in classrooms learning to use our intellect. We learn how to strengthen the physical body. Often, we receive spiritual training from churches, pastors or spiritual gurus but seldom do we learn anything about emotions.

In some ways the psychology community has made us *think* that emotions are their area of expertise and that they can never be understood by amateurs. Similar to how priests in the dark ages were the only ones with access to the Bible before the printing press made it possible for the common person to own their own Bible. Psychologists don't hoard emotional understanding intentionally, but perhaps this is the way we have interpreted it. We need to change that interpretation because it's important for you to get involved with your emotions. You want to learn to understand your emotions, how you create your emotions, how to feel your emotions and what your emotions mean. When you get involved in your own emotions and understand how to work with them, you can enjoy phenomenal emotional health.

We often think that better emotional health is just an accident. We believe that some people are born with it and some people aren't. But think of a person who has neglected their physical health for many years and then they decide to learn and apply principles of nutrition and physical exercise. What happens? They improve their physical health. The same can be applied to emotional health. When you learn the principles of emotional self-care and you practice those principles, you can enjoy incredible emotional health.

Our lack of emotional understanding is particularly difficult when we experience a loss. We don't know anything about grief because we avoid learning anything about it until we find ourselves in pain. So we don't know what to do, but we do know we can no longer ignore our feelings. They demand to be felt.

Some will tell you, you must build your life around your grief, and that your grief will always be a part of you. They believe that you will always hold the pain in some form. There is a better way. A healing way. A more encouraging, hopeful way. Through the phases of the healing model you will learn how to resolve your grief instead of mask it. When you do this, rebuilding then becomes much easier because you're building on a solid foundation.

When I went through a divorce from my first husband, when I lost my brother John to suicide and when my parents divorced no one told me I couldn't heal. I expected to heal, and I worked on healing. I don't remember anyone telling me I could heal either, nevertheless, I was determined to find a way. I listened and learned and then applied what I was learning.

When my children died, people would say things like, "I imagine you will always grieve." Maybe you've heard similar responses from people regarding your losses. This message isn't helpful as it puts you into a position of needing to figure out how to rebuild while still holding onto your grief.

And yet, we are never taught what to do. We are never taught how to handle grief or emotional pain.

Questions to Consider

What emotional training or what examples of emotional management have you had? Were they mostly positive or negative training or examples?

Because we lack understanding, when bad things happen, we rely on our intellect, our physical strength, and our spiritual muscle but we don't use our emotions to help us. The very thing we need.

Grief is not the problem. The way we think and feel about grief, or any feeling for that matter, is the problem. In this world that over glamorizes positivity it's easy to think there is something wrong with you when you experience grief or any negative emotion.

In fact, our emotions are clues. They are the breadcrumbs of life that can lead us down the path to the very things we desire if we will learn how to read the clues. Grief is the very thing that can lead to healing. But when you think something is wrong with you because you are experiencing the pain of loss you are focused on the wrong thing.

Listen to what Dr. Lisa Firestone has to say about how common trauma is. "A trauma can be defined as any significant negative event or incident that shaped us. It can emerge from any impactful instance that made us feel bad, scared, hurt or ashamed. By this definition, we have all experienced some degree of trauma in the process of growing up." It's an interesting perspective to consider that we all have experienced some degree of trauma in our formative years.

Loss and trauma create painful feelings. The associated emotions of pain, such as grief, guilt, shame or fear are uncomfortable. I believe it is uncomfortable so that we search for solutions as I mentioned previously.

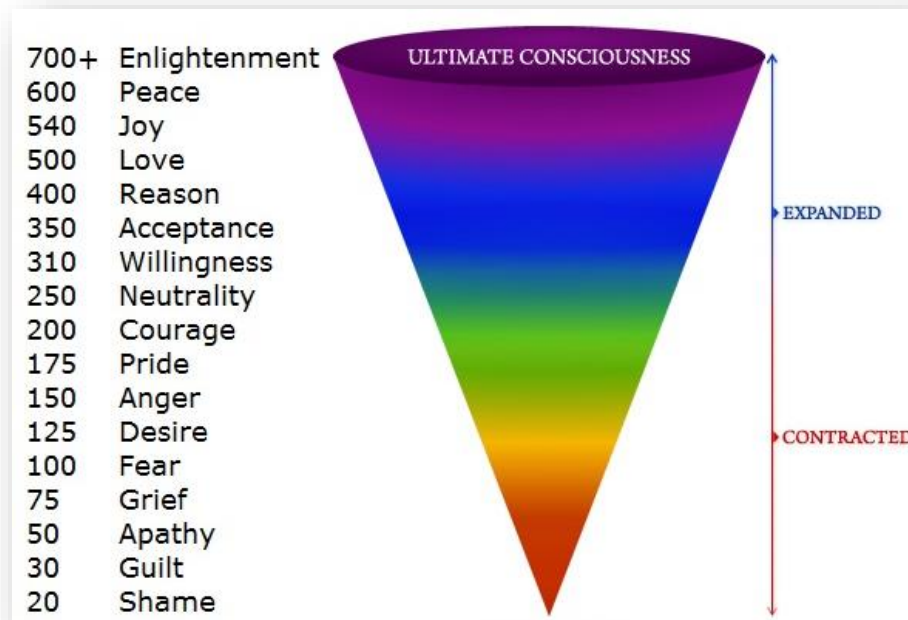
Dr. Peter Levine suggested, that "It is how we respond to a traumatic event that determines whether trauma will be a cruel and punishing Medusa turning us into stone, or whether it will be a spiritual teacher taking us along vast and uncharted pathways."

That is the importance of the work you are doing in this program. You are learning how to respond to and work with your grief, so it is a teacher and healer, and not a monster that destroys you.

Emotions are energy in motion

Emotions move your energy. You know what it feels like to feel love, to feel gratitude or to feel angry. As you read each emotion, you have memories of feeling it. You can almost feel the energy of that feeling in your body just by thinking of it.

Dr. David Hawkins developed a useful tool to help us to see how our emotions either expand our energy or contract our energy. He placed a series of emotions on a scale to illustrate the expanded and contracted emotions. He assigned a vibrational level to each listed emotion.



Look at where grief is on his scale? As shown in this chart, grief is a very contracted emotion. Before your loss event you may have been living on the vibration of courage, willingness, or love. Then something happened that moved you into grief. It's ok that you are in grief and experiencing contraction. It may be the very experience you need to have right now to allow you to pay attention, slow down and seek answers.

But you don't want to live there forever. In fact, as mentioned in the previous chapter, your loss experience can be a catalyst to expand your soul. An article on cancer.net explains "post-traumatic growth". "post-traumatic growth describes the positive life changes that develop through a stressful, frightening experience. Researchers note that post-traumatic growth is not the same as resilience. Resilience describes people returning to their previous levels of functioning. Meanwhile, post-traumatic growth refers to positive personal change." ([https://www.cancer.net/survivorship/life-after-cancer/post-traumatic-growth-and-cancer.](https://www.cancer.net/survivorship/life-after-cancer/post-traumatic-growth-and-cancer))

In this same article they mentioned 5 possible areas in which a griever might experience growth. They are: “improved relations with others, new life experiences, greater appreciation for life, a sense of personal strength and spiritual development.” Even though right now you may feel that you aren’t having these growth experiences, these are all available to you. It’s not where you are, it’s where you are headed that counts.

If you believe you can heal your grief, you are far more likely to heal than if you believe healing is not possible. Continue to hold onto the idea that healing is possible, even if you don’t understand the how yet.

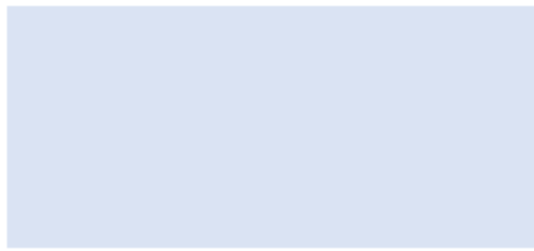
Our emotions affect the way we interact with the world.

Low vibration emotions tend to attract more low vibration emotions and high vibration emotions tend to attract more high vibration emotions.

Your grief impacts the way you see the world and the way you interact with your world. As you come to better understand your grief, you will be better prepared to work with your grief and feel the clean pain of loss, rather than heap additional guilt and shame on top of your grief. As you look at Dr. Hawkin’s emotions chart you can see that fear, apathy, guilt and shame are close neighbors to grief. It is common to experience all these feelings during grief.

You have a certain level of capacity. When you experience a loss, it affects your capacity. The illustration below shows what happens when you’re experiencing grief. The grief consumes much of your natural capacity. This is why you find it difficult to do what you have done in the past.

This lack of capacity may cause you to feel overwhelmed and confused. This is normal and is why you may want to look at simplifying your life as much as possible while you are in this season of grief.



Your Capacity



Grief

Your Capacity

The levels of grief

Perhaps you noticed that your grief has changed quality over time. Where you once felt completely consumed by grief every day, maybe now you feel that it is more manageable, or the intensity has lessened.

In each of the diagrams below you will see the 5 levels of grief illustrated, including the common emotions and behaviors associated with that level of grief. The concerns represent what to look out for. It's particularly important to address these concerns and warning signs.



Level 5 is the All-consuming Grief that envelops you in the early days of grief. Illness is common because of our weakened state. Accidents can occur because of the distraction and disorientation of grief. During this time of intense pain and shock you may find it exceedingly difficult to engage in life in any meaningful way.

**Level 4:
Deep Grief**



Your Grief

Common Emotions:

- Frustration
- Confusion
- Deep Sorrow

Behaviors:

- Hiding
- Change in Sleeping and Eating Habits
- Mourning

Concerns:

- Illness & Accidents
- Isolation
- Exhaustion

Level 4 Deep Grief is characterized by confusion and deep sorrow. Again, illness and accident are a concern. You may find yourself frequently isolating and exhausted as you work through your grief.

**Level 3:
Functional Grief**



Your Grief

Common Emotions:

- Depression
- Anger
- Intense Loneliness

Behaviors:

- Isolation
- Pretend You Are OK
- Angry Outbursts

Concerns:

- Long-term Depression
- Damage Relationships
- Not Getting Needed Support

In Level 3 Functional Grief you may experience depression, anger, and intense loneliness. In time and without the needed support you may develop long-term depression or damaged relationships because of anger and isolation.

Level 2: Hidden Grief

Common Emotions:

- Shame
- Anger
- Fear



Behaviors:

- Loss of Interest
- Lingering Anger
- No Desire to Socialize

Concerns:

- Prolonged Anger
- Victim Mentality
- Hopelessness

In Level 2, Hidden Grief, you hide your grief from your friends and family to feel more accepted. You may even hide your grief from yourself. This may erupt into prolonged anger, a victim mentality or feelings of hopelessness.

Level 1: Resolved Grief

Common Emotions:

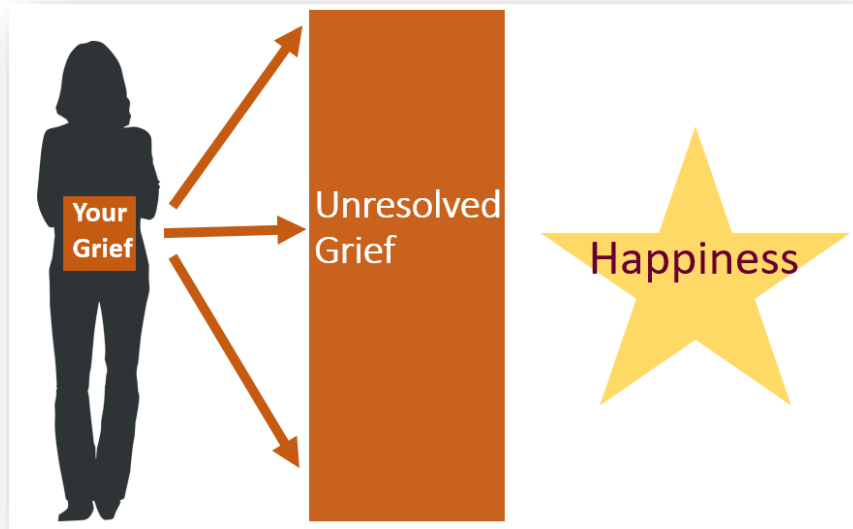
- Happiness
- Purpose
- Occasional sadness



Behaviors:

- Hobbies/Interests
- Self Care
- Comfortable Talking about Your Loss
- Social
- Build Relationships
- Live a Full Life with a Full Range of Emotions

Level 1 Resolved Grief allows you to feel free to experience happiness and purpose. While you still may feel occasional sadness, the quality of the sadness has changed and you are able to fully participate in hobbies, interests, self-care and personal relationships, as well as feeling a full range of emotions.



Deep, unresolved, hidden or functional grief can stand in the way of your happiness. When you work through the steps of personal healing your view of life will change as if you're lifting a hazy cloud. Resolution of your grief is available to you as you engage in this process.

Questions to Consider

1. Which level of grief do you most identify with and why?

Suggested Build a Life After Loss Podcast Episodes:

Ep 59 5 Stages of Grief

Ep 86 Input Determines Your Outlook

Ep 77 Moving Through Grief

Ep 94 Emotional Injury

Chapter 3: Three Prerequisites: Desire, Hope and Effort

Prerequisite #1: Desire

Everything starts with desire. What did you get lately that you desired? Maybe it was cookies or ice cream, so you stopped at the store to buy cookies or a pint of ice cream. Maybe it was new clothes or shoes, so you went online and ordered the clothes or shoes you wanted.

You might be thinking, *I wanted the new clothes or the new shoes, but I couldn't afford them, so I didn't get them.* And that's because you desired something else more than the shoes or the clothes. You desired to be fiscally responsible more than buying new shoes or you wanted to go out to dinner instead of buying the new clothes or you wanted to pay your mortgage instead of buying new shoes. You decided based on your desire.

Maybe you desire a clean house. Depending on how much you desire a clean house, is proportionate to how clean your house is. If you desire a clean house and you don't have a clean house, your desire isn't high enough to move you to action and that's ok.

I heard someone say once that we can educate our desires. What a great concept. If you educated your desires, what would that look like?

This idea that it all starts with desire is the beginning of choices. It's what causes us to choose what we choose. Desires are our inner, strongest motivations. Neal Maxwell, a scholarly theologian, said, "Your deepest desires will control your choices, and your choices will then control the consequences to be felt both in this life and in the life to come."

Desires infused with emotion lead to your choices or behaviors which leads to your results. Therefore, our actions are a result of our desires.

It is importance to believe that you can feel better, and that healing is available to you. If you don't believe you can feel better, you won't notice the support that can help you feel better, you won't search for answers and resources, and you won't do the work of healing.

But even before that you must have a profound desire to heal. Not in a quick fix sense. The most asked question I hear is, how can I solve my grief now? It's not often phrased quite like that, but that is the intent in the questions people ask. I wish I could answer that question of how to solve your grief now. The answer to that question doesn't exist. There is no quick fix. There are ways to help you down the path of healing, and there are things that take you off the path, but there is no one answer to fixing grief.

When you strictly desire to put away the pain, without the understanding of the effort required, that can get you into trouble fast. That can lead to excessive drinking, drugs, or participating in other numbing activities which instead of helping you, and bringing you closer to healing, these harmful activities separate you further from healing. Numbing is an artificial solution which is not a solution at all. The work of grief healing is to seek true healing, not numbing.

Let's review the simpler desires and choices which illustrate what is meant by educating your desire. Think about how your desires have changed over the years. When I was in high school, I spent a lot of money on pop music but as I got older, I wanted to spend my money somewhere else. My desires changed.

I used to drink soda regularly. My favorite was Dr. Pepper. I liked and drank Dr. Pepper, until I switched to Diet Coke because I desired a slimmer frame and I thought that would help me to stay thin. Over time, I learned about the negative impact of soda, so I drank less and less soda and more and more water, because I desired health more than soda. I started to see soda as chemicals and poison. I know that's strong but that really was the shift in my thinking.

Occasionally I still drink soda but usually less than once a month compared to several times a week. Why did I change? I educated my desires. I got clearer about my priorities. I sought resources that educated my desires and put me more in line with what I wanted.

I'm still working on educating my desires. I still over desire cookies, ice cream and anything sugary. My desire for sugar is greater than my desire to eliminate it, even though I believe reducing sugar intake will improve my health. I desire sugar, so I eat sugar, which leads to my results.

Desire



Behavior



Results

Desire leads to your behavior which leads to your results.

I have an opportunity to align my desires with the truth about good health. It's a work in progress. I buy more fruits and vegetables and I try to reach for them more often but it's a process. If I educate my desires enough, I'll be able to create the steady desire needed to get what I want in the long run and avoid what I don't want which is poor health. But if my desire for sugar is stronger than my desire for improved health then I will continue to reach for the sugar and experience the same results. As Einstein said, "Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results." In contrast, when I changed my thinking and desires around soda, I created a different result.

Even writing this workbook came from my thoughts and desires. It has been something I've wanted to do for a while, but I was working on my book, *Miracles in the Darkness: Building a Life After Loss*, which was my priority for a time. I finished that book and some other things happened and my desire to write this workbook increased until it led me to action.

You have the same opportunity. You can start to educate your desire around grief and healing. You wouldn't be reading this if you didn't have a desire to feel better and to heal. As you continue through this course you will be educating your desire. You've seen evidence of what's possible regarding healing which has increased your desire to seek greater levels of recovery.

Questions to Consider

1. Do I desire healing? How great is my desire to feel better? Has my desire to heal changed over time?

2. What benefits have I experienced because of my grief? (Examples may be: People expect less of me. I don't have to show up for others. People feel sorry for me. People take care of things for me.)

3. Healing may require me to think differently and to give up old beliefs. Am I willing to let go of the benefits of grieving and hanging onto the pain?

I believe that healing from grief is available to everyone who desires to be healed, including you. But you must desire it enough to lead you to the actions of searching for the truth about healing, of finding the needed support, and of doing the work.

I understand that it's not easy. Dr. Joe Dispenza speaks to the way our minds work and how trauma affects us and creates our state of being.

“Let’s face it, we’ve all had traumas, shocks, and betrayals in our life which have created strong emotional charges. It makes sense then that the stronger the emotional reaction you have to someone or something, the more you pay attention to the cause. When something with such a strong emotional quotient occurs in our life, the brain freezes the scene and takes a snapshot of the event. Now the picture becomes holographically embossed in our neural circuitry. This is the normal process of how a long-term memory is created. Our problems begin when we continuously think and feel within the boundaries of that past experience’s circuitry and feel within the chemicals of that past emotion. When we think and feel for long enough within the confines of the event’s neurochemistry, it ultimately becomes our state of being. That’s because how we think and how we feel becomes our state of being.” (Dr. Joe Dispenza, *Let Your Past Life Be a Past Life*, <https://drjoedispenza.net/blog/change/let-your-past-life-be-a-past-life/>)

Your emotional reaction to your losses and your traumas is so profound that it can keep you stuck in the past, and reliving your pain repeatedly, until it becomes your normal state of being. But even if it has become your state of being, healing is still possible. To desire healing you must feel that healing is possible.

Dr. Benjamin Hardy addresses the importance of environment in his book *Willpower Doesn't Work*. During the Vietnam War, nearly 20 percent of U.S. soldiers developed an addiction to heroin. But when they returned home a massive 95% recovered from their addiction. Why? Their environment. Their environment in Vietnam made it easy to be a heroin addict but when they got home, they were surrounded by people and places that made it difficult to be an addict. (*What Vietnam Taught Us About Breaking Bad Habits*, <https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2012/01/02/144431794/what-vietnam-taught-us-about-breaking-bad-habits>)

This isn't about overcoming a drug addiction but remember you can become addicted to your own grief and pain, as Dr. Dispenza suggested. It's a tricky tight rope to walk. Grief is normal. It's the normal reaction we have to loss and grief. Grief can be the pathway to healing as your mind and body adjust to the loss. But the chemistry produced in the body by grief can be addictive. While grief is normal and there is no timeline for how long it can last. Without intervention and your personal involvement, you can get stuck in grief. The chemistry of emotions, and specifically grief, is the scientific reason you can become stuck.

As Dr. Hardy proposes, your environment is important. I'm not suggesting you move to another country to change your environment. Sometimes we're tempted to just leave the place where we've experienced our pain. While some situations may warrant leaving your circumstances that's not usually helpful.

Your environment is not only your physical surroundings, it also includes visual, and auditory stimuli. Are you spending all day reading unhelpful posts on Facebook or Instagram that reinforce the falsehood that you must grieve the rest of your life? What do you have around your house? Do the pictures, quotes and environment encourage healing or keep you in the past? That doesn't mean you have to take down pictures of a loved one who has died, or anything similar, but do be aware of your environment. When you evaluate your environment and create an environment that promotes healing, you are educating your desire to heal.

Questions to Consider

1. What things in my environment keep me stuck in the past?

2. What things in my environment encourage and inspire me?

Louise Hay wrote in her book *You can Heal Your Heart*, “while no one can change the physical reality of a loved one dying, how we hold the experience after a loss makes all the difference in the world. How many of us put a negative interpretation on the day our loved one died? Do we talk about how a special day or holiday was forever ruined by their passing? We have such a profound way of affecting our inner world by the words we choose?”

She suggests that you practice affirmations that can aid in healing. For example, here are the affirmations she suggested to a woman who lost her mother on her own birthday, “I remember my mother with love. I celebrate my birthday with gratitude and love. My birth and life were made possible by my mother.”

Here are some affirmations you can practice. You can also create your own that speak to your circumstances.

Healing is available to me.

I choose healing.

I am whole and I always have been.

I am worth the effort to heal.

Write your affirmations here: _____

I invite you to look around your house, your social media, your work, and anywhere that you spend time and start to clean up the messages that aren't helping and start to include hopeful input that does support your healing.

In summary

1. You make choices according to your desires
2. You can educate your desires
3. Changing your environment to a healing environment can assist you in educating your desires.

Prerequisite #2: Hope

The most important feelings you can generate in your journey through grief is desire for healing and hope of healing. Hope is essential to healing.

What is hope and how can you nurture your hope?

This explanation of hope from a religious text is instructive:

“The word *hope* is sometimes misunderstood. In our everyday language, the word often has a hint of uncertainty. For example, we may say that we hope for a change in the weather or a visit from a friend. In the language of the gospel, however, the word *hope* is sure, unwavering, and active.”

Active hope is sure and unwavering. This is the type of hope we’re referring too. In the 1828 Webster Dictionary, hope is described as “confidence in a future event” and “the highest degree of well-founded expectation of good.” As you think of hope and increasing your hope, hold onto these words of confidence and expectation.

Hope is a choice. You can choose to have hope for the future. The idea of using the power of choice in this way may be foreign to you, but choosing hope is available to you. The following ideas will help you to build your hope in your future.

Recognize your wins. Recognize that your actions matter and your thoughts matter. Celebrate the little things every day. In fact, Shawn Achor, a speaker and a happiness researcher, suggests that each day you write down one positive experience from that day. He says doing this practice allows your brain to relive it and generates again the positive energy of the event. In general, we are far too hard on ourselves. When you start to acknowledge successes, even your small wins, you begin to get better at recognizing your goodness, progress and success.

Claim everything as progress and you will start to see more progress. It's amazing the things that you can find to claim as progress.

Did you get up this morning? Claim it as a success!

Did you get dressed or brush your teeth? Claim it as progress!

Did you show up at work on time? It's a success!

Did you fix dinner for your family, do the dishes, or straighten the bathroom? It's progress!

Did you work on a home or work project? Congratulations! It's a success!

Even though you may think, *but of course I did these things*, don't reject this idea. Try it out. Practice claiming your wins and successes and feeling the energy of the good in your life.

- What successes can you claim today? This week? This month? _____

Look for Role Models.

A Psychology Today article suggested that you “look for role models who have found solutions. There are many, many people who have overcome tremendous adversity. Reading their stories and surrounding yourself with supportive messages and people can help you build hope.”

Looking for role models is important. I hope I can be one of those role models for you. If you don't have hope for your future right now, start to build it with an affirmation like “If Julie can heal, perhaps it's possible for me too.” Look for hope around you through other people in your life and through their examples. Then use it as a steppingstone.

Stair stepping beliefs can be immensely helpful. This looks like starting with a new belief that is easier for you to believe and then stair stepping into greater belief in the possibilities. In other words, growing your hope.

As an example, it may look like this:

If Julie (or fill-in another role model) can heal, perhaps it's possible for me too.

It's possible I could heal from the pain of grief.

I'm learning the steps of healing.

I can heal.

I am healing.

I am healed.

Each belief leads to the next possible belief. Start with the first one and practice it until it feels true then move to the next one. Each time, you are stretching your hope and belief in your future.

Questions to Consider

- Who are my role models of overcoming challenging circumstances? What did they overcome and how is their experience an example for me?

- What do I want to believe is true? What three progressive thoughts that can lead me to greater belief and hope?

In the same Psychology Today article, they explained learned helplessness, which was discovered by Martin Seligman, one of the founding fathers of positive psychology. When you go through difficult, challenging experiences that are out of your control, you can start to feel like you have no control anywhere in your life which can create a situation where you stop trying.

I was working with a client recently who is going through a tremendously challenging divorce. I noticed he was repeatedly saying, “I have no control.” That’s an extremely dangerous message for the brain. If you repeatedly tell yourself, you have no control, you will start to live as if you have no control. But you do.

You may not have control in some situations, but there are always areas where you do have control. I pointed this trend out to my client and invited him to make a list of what he does have control over. This increased his awareness of the control he did have in his life, and he started to make incredible, positive changes because of it.

When words come out of your mouth it’s because it’s in your mind. Pay attention to the things you say. You may have never paid attention to your words before, but your words are clues to your persistent thoughts. Do you like those thoughts? Is there a better way of thinking that would serve you better? Start paying attention to your words and then follow the next recommendation.

Be kind to yourself and others.

How can you express kindness to yourself today? Can you take a break for a warm cup of tea and listen to some quiet music that’s uplifting? I love a good cup of peppermint tea! Can you read something inspiring? Can you practice some kind messages? Messages such as *I’m whole and I always have been. I am enough. I am loved. I follow my intuition. I totally love and accept myself.* What statements can you practice that would uplift you?

Check in with the affirmations you wrote previously. Practicing affirmations will create an affirmative mind. This practice will strengthen you as you face the challenges of grief. Write down 1 or 2 affirmations and post them in a couple of places where you’ll see them often. Practice saying them out loud. Repeat them in your mind several times a day. You will find it easier and easier to be kind to yourself when you are practicing good thoughts about yourself.

Be kind to others too. Who do you know who would appreciate a kind word from you? Text them today or pick up the phone and call them. Smile at someone in the grocery store. Compliment the next person you meet. Find ways to lift others in simple ways and you’ll lift yourself.

Lean on your faith.

If you have faith in God, a higher power or the universe, that is a wonderful source of hope. Do you have a daily spiritual practice? As you practice your spirituality it will open your mind to learning and hope. Your perspective will change, and you'll be able to avoid learned helplessness referred to earlier, because you will gain a perspective that you are truly never alone. There is always help and hope from a higher power to build you and support you.

To illustrate the importance of our spiritual wellbeing here is just one study that shows the power of one specific spiritual practice. There are similar studies that show the positive impact of prayer, meditation, being in nature, etc. The Center for Bible Engagement studies people's engagement with the Bible. From their website what they have found in their studies is that "the life of someone who engages in the scriptures 4 or more times a week looks radically different from the life of someone who does not. In fact, the lives of Christians who do not engage the Bible most days of the week are statistically the same as the lives of non-believers." Part of the research suggests that those who engage in the Bible 4x or more a week are 59% less likely to view pornography (and I would imagine this would extend to other risky behaviors also) and 30% less likely to struggle with loneliness."

These statistics speak to the importance of continuing or strengthening your spiritual practices whatever those practices are for you. What are your current spiritual practices? This could include meditation, prayer, inspirational reading, sitting in nature or a myriad of other options.

Write about what you want in the future.

When you have a major loss that turns your world upside down, everything changes instantly. The early days are really spent in so much turmoil and anguish but as you start to heal you may notice that what you thought you wanted in the future is not what you want now. That's ok.

You get to redefine your future. Remember you are not your past. Your past and your losses do not define you. It's never too early to practice dreaming again. Practice imagining what you want for your future.

It's nearly impossible to move into the future when you can't picture the future. When you leave the future blank in your mind, it's like turning on the GPS and asking it to show the direction when you've never even put in the destination. It's not necessary to have a complete detailed picture of the future, but it is very helpful to identify 1-3 things that you would like to see happen.

If the idea of looking at the future right now feels daunting, that's ok. Everyone is on their unique path to healing. If it's something you want to try, keep this as uncomplicated as possible. For example, it may be as simple as saying I want to learn a new hobby. Or you can skip it all together and that's totally ok too. Be open to the idea of this being something you come back to later.

In summary, these are the 5 suggestions for increasing hope:

1. Acknowledge your wins each day. Write down something positive that happened today
2. Look for role models
3. Be kind to yourself and others
4. Lean on your faith
5. Write about what you want in the future

My life changed radically the moment my children Carrie and David died. Their death was devastating and painful for a long time, but eventually through seeking help and working through my pain I was able to overcome the pain of grief, shame and guilt. I enjoy a wonderful life now full of happiness and meaning. I'm not a unicorn. There is nothing unique or special about me. You can overcome the pain of grief, shame and guilt, too.

Prerequisite #3: Effort

Winston Churchill said, “Continuous effort – not strength or intelligence – is the key to unlocking our potential.” This applies to the work of grief too. You may have heard and believed that time heals all wounds. Depending on where you are in your grief journey this idea may be frustrating to you. You may feel that enough time has passed, and you wonder why you still feel terrible. If this is the case for you, remember it’s ok. There’s nothing wrong with you, you’re just missing good information and tools to help you through.

Once again, let’s debunk the idea that time is what heals us, because without focused effort, time will not lead to healing. Time with the right effort can lead you to feeling better along the way and ultimately to healing from the pain of grief.

Think back on something you accomplished. What allowed you to accomplish your goal? When I wrote my book *Miracles in the Darkness: Build a Life After Loss*, I had a desire to do it. My *desire* to write the book was fueled by my tremendous *hope* that it would be beneficial to others and then I had to put forth the *effort* and do the work. My *hope* and *desire* fueled my *effort*.

The work of grief looks a little different than some goals and accomplishments but not much really. Many of the goals and accomplishments you work towards are tangible. You know what it’s going to look like when you finish it. If you want to paint a painting, you know when the painting is done. When you want to finish a project at work, you know the steps and the end goal.

The work of grief is less tangible. Although I highly encourage you to think about what you want at the end of this course and beyond. What will it look like when you are no longer plagued by constant grief? What do you want it to look like?

The work of your grief might be willingness to learn and grow, and willingness to feel what you’re feeling and understand how to do that and practice feeling. It might be asking questions and seeking answers. It might be practicing loving yourself and giving yourself compassion and patience and room to grow. It might be saying no to less important things so you can have the space for your grief instead of avoiding your grief by staying overly busy.

It might be learning how to cope in ways that are more helpful instead of harmful. It might be crying, practicing gratitude or intentionally introducing some positivity into your day. It might be meditating, practicing affirmations, and slowing down.

When you sit and wait for the pain to leave you will be disappointed and you can easily slip into despair. Without little bits of progress, you will slip into despair. You never stand still. If you think you can wait out grief, you will find yourself falling further into your grief and sorrow. Don't allow yourself to fall into despair. You will look for ways to numb instead of ways to build. It's vitally important that you continue to put forth effort. That does not mean that you must spend hours and hours each day addressing your grief. You will be surprised that just a few minutes a day of continuous effort will make a vast difference.

When you think of effort or work you may picture plowing forward and ignoring your pain and just getting busy. This is not about getting busy. This is about getting real and facing your pain and not ignoring it. If you're willing to put forth the effort to learn and grow, the resources will show up for you. You will find the answers.

Our brains are master sorters. We pay attention to what we consider important and relevant. Think about the last time you bought a car. You may have never noticed that same make and model or color of vehicle on the road. You drive off the lot and the next few days you notice how many vehicles are just like yours! This is an example of your mind sorting. Before you bought your car that car was not top of mind. You had no reason to notice that car, so your brain never brought it to your attention. Your mind only brings to your consciousness what you're looking for and what you deem as important. Be selective about what you tell your brain is significant.

Give your brain some direction. Encourage your brain to pay attention to the resources, support and ideas that will help you in your healing journey. Then when you start to notice the many opportunities in front of you. Remember what Winston Churchill said, it's not about strength and intelligence it's about putting forth the effort.

Questions to Consider

1. How comfortable are you with the idea that grief healing requires effort?

Suggested Build a Life After Loss Podcast Episodes:

Ep. 6 Choose Hope

Ep. 67 Increasing Hope

Ep. 68 It Starts with Desire

Ep. 88 Continuous Effort

Chapter 4: The Model of Healing

You are committed to your healing. You know you want to learn how to work with your grief, to start to feel better and to ultimately claim your own healing. But the path may not be clear. In fact, grief feels messy, and erratic. Because of grief's unpredictable nature, you may feel a lack of confidence in yourself to move forward. One day you feel surprisingly good. You feel like you're getting better and that maybe there's better days ahead despite the pain that you've experienced. Then the next day comes, and you're triggered by a familiar scene or smell, and you drop into questioning again if it's possible to heal. The challenge is to hold onto hope despite daily trials.

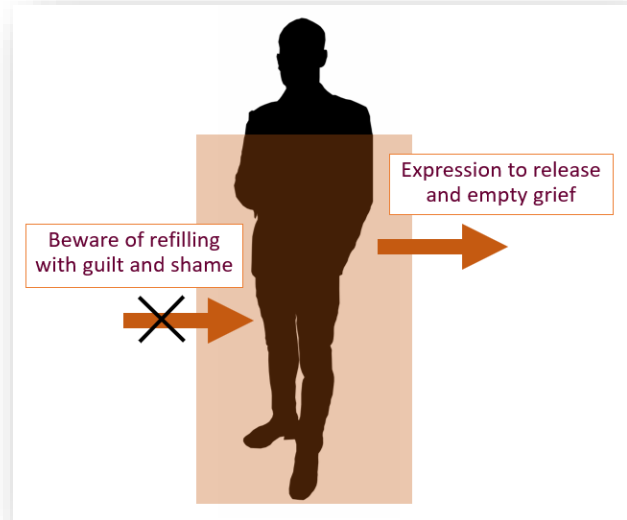
I invite you to consider that these moments of unexpected mourning are there to invite you to release a little more pain. Think of a full tub of dirty bath water. To drain the water from the tub, you must unplug the drain. If you plug the tub while it's draining it will stop draining and the remaining dirty water will stay in the tub until you unplug it again.

Your grief fills the container of your being. It stresses the limits of your emotional capacity. Each time you express your grief you are releasing the valve and allowing the grief to move through you and freeing some of the pain.

Your mourning has purpose despite how painful it may feel. Remind yourself that you are releasing the heavy emotions. Visualize those emotions moving through your being and out, allowing the feelings to dissipate into the air. You are emptying the painful emotions.

When you express or allow yourself to feel your grief, imagine that you are pulling the plug of your grief container and emptying it a little at a time. Expressing your grief in healthy ways may include, writing about your feelings and thoughts, crying, or talking to a friend about your experience. Allowing yourself to feel your grief includes allowing the painful waves and the feelings without judging your experience.

Be aware that when you feel bad about expressing your grief, you may be releasing some of the pain of grief but then filling the container back up with guilt or shame or judgment. For example, some people feel bad about crying in public or they may feel like sharing their grief with someone is too heavy. Instead, of feeling bad about having normal human emotions, they can remember that their feelings are valid and that their expression is valid. If you tend to feel guilt or shame for voicing your grief, try to remember that grief is a season and that being honest about your current condition is healthy. It doesn't mean that's who you are or how you'll always feel. Grief is a chronic yet temporary condition.



Pretending that you are doing better than you are is even more draining than allowing the feelings and can cause you more pain than owning up to your current experience.

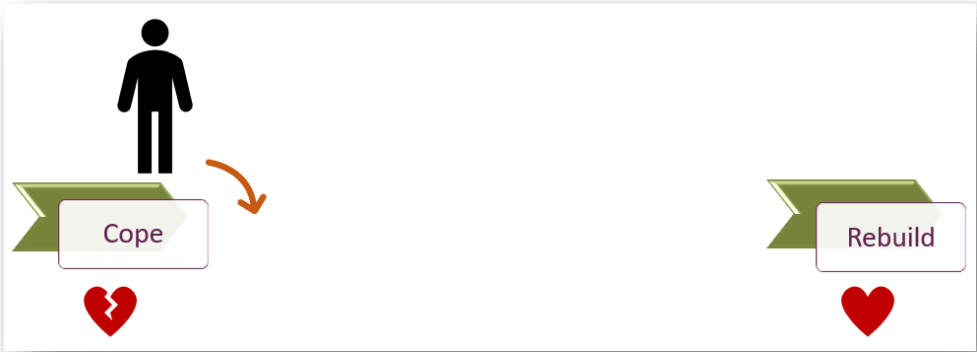
Questions to Consider

- What thoughts do you have about expressing your grief?

- When you have expressed your grief, what has worked and what hasn't?

Missing Pieces

In the early days of grief all you may want to do is focus on surviving. Breathing in and breathing out. As illustrated earlier, our mind and heart are consumed with the loss and grieving. There just isn't room for anything else. Over time, you naturally start to adjust to the changes. And yet, you find yourself still squarely in grief, but starting to consider what you want to do next.



You know you want to heal but you don't know where the path is. That's when you realize that you don't know the way. There doesn't appear to be a path to healing your grief so stepping forward feels like you're falling further into the abyss. The steppingstones to get from coping to rebuilding are missing.

The Hope Model of Healing offers the way from coping to rebuilding. Each element in the model is a step which creates a path and a foundation for healing your grief.

Hope Model of Healing

- **H**onor Your Grief
- **O**pen to Understanding
- **P**repare through Discovery
- **E**mbrace Resolution and Rebuilding

HOPE offers a pathway to healing and leads to transformation

The Hope Model of Healing

I've spent the past 20 plus years discovering and refining what causes our pain and grief, how to allow our grief to heal us and what effort is required of us to claim healing. There are five Foundations of Growth necessary to move through grief, release the pain and move toward healing which then leads to more purpose and joy in our life.



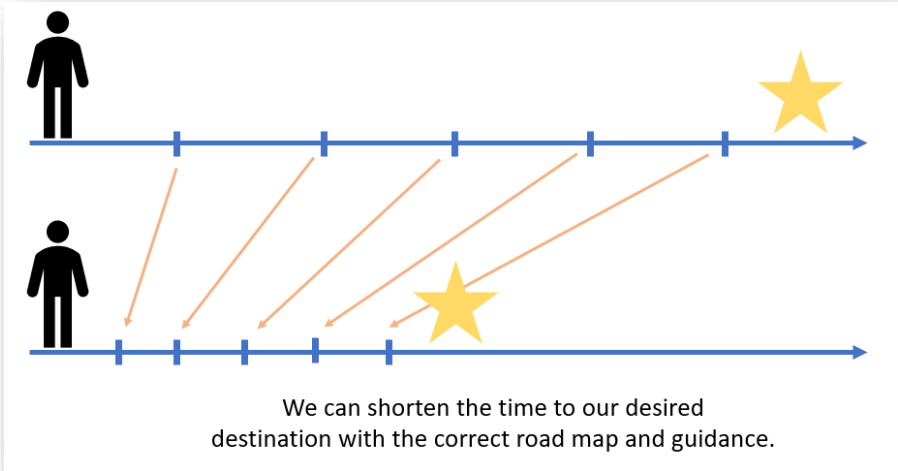
After loss, life can feel shattered and unrecognizable. As you learn and apply these principles you will see how the elements fit together to guide you from grief to hope to rebuilding your life. Without the elements of effective coping, understanding your grief, discovering the underlying pain, and resolving that pain, you will find that your loss experiences will continue to be a drag on your energy for much longer than is necessary. Even though grief is our normal reaction to loss, it does not mean that it must last a lifetime.

The premise of the Build a Life After Loss Personal Plan of Healing After Loss is that grief is normal, and with time, effort and skilled support, feelings of grief can be healed when correct understanding and principles are applied.

Questions to Consider

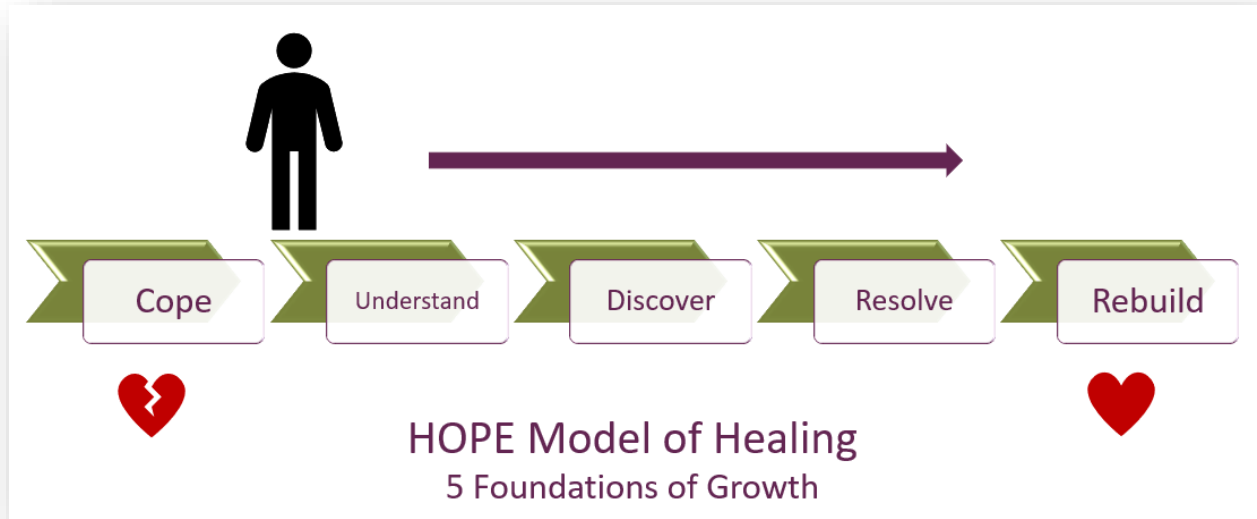
- In what ways have you felt the void of the missing path to healing?

- What has helped you and your grief so far? And what just isn't working?

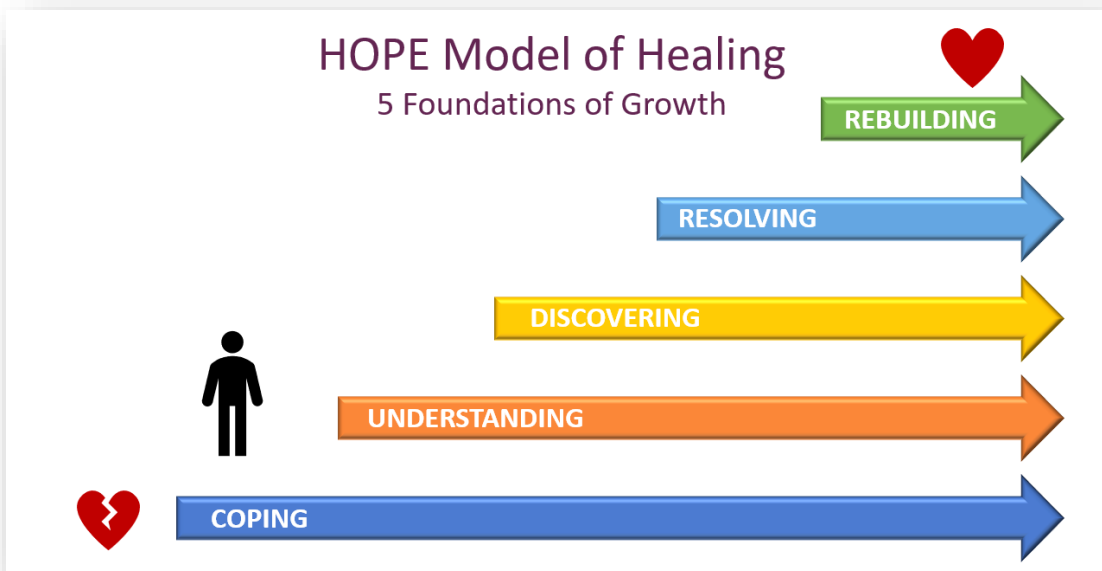


The diagram above illustrates that you can shorten the time it takes to get where you want to go if you have the correct road map and the proper guidance. Athletes have known this for years as they've relied on coaches and good information to create the results that they want. You are now applying this principle to healing after loss. This coaching program is designed to provide the correct road map, and the guidance and support for you to achieve your goals.

The Hope Model of Healing is the road map. It provides the framework to step from coping to understanding to discovering to resolving and then to rebuilding. You take the skills that you learn throughout your journey, and you rebuild your capacity and strength all along the way.



The diagram below is another way of looking at it. Notice how each step continues with an arrow headed towards the future. This is the foundation that is created in each step along the way of learning and applying.



Let's take a brief look at each one and then in the subsequent chapters we'll take a deeper dive into each.

Coping: When a loss occurs, you immediately go into coping as you carry the heavy weight of early, Level 5 All-Consuming Grief. Your reactions may seem automatic, reactive and out of your control. This is normal. As your early grief moves to Level 4 Deep Grief and Level 3 Functional Grief you have more awareness of your actions and your responses. This greater awareness allows you to take more ownership and make decisions about the way you're coping. In chapter 5, we'll look at constructive coping versus destructive coping. We'll also explore healthy coping options, and how to be patient and curious. In addition, we'll look at where your emotions come from on a deeper level.

Understanding: In previous chapters, we looked at some of the challenges of grief and the vibrational quality of grief. Grief is a season that is intended to lead to healing. In chapter 6, we'll discover why it's important to learn about grief, and how grief affects our body and mind. Then we'll take a closer look at what healing is and why it's important.

Discovering: We tend to look at the pain of grief as one big event but the feelings of grief and the often-accompanying feelings of guilt, shame, fear, etc. are caused by many painful underlying thoughts and beliefs. In order to start healing it's important to identify the things that are causing our pain. Again, it's not just looking at the one big loss but rather identifying the components of our specific unresolved feelings. We'll delve into this further later in the program.

Resolving: Whether your grief is due to the hurtful acts of others, to the unexpected loss of a loved one or to any other significant loss, healing your grief will involve resolving the conflict in your emotions so you can work towards letting go of the pain.

Rebuilding: You'll start looking to the future. As you start to resolve your grief, you'll feel yourself expand and grow and you'll have a renewed desire to create a life that you want. In the beginning of this journey, it is natural to want to move away from the pain which is why you were seeking answers. Eventually you will want to not just move away from pain, but also move toward more happiness and purpose in your life.

Grief is Messy

Have you ever cleaned out a closet? You get tired of having to put up with the mess, not being able to find things and having to shove everything back in so you can shut the door. You decide to clean it up. You pull everything out. You drag the coats, shirts, shoes, boxes, bags and all the random things out of the closet. You discover you have shirts that you haven't worn in 5 years, shoes that are worn out and broken pieces that you thought you would fix one day. You begin sorting and organizing but as you look around at the debris scattered across the floor, you notice that you have created a bigger mess than you started with.

But you're encouraged because you have a goal, and you know this is the process to the goal.



Now you can see it all. Random stuff is no longer hiding behind all the disorganization. You can make decisions. You decide what you are going to keep, what you are going to put back in the closet and how you want to organize what's left. When the job is done, you've created beauty and order and it feels great!

Grief is messy. When we finally get tired of putting up with the mess and shoving all the heavy feelings down, we are encouraged to start the process of healing. Don't worry about the mess in the meantime. You're in the right place. The Model of Healing will assist you in creating some order and beauty from the mess of grief. You will feel encouraged and uplifted!

Suggested Build a Life After Loss Podcast Episodes:

Ep. 84 The Model of Healing

Ep. 81 Doing It Right

Ep 79 The Chaos of Grief

Ep. 65 Perfectionism

Chapter 5: Coping

In the early days of Stage 5 All-Consuming Grief, you are in survival mode. Everything else in life fades away as you focus on your loss and the devastating pain. You bow out of all other responsibilities so you can concentrate on breathing and thinking and not much of anything else. Your coping during this time will be automatic and without much thought. It will likely be based on patterns that you've already developed, that are now heightened. In addition to leaning on previous habits that you've used to cope; you may find yourself reaching for things that you haven't relied on before. You are looking for relief. The Merriam-Webster dictionary definition of coping is "to deal with and attempt to overcome problems and difficulties." You are in an intense state of dealing with difficulty.

Just like reaching for an Advil is a habit that a lot of people use to deal with physical pain, there are many habits that you've developed over the years to deal with emotional pain. In extreme stress these habits are accentuated because you are reaching for this learned relief repeatedly to lessen the pain and help you cope. These changes in daily patterns may include sleeping more or less, eating more or less, or drinking or using other substances to numb the pain.

Post Traumatic Growth

As mentioned before, your grief is normal. It's your natural response to a loss. And grief is hard. It doesn't feel good. It's constrictive and painful. As much as you want to, you can't escape it; it follows you everywhere. Even though grief is common, it is broadly misunderstood. Because of that misunderstanding, we often think there is a right way and wrong way to grieve. You judge yourself and your response to loss and grief, and you may judge others as well. You may see others and think, he's too stoic or she's too emotional or shouldn't she be over it by now. Much of this judgment comes from fear. It doesn't feel good to feel bad, so you fear that there is something wrong with you or with your partner or anyone else that is grieving. You fear you won't survive the pain. You fear those around you won't either.

It's comforting to know that post-traumatic growth is much more likely than post-traumatic stress. In an article by Lorna Collier for the American Psychological Association she wrote, "Post-traumatic growth (PTG) is a theory that explains this kind of transformation following trauma. It was developed by psychologists Richard Tedeschi, PhD, and Lawrence Calhoun, PhD, in the mid-1990s, and holds that people who endure psychological struggle following adversity can often see positive growth afterward. 'People develop new understandings of themselves, the world they live in, how to relate to other people, the kind of future they might have and a better understanding of how to live life,' says Tedeschi."

You're on the path of positive growth. It certainly doesn't feel like that some or most days, but you're here and you're paying attention. Growth is happening even when you don't recognize it.

Misunderstanding the 5 Stages of Grief

Dr. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross's work with the terminally ill was instrumental in influencing the medical community to see the patient with more compassion. After interviewing hundreds of terminally ill patients, she discovered a pattern of common emotions. These common emotions were denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. Her book [On Death and Dying](#) was a result of her work with these patients. She explained that these are not the only emotions they felt and not all individuals expressed all these feelings, but these were the shared emotions that were most often present and so therefore they were worth our awareness.

Unfortunately, Dr. Kübler-Ross's model has been widely misunderstood and has been accepted by popular culture as the definitive model of grief with little knowledge of the origin and application of her research. You may have had someone say to you, "oh, you're in the anger stage of grief." These types of statements reflect our desire for order and explanation, yet they are not helpful. They tend to oversimplify your experience and can cause you to feel like something has gone wrong when your grief isn't simple.

Kübler-Ross never intended for the stages to be viewed as a linear path and yet that is the way that people have tried to apply it. Furthermore, as grief researcher Kenneth J. Doka observed, "Kübler-Ross originally saw these stages as reflecting how people cope with illness and dying, not as reflections of how people grieve."

This is important to keep in mind. The book she co-authored with David Kessler On Grief and Grieving was published after Kübler-Ross's death and overlaid the framework of On Death and Dying to explain our reactions to loss. Her work is extremely valuable in giving the terminally ill, those who grieve and those who support them more understanding of the emotions and experiences of loss, but it is not comprehensive. If your grief does not fit the 5 Stages of Grief, you are not alone. Think of the 5 Stages of Grief as a list of *possible* emotions you may feel in grief but not as prescribed steps you must follow.

Questions to Consider

- How does better understanding the 5 stages of grief, it's origin and its application change the way you view your grief?

Grief Myths

In addition to the confusion about the 5 stages of grief. There are many other myths about grief that need to be addressed. These myths develop because of misunderstanding about the grief process and our human nature to try to make sense of something that so often doesn't make sense. As you consider all the misinformation about grief, remember that your friend and family who love you are also operating with these false ideas, and they may try to help by sharing them with you. Understanding the truth will assist you in your grieving and your coping.

Common grief myths:

If you feel like you're going crazy, you are. A traumatic loss is an emotional injury. It knocks us off balance and you can feel like you're going crazy. It's not uncommon to have crazy thoughts and for things to not make sense. Just because you feel like you're going crazy it doesn't mean you are. Of course, if you have concerns, consult a medical professional.

If you keep their belongings or pictures you're stuck. Every loss is different, and this may not apply to you but if you've lost a loved one, having their belongings or pictures can give you comfort and allow you the time and space to adjust to their not physically being there. There is no right time to let go of their belongings and no right or wrong answer to how long you keep them.

When Carrie and David died, because of the circumstances of our family's life and needing to reclaim the space, I cleaned out their things fairly soon. I chose those items I wanted to keep, and I let go of the rest.

You may choose to do this in stages. You may put some things away and later decide that you're ready to let them go. Or you may leave their things out for a long time. It's a personal choice.

Keep yourself distracted with work, school etc., to get through the pain.

Distractions are just that – distractions. You can't always be sitting in the pain of grief, but you may find yourself working really long hours or overindulging in entertainment to avoid the pain. This may provide relief in the interim but it's not a long-term solution.

There's a right way to grieve. There are three main patterns of grief and mourning. The first is the intuitive pattern which is characterized by expression and emotion. This style is stereotyped as a female expression. While there's a preference to intuitive grieving in women, not all women grieve this way and men can grieve this way also.

The second grief pattern is instrumental which is characterized by action and cognition. This is the person that works things out in their head and takes physical action to figure things out. This is commonly associated as a male expression; however, each pattern is seen in men and women.

The third pattern is blended which as the name implies is a blend of the intuitive and instrumental patterns. When you watch people grieve differently than you do, you may feel that you are doing it wrong, or you may feel like they are doing it wrong. Consider that neither of you are doing it wrong; you're just doing it differently.

The first year is the hardest. Everyone has an idea about what's harder - the first year or the second year or some other time. Studies show that the first six months is the hardest based on the criteria that they researched. However, each phase of grief offers its own challenges. Thinking the first year is the hardest may cause you to think that you should be over it after a year. Your experience is your own and thinking that you should be doing better than you are just causes more pain.

Give people space. People often run with this belief. They think they are doing grievers a favor by giving them their space. If you're the one grieving this can add to your pain as you sense that others are giving you space – space you may or may not have asked for. As hard as it is, refrain from taking it personally if others move further away instead of closer to you. They likely feel inadequate to help and they have been taught to give you space. Unfortunately, you may also be running on the belief that you must isolate yourself in order to heal first before engaging with others or to protect others around you from your sadness. Your feelings are valid, and you do not need to feel that you should grieve alone. Continue to reach out to family and friends, and allow them to be a part of your journey as much as they are willing and able to.

Time heals all wounds or paradoxically, you will carry this grief for the rest of your life. The idea that time heals our emotional wounds is universal. Yes, time is an element of healing, but it is not the only element. Remember the story of breaking my foot in college. Time was an element of healing the physical injury but to heal properly I also sought the appropriate help and then I followed protocols to aid me in healing. Time doesn't heal our wounds, it's what we do with the time that helps us to heal. Sadly, too many people wait and wait for time to heal them and then give up because it hasn't happened, and they don't know what to do about it.

Ironically, you may also hear the myth that you must carry your grief with you the rest of your life. This is most often offered when someone suffers the death of someone who is very close to them – i.e., a child, spouse, or parent – or when the death is particularly tragic – i.e., a suicide, sudden death or death of a young person. The idea that you must carry your grief with you forever is becoming more and more prominent. In this paradigm, they illustrate the pain of grief and suggest that over time the quality of the grief will change, and the pain will lessen.

You will build around the grief and create a new life to cocoon the grief in order to carry it better. This is Dr. Lois Tomkin’s Model of Grief.

The Hope Model of Healing goes one step further. Once you have built the strength to carry the pain, you can choose to address the pain and heal it. It’s not required to continue to carry the pain indefinitely. Of course, the loss will always be a part of your life, and once you’ve healed your grief you may still have moments of sadness, but it’s not necessary to carry the pain of grief forever. In fact, doing so can affect your work, your ambitions, and even your health.

During heavy grief, it’s difficult to imagine that grief won’t always be there and so people will say that this is their lot in life. This perpetuates the idea that we are destined to live with grief forever. People become resigned to the idea. Unfortunately, when you hear this enough you will start to believe that forever grief is your fate too. Consider where this message is originating and remember that so many including myself have recovered from the pain of grief.

Questions to Consider

1. Which grief myths do you connect with the most? How do you feel about changing your belief around these myths?

Your Grief is Unique

It's not useful to compare your loss experience to someone else's even within the same household or among those who experienced the same loss. And as previously addressed grief styles differ.

As the all-consuming grief starts to lessen, you will find that you have more control and more reasoning power again. When your grief starts to feel a little more manageable you may look back on your experience with Level 5 All-Consuming Grief and feel badly about the way you handled your experience. Remember, you were doing the best you could. You are all always doing the best you can. Practice self-compassion. When you know better, you can learn to do better. But just knowing isn't enough, it's about integrating what you know through intention and practice.

Right now, you may have thoughts like "I shouldn't drink so much." Or "All of this eating has caused me to put on 20 pounds." Or "I'm spending too much time playing video games." These thoughts are tricky. They feel useful because you are recognizing that some of these habits are not for your highest good, but these thoughts are very judgmental. Instead of creating the change you desire, they are adding to the pain that you are already facing.

You are uncomfortable because of your grief, and in addition, you are more uncomfortable because of the ways you have chosen to cope. Instead, thank your mind and body for helping you survive. Thank them for doing the best they could. As your cognitive function becomes more alert you may want to make different choices about the way you cope but give yourself grace for however you have coped up until now.

Let's look at some common activities or temporary relief distractions people use to avoid emotional discomfort.

Overeating

Isolation

Over shopping

Sex

Overworking

Over sleeping

Inappropriate humor

*Electronics – phone, tablets,
computers*

TV/Movies

Drugs

Fiction/Fantasy

While these coping mechanisms may create some temporary relief, they don't help you to move through your grief. And over time these activities may even be detrimental. These behaviors put you in a holding pattern. You feel stuck, choosing actions that you know are not healthy. Obviously, some activities are more damaging than others. You will want to eliminate the most destructive habits first. It makes sense that you employed these distractions and may still participate in them. Sometimes you just needed immediate relief and these behaviors offered you immediate respite. Again, be kind to yourself as you start to make changes.

While these behaviors may have felt useful in your early grief, you may now be ready to start shifting to a more healthful approach. You will know what it is you want to change. They are likely things that have already come to mind.

Do not expect to make these changes immediately. These distractions have become a habit and it takes time to develop new habits. Stay as curious as possible instead of judgmental. When you catch yourself being judgmental, ask yourself how you can be more curious. It's a process. Be patient with yourself as you adopt new activities. This is not about all or nothing. This is about learning and adjusting as you go.

Questions to Consider

1. Which grief myths have affected you the most?

2. Which of these distractions do you find yourself doing?

More Temporary Relief Distractions

There are two other temporary relief distractions that need further explanation.

Ruminating. It is easy to let your thoughts go wild. Continuing to replay everything in your mind over and over again can become an obsession. It is a way of denying what’s happened by trying to concoct a new, better ending that can never happen. Some replaying of what happened in your mind is your brain trying to make sense of it. There are questions that you will want to answer. Some questions have answers and others don’t. Eventually, you will make the distinction and be able to satisfy the level of understanding that your mind is demanding. However, continuing to rehash the details day after day and hour after hour is not helpful. Perhaps some of the overthinking is a distraction to keep from having to face life and your current circumstances. If you find yourself constantly going back over the minutiae, consider picking a time each day to think about it and then during other times if you find yourself wanting to ruminate over your loss, direct your mind to other pursuits and remind yourself of your scheduled time to think about it. Having a plan and a scheduled time to think about it will allow your mind to relax.

Blaming. When something terrible happens, you may find yourself looking for someone or something to blame. You may blame those that try to come to your aid. Maybe you feel that they said the wrong thing or did the wrong thing. Perhaps they didn't honor your privacy or maybe they didn't reach out as quickly as you thought they should. Maybe they didn't show up or maybe they showed up the "wrong way." Perhaps they didn't show the level of empathy you thought they should, or they didn't pay close enough attention. There are any number of ways that we blame others when our feelings are already hurting due to grief. It's easier to blame those around us than it is to admit that we're hurting. When someone has a physical injury, they are more sensitive to touch. Similarly, when you are hurting emotionally, it's easier to be bugged by the people around you.

Questions to Consider

- In what ways have you found yourself blaming others?

Keep Your Energy Moving

Emotion is energy in motion. To keep it moving you can employ activities such as write and rip, tapping, listening to music, screaming into a pillow, praying and exercising. Write and rip is simply writing out your emotions and why you feel that way onto a piece of paper. Then when you've fully expressed your feelings, rip it up and throw it away. It symbolizes releasing the unwanted emotion.

Tapping is lesser-known emotional release technique. In fact, it is also known as EFT or Emotional Freedom Technique. For a simple explanation of tapping look up "Jack Canfield tapping" on YouTube and watch his "How to use EFT Tapping to Accelerate Healing" video. He offers a simple process with a simple explanation. Other good resources for tapping are The Tapping Solution app for your mobile device and Brad Yates' many tapping videos on YouTube.

You can also add some of the following coping activities to keep your energy moving.

Drink water

Eat fruit

Take a walk

Write in a journal

Draw

Ride a bike

Take a class

Call a friend

Enjoy a hobby

Questions to Consider

- Which of these ideas interest to you and why?

- What are you willing to try this week?

Patience and Other's Opinions

As you start to become more aware of the ways that you've coped up until now and as you learn new options to include additional healthful coping skills, it is vital that you remain patient with yourself. You will have much less success in making changes if you are berating yourself for not being able to make the changes you want to make. You'll be far better off if you slowly adopt new habits to replace old unhealthy habits, then if you try to overhaul all your routines overnight.

This is a good time to also remember that no one can tell you how long your grief will last. Be gentle with yourself. You're here because you're working on your grief and you have sought the resources you need to cope and heal from your grief, which means you're on a healing path.

Friends and family may offer their personal advice about where they feel that you should be on your grief path. They may say that it's time to stop grieving, but they aren't walking in your shoes. Remember, almost always their advice is offered because they love you. But also, their advice may be unhelpful. Because you love them, you may feel obligated to comply with their recommendations as best you can. You may feel that you need to rush the process or act "ok" to get their approval or to help *them* feel better. Letting go of others' approval is crucial right now as you work through your grief. Furthermore, you are not responsible for other people's feelings. Take responsibility for your own emotions and decisions and avoid acting based on guilt and shame.

When you take a closer look, you may find that you are often motivated based on what you think other people want you to do. You do this to try to feel better about yourself, thinking that if you can gain people's approval you will be ok. This is a hard path because it is impossible to please all people all the time. It's far better to be secure in your own path and work through the emotions you feel about other people's disapproval.

The best way to approach these challenges of impatience and judgment is to be curious. Ask yourself good questions out of pure curiosity, like *Why do I feel I must do something because someone said I should? Or What could I choose to do differently next time? Or How can I practice patience right now? Or What support do I need right now?*

Curiosity is a desire to understand without trying to manipulate the result. Think about what curiosity feels like. Practice that feeling and then apply it to your conversations with yourself. Go into the feeling of curiosity at least once a day to explore how you are thinking and feeling. After you explore your experience with inquisitiveness, you'll be more prepared to make good decisions for yourself based on good information. Curiosity is a good approach when you are making changes in your habits and when you are incorporating new coping skills.

Questions to Consider

- Where are you feeling pressured to be “ok”?

- Where have you felt responsible for how other’s feel?

- How can you take responsibility for your own emotions and decisions?

Suggested Build a Life After Loss Podcast Episodes:

Ep. 8 Grief Myths

Ep. 15 Suffering is Optional

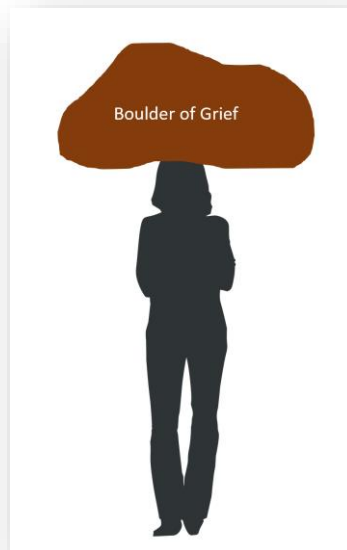
Ep. 40 Belief

Ep. 101 Moments of Clarity

Chapter 6: Understanding

The Boulder of Grief

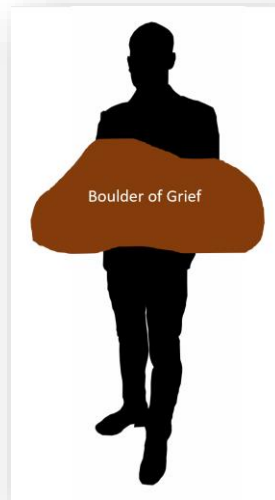
When loss hits you hard it's as if a boulder has landed on you – the boulder of grief. When we describe loss and grief, we use words like heavy, devastating, crushing, overcome, distressing, distraught and shattering. The heavy weight of loss and grief descends on you and overwhelms and overtakes you.



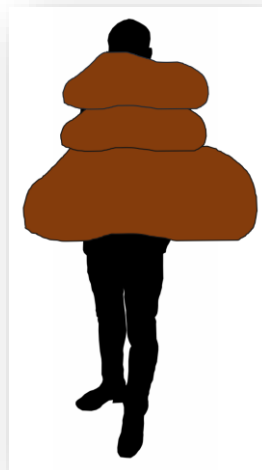
The boulder of grief is heavy; it flattens you and leaves you feeling battered, bruised, and weary.



The boulder of grief settles into your core. It becomes your companion day and night as your body, mind, and spirit work to assimilate the reality of your devastating loss.



Loss experiences stack up inside of you when grief is left unresolved. Because the process of resolving grief is so misunderstood or not even considered, many people carry around the heavy weight of unresolved grief for many years or even a lifetime. Left unresolved, grief affects your heart and your throat. You will shut off feelings and have trouble speaking and expressing yourself. You may even feel that it's hard to breathe. Notice how the boulders of grief are covering your heart and your voice.

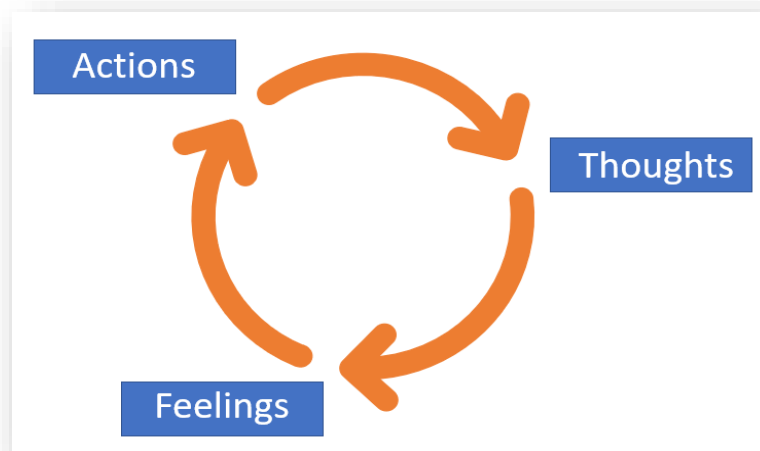


The Source of Emotion

Grief is a time of a surplus of emotions. It's also a time when you may be trying hard to not feel any of them because so many of the emotions that surface are unpleasant, difficult or painful. Your human nature is built to avoid pain and to seek pleasure, so it's built into your programming to try to avoid the difficult emotions. Unfortunately, ignoring them does not work and can create more problems for you in the long run, including physical or emotional ailments.

Let's look at where feelings come from so the smorgasbord of emotions that arise will start to make sense.

Perhaps you've heard of the think-feel-act (TFA) cycle. In short, the model shows that how we think affects how we feel and how we act; how we feel affects how we think and how we act; and how we act affects how we think and how we feel.



Viktor Frankl, holocaust survivor, author and psychotherapist said, “Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom.”

In the space he's referring to is your thoughts and feelings. In between an outside stimulus and your actions is your thoughts and feelings. You may have been taught that you must feel your feelings and there's nothing you can do about them. Or you may have been taught to ignore your feelings or to push them down entirely. When you look at the triad model above, you start to notice that if you can't affect your feelings then you can't affect your behavior and therefore you can't affect the outcomes of your life since your results are tied to your actions.

Feelings are clues to what you are thinking and clues to why you act the way you do. Feelings can be the catalyst for change when you decide to get involved.

Because your results in life – whether positive or negative – are tied to your actions, you spend a lot of time trying to adjust your actions to get the outcome you want. But if your actions are influenced by your thoughts and feelings that's where you really need to get involved. Remember what Frankl said, "between stimulus and response is a space." The space is your thoughts and feelings.

Your feelings are a powerful motivator. How often have you said *I just don't feel like it*? If you don't feel like it, you're not likely to do it. Sometimes you think I should do this but then the feeling isn't there so you don't do it no matter how much you think you should.

Where do your feelings come from? There's a clue in the diagram. Your feelings come from your thoughts. Even your grief comes from your thoughts as you reflect on how much you miss someone or how it shouldn't have happened or any number of thoughts about your loss. Think about it – you are not influenced by every loss that happens in the world, only the losses that affect you personally. In other words, you are affected by the losses that you have thoughts about. Because you have thoughts about it, you have feelings about it. Every feeling can be traced back to a thought.

Sometimes your thoughts, feelings and actions are closely intertwined. There is so little space between these three elements that you can't even detect how the thought affected the feeling and then the action. In some cases, your model might look more like this.



However, with closer examination, even though the action felt automatic you can determine what feelings caused you to respond the way that you did. Then when you start to examine your feelings, you can start to track back to the thought that created the feeling. As you practice looking at the underlying feelings and thoughts that caused your actions, you will start to create more space between the stimulus and the response. This takes time and practice. Once you know the thought that created your feeling you can decide if you want to change the thought or keep it. It's up to you. The best news is that changing your thought, and therefore your feelings, is always an option. However, don't be in too big a rush to change the thought and the feeling. Feeling what your feeling will always come first.

Questions to Consider

- What action did you take recently that surprise you?

- What feeling were you feeling when you took the action?

- When you felt that what were you thinking?

Emotional Vocabulary

Susan David, Ph.D., author of *Emotional Agility*, says, “Our raw feelings can be the messengers we need to teach us things about ourselves and can prompt insights into important life directions.” Unfortunately, much of society has taught us to suppress our emotions, which blocks us from the very emotions that can help us to heal.

To begin understanding and allowing your emotions, build your emotional vocabulary. The first step in emotional management is being able to name your feeling. Perhaps you’re used to only hearing and saying common feeling words like happy or sad, mad, or glad, excited or disappointed.

In the very first section of this workbook, there’s a sample feelings wheel that will help to expand your emotional vocabulary. For example, on the chart you’ll find several words for sad including guilty, ashamed, depressed, lonely, bored, tired, remorseful, stupid, inferior, isolated, apathetic, sleepy. Each of these words are more specific emotions that can all be lumped into a description of sad. When you can find a more specific, descriptive word for how you’re feeling you have better clarity.

For the next week try the following exercise:

1. Ask yourself 2-3 times a day, *how am I feeling right now?*
2. Find a specific emotion on the chart that matches how you’re feeling. Consider exploring other feelings charts if you can’t find the word you are looking for.
3. Write down the time of day, the emotion and a very brief phrase about why you might be feeling the way you’re feeling. It might look like this: 2 pm, feeling bored because my friends just left and I’m missing their company.
4. To help you remember to log your emotions, set a timer for different times a day to check in with yourself.

Allowing Emotions

To allow emotion is to acknowledge the feelings you're feeling and to sit with it. An emotion is a vibration in the body. Emotions are energy in motion and if you allow the emotion instead of ignoring it, it tends to continue to move through you instead of becoming trapped. If you ignore it, it becomes more demanding, much like a toddler who isn't getting the attention they want. Continuously ignoring emotions will cause them to become trapped, which takes a toll on your emotional energy and your physical health.

To start sitting with the feeling and paying attention, take a deep breath, and go into your body. Ask yourself these questions:

1. What am I feeling? Name it.
2. Where do I feel it in my body?
3. What does the vibration feel like?
4. Does it have a color or a texture?
5. Sit with the feeling, noticing it, paying attention to it and allowing it to continue to move through you until it's run its course.

It's not always possible to take the 5 minutes to sit with a feeling and that's ok. Practice this during quiet moments once or twice a day to get familiar with the process. Avoid saying I'm too busy and not doing it at all. It only takes a few minutes and when you have more practice you may find that it takes less than 2 minutes.

Another temptation with emotions is to spin in thoughts. Remember our feelings influence our thoughts and our actions. When a painful feeling surfaces, you may find yourself ruminating on one painful thought after another. This can spin you into heavier and heavier painful emotions. If you find yourself doing this, try to go into the sensation in your body. This will take you out of mind and the thinking and spinning, and it will put you into your body, allowing you to focus on the emotion and processing it.

At first you will find yourself spinning in thoughts and remembering this tool hours afterwards. Don't let that discourage you. This is normal. Each time you remember you will be closer to being able to affect the process. The next time you might remember right afterwards. The time after that you might remember after 30 minutes of spinning in painful thoughts.

The next time you may remember 10 minutes in and so on until you catch yourself right at the beginning, a sign that you have integrated this skill. Be patient with the process of learning.

Questions to Consider

At the end of the week answer the following questions:

- What am I learning by paying attention to my feelings?

- Am I noticing any patterns?

Your Brain on Grief

On brainfacts.org they report that, “For the average adult in a resting state, the brain consumes about 20 percent of the body’s energy. The brain’s primary function — processing and transmitting information through electrical signals — is very, very expensive in terms of energy use.”

Your brain uses a lot of energy, and during a season of grief, your brain is using a huge portion of the brain power to cope with grief. A lot of your body’s energy each day is being used to process grief. It’s exhausting and draining. It’s normal if you feel tired or confused. With so much of your brain power going to grief you will have less available to solve everyday problems that you have easily handled in the past. You may feel overwhelmed because the energy for function is being diverted for grief processing. You may feel forgetful for the same reason.

Think of a computer processor. When the processor is overburdened with background processing the normal functions of your computer will slow down to accommodate the added load. The functional bandwidth is overwhelmed with additional processing. It’s the same with your brain. Even when you’re not actively aware of your grief or your grieving process your brain is in the background hard at work dealing with the added burden of grief.

Painful Emotions

Emotions create chemistry. That's why you can so quickly feel a reaction to something in your body. Your emotional and your physical body are linked together and inseparable. When you think the same thoughts over and over and you feel the same feelings over and over, you are repeatedly producing the same chemical reactions which creates what Dr. Joe Dispenza calls a state of being as you become connected to the chemical compound of the repeated emotions.

Joe Dispenza "Just as thoughts are the language of the brain, feelings are the language of the body. And how you think and how you feel create a state of being. Your personality is made up of how you think, act, and feel. It is your state of being. Therefore, your same thoughts, actions, and feelings will keep you enslaved to the same past personal reality."

This explains why you may feel like a different person after a tragic loss. Your chemistry has shifted with your new thoughts and feelings. While again it is the normal process to experience grief, it's also important to keep the emotions moving and not to stay stuck in the new state of being or the chemistry of grief. Inevitably, however long you are in grief will feel like it's too long. With effort, understanding and patience you are processing. Knowing that you are doing the work should give you assurance that you are not stuck in grief but instead you are doing the work to continue the healing process.

When you are feeling especially painful emotions like, guilt, shame, regret, and anger, remember that it's just chemistry produced by your body as a response to the vibrational quality of the emotion. Remind yourself, *I'm ok. This is just a chemical response; this is just a vibration.*

Guilt, Shame and Anger

Feeling guilty is a common response to a loss. You may feel guilty because you feel like you could have done something different to keep it from happening. You may feel guilty because you feel responsible somehow for what happened. But guilt is doing something with the intent to harm. Most of the time guilt is misplaced. Did you intentionally do something to harm someone? Or, with hindsight, do you regret an action or not taking an action?

Seldom do we purposely do something to harm someone. Far, far more often, it's regret not guilt that you're feeling. You regret that you didn't do something or say something. Examine your guilt feelings and see if instead it's really regret that you're feeling.

Regret happens when you compare what you wished you had done with what you did do. What you wished you had done is based on new information that wasn't available to you when you made your previous decision. At the time you chose what you did, you were doing the best you could with the information you had. With new information, you may feel that you would have chosen differently but that information wasn't available to you before the events. It's unfair to try to make decisions for the past from the perspective of your new present. You're always doing the best you can.

Shame is especially damaging. Brené Brown wrote, "Shame is the intensely painful feeling or experience of believing that we are flawed and therefore unworthy of love and belonging – something we've experienced, done, or failed to do makes us unworthy of connection. I don't believe shame is helpful or productive." By comparison, Brown suggests that guilt can be productive in that it leads to making changes to correct an error. Brown said, "the difference between shame and guilt is best understood as the differences between "I am bad" and "I did something bad."

The antidote for shame is connection and expression. Brown again said, "when we find the courage to share our experiences and the compassion to hear others tell their stories, we force shame out of hiding, and end the silence."

Anger is another emotion that feels involuntary and out of your control. It demands attention. It can be internalized or explosive. Either way it's destructive. Anger is most often a secondary emotion. It's like the tip of an emersed volcano. Anger is what you show or express, but underneath is another painful emotion that has been hiding and anger is its expression.



Why do we so often choose anger instead of acknowledging that we feel hurt, lonely, frustrated, sad, fearful, anxious, disappointed, or embarrassed, to name just a few? One reason is anger feels more powerful. For example, you feel less vulnerable in anger than you do in sadness. It may feel easier to express anger and use your anger to release pent-up emotions, than it does to express how sad you are, how afraid you are or how very hurt you feel.

Assessing the underlying core feelings can help to dispel this fiery emotion. Anger can become a habit. If you find that you are frequently angry, ask yourself, what am I really feeling that I haven't wanted to admit or express?

Questions to Consider

- Do you find that you are frequently angry? If so, what is triggering your anger?

- What underlying emotions have you been expressing through anger?

Healing Resistance

Moving through grief and healing is not linear. It's not a straight path with no detours. It's a living, breathing learning process. During this process a dangerous detour is victim mentality. It's important to heed the warning of this detour.

People are sympathetic to your pain and often say things like "I have no idea how you are functioning." "How do you go on?" "How do you endure that?" You can see why it would be extremely easy to think of yourself as a victim. You have the sympathy and the pity to prove it.

A victim mentality causes resistance to healing. It is believing that your circumstances have made you the victim and therefore you have no choice but to view yourself this way. The truth is you have seen hard things which is why the slope is slippery to a victim mindset.

A victim mentality “is a method of avoiding responsibility and criticism and receiving attention and compassion.” This description highlights the benefits of being the victim. People will expect less of you. You won’t have to put yourself out there. It’s a reason to stay hidden in the shadows of life and not take responsibility for yourself. It’s a way to receive attention and have the right to complain. You may become addicted to the drama because it may feel better and easier to point the blame at someone else and feel the heightened emotions of criticism than it is to face your own discomfort.

You may have heard various opinions on the possibility of healing from the pain of grief, and you notice that many people, including some we consider experts, suggest that healing isn’t possible. Instead, they say the best you can hope for is to start feeling better but that you can expect to grieve the rest of your life.

Perhaps that idea makes sense to you because you can’t imagine how you could heal. I get it. I remember feeling that way too. While I kept the hope of healing alive sometimes the ember of hope was so tiny and other times it was a noticeable flame. Eventually, I harvested the fruit of my hope in healing.

I don’t believe you have to grieve the rest of your life. I believe healing from the pain of loss is available to you. Why? Because I’ve experienced it. I’ve felt the joy of healing. I have felt the lifting of the burden of loss. It’s not that the circumstances have changed, of course, but my connection to the circumstances have changed. I’m at peace. I’ve done the work of healing; the work that I share with you here. Open your mind to the possibility of eventually healing, of creating a life of purpose and joy, of being able to enjoy fond memories without the pain of grief and of being able to let go of the pain of the past.

In order to work towards healing, you’ll want to continue to take responsibility for yourself and your healing. This will include uprooting the tendencies toward being a victim. Victim mentality can be very subtle. Everyone experiences some level of feeling like the victim. The first step is recognizing it and asking yourself how you can take responsibility for your experience. You don’t get to decide how others show up in your life or how some things play out in the world around you, but you do get to decide how you are going to think, feel and respond to it. Healing includes refining your thoughts, feelings, and responses.

The Bridge of Grief and Pain

When you lose someone you love, you may feel like you can't let go of the pain of loss because letting go of the pain feels like letting go of the person. Moving on feels like moving away from the person you've lost. Moving forward feels the same. You may even hear that the pain of loss is equivalent to the intensity of your love; this is true. However, it does not mean that you must keep the pain to prove your love.

When someone you love dies or becomes estranged from you, it naturally changes the relationship. The relationship that used to include physical presence no longer includes the ability to be with each other in that way. You still have a relationship with the person, but the nature of the relationship has changed. Because of the strong emotions you attach to the loss of that person, you create a bridge of grief and pain to that person. This becomes the new connection. You still love and appreciate them, but the strongest bond is with the pain and grief which can detract from your feelings of love and gratitude. Thinking that your connection to the person can be measured by the extent of your despair makes it extremely difficult to let go of the pain and grief because that would mean letting go of the person or at least not "proving" your love by your suffering. Recognizing your current need to hold onto pain to hold onto the person is an important element of understanding your grief.



Before their death or the estrangement, you did not need a bridge of pain and grief to connect you. Chances are your connection to them before was love and gratitude. You loved who they were. You loved their presence in your life. You were grateful for them. You were grateful for your relationship with them and for your special bond. Love and gratitude for them and who they are is still available to you. As you heal, focus on strengthening the bond of love and gratitude between you and your loved one even in your new circumstances. As you focus your attention on those expanded feelings of care and thankfulness, you'll be more and more willing to let go of the pain of loss.

Gratitude and love are very powerful, uplifting emotions that will transform your life. Even when a romantic relationship ends in break up or divorce, you can find ways to love and appreciate the person that you were connected with previously in such an intimate way. This will take some work, but animosity will hurt you more than help you. As you open your heart to love you will feel the benefits of this powerful emotion.



As you work through the feelings of grief, you will rediscover your immense love and gratitude. One of the signs of healing is experiencing more love and gratitude. Another sign of healing is being able to remember the good times without them being overshadowed by feelings of sadness or despair. These are sign posts along the journey of healing that let you know you are heading in the right direction. Do not worry if you are still feeling a lot of grief.

This is a process and understanding what you're working towards will help you to shape your path to get there.

Eventually your bond to the person will be predominately love and gratitude. The pain of grief will have fallen away, and you may even discover that your love and gratitude for the person is even greater than it was before. While it may be true that the intensity of your relationship before the loss may have a correlation to the intensity of the grief after the loss, this natural response does not correlate to how you must experience the loss in the future. It is not necessary to prove your love by suffering for the rest of your life. Strengthening the bridge of love and gratitude allows you to hold onto the person *and* let go of the pain of loss.



When You've Been Wronged

Most often people associate grief with losing someone they love through death. But what if your loss is due to someone else's reckless and painful actions, resulting in abuse, significant financial loss or another awful event. When you feel wronged it's easy to get stuck in grief and anger. Unlike the bridge that was explained above, you may never have built a relationship of love and gratitude with this person that has caused you so much pain. Yet now you are tied to them with grief and anger.

You may feel like letting go of your grief and anger is letting the other person off the hook. You may have even heard it explained like this, "holding onto anger is like drinking poison and expecting the other person to die." Your anger and resentment are painful, and you know it is hurting you but how can you resolve these two conflicting needs: the need to let it go and the need to see justice done.

First, remember if they are responsible for wrongdoing, they are responsible regardless of whether you are angry or not and it may not be your responsibility to hold them accountable. Letting go of the pain someone else has inflicted on you does not make them less accountable. Second, letting go will allow you to show up with a clear head if you are ever asked to explain your part of the incident. Strong negative emotions can weaken your emotional and physical state. It's always better to move through the negative emotions and work toward focusing on what's within your power than to sit in despair because of someone else's actions. This approach will take time, perspective, and effort. As with moving through grief of any kind, be patient with yourself in this process.

Letting Go

Healing is letting go of the pain of loss; it is not letting go of the person you've lost. You are never moving away from or separating from the person you love; you are only separating from the pain of loss. Also, letting go of the grief of the wounds someone else has inflicted on you does not make them less responsible. You are moving through the pain of the loss and moving toward the life that you want to build while carrying with you the warm memories of those you care about.

As Dr. Joe Dispenza said in his book *Breaking the Habit of Being Yourself*, “A memory without the emotional charge is called wisdom.”

Suggested Build a Life After Loss Podcast Episodes:

Ep. 7 What Others Say and Do

Ep. 10 The Magic of Gratitude

Ep. 21 Grief and Moving Forward

Ep. 94 Emotional Injury

Chapter 7: Discovering

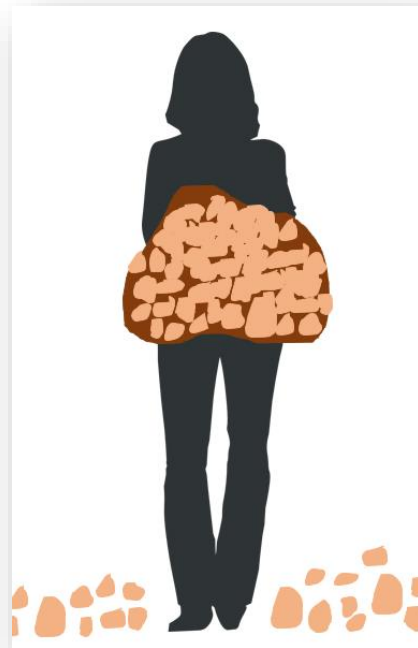
Up until now, much of the program has focused on increasing your understanding of loss and grief. You've been laying the foundation. As you increase your understanding of yourself and grief, you are already lightening the load you carry. In this chapter, you will start to apply tools that will aid you in specifically discovering and resolving the elements of your grief.

When the boulder of grief descends on you, it is weighty. Like a large boulder on a mountain path, the boulder of grief is impossible to move in one solo effort. Up until now, you have looked at your loss and grief and everything that goes along with it as one large burden that is near impossible to move.

In the Discovery phase, you will begin looking closely at the many, many pieces that combine to make up the heavy grief that you feel. Your boulder of grief is not one solid rock, but instead it is a bundle of smaller rocks, pebbles, and sand. The rocks, pebbles and sand are the circumstances surrounding the loss event including what came before, during and after; your thoughts and feelings about the loss; what you're believing about what happened and what you're believing about yourself as it relates to what happened.



This discovery process leads to resolving, which you will learn more about in the next chapter. As you start to discover and resolve, you will be chipping away at the boulder of grief. You will start to see that while the grief is impossible to move in one large effort, it is possible to improve and move forward as you address the smaller bits that make up the one big boulder. Over time and with effort the boulder of grief will be smaller to carry. Eventually you will be able to knock away most if not all the debris of the boulder. You will be able to move freely through life with no barrier to creating a life of meaning and happiness.



The step of discovering is all about identifying the smaller pieces of pain that are included within the pain of your loss. One reason that people have been unable to help you work through your grief is that they also view your grief as one big event or situation that feels impossible to move. Because your experience is unique to you, no one can tell you what makes up your personal boulder of grief. Your distinctive experiences must be searched and investigated to uncover the pieces of *your* story.

Holmes and Rahe Stress Scale

In the 1960s Thomas Holmes and Richard Rahe studied the link between stress and illness. In 1967 they introduced what is now commonly called the Holmes and Rahe Stress Scale. In their list of stressful life events, they identify over 40 life events that can cause feelings of stress. Many of these events also cause feelings of grief. Their research highlights the importance of defusing these emotional events to lower the stress that your body is currently carrying.

As mentioned previously, in the past you may have associated grief with only death and maybe divorce but feelings of grief can come from any type of loss.

Here is a sample list of losses that cause feelings of grief:

Death of spouse, child, parent, sibling, or other close family member

Loss of business

Death or Loss of a pet

Death of a friend

Divorce/separation/break up

Illness/Loss of health

Loss of job/career

Retirement

Abuse

Estrangement from close family member

Foreclosure/loss of home

Imprisonment

Loss of financial security

Child leaving home

Moving

Loss of trust

Loss of security

As you read through this list it will trigger your memories of your own losses.

Now consider the other impactful, pleasant events that have occurred in your life. These might include:

Attendance or graduation from high school or college

Marriage

Birth or adoption of children

Home purchase

A new job or promotion

Building a successful business

A pet

Vacations

Personal achievements: awards, tournaments, etc.

You may want to refer to the above lists as you do the following assignment.

Assignment 1, Part 1:

Creating your Personal Story Timeline

1. List the loss events you've experienced and the year or your age when they occurred.
2. Add the emotions you felt at the time of the loss next to the listed loss.
3. List other impactful pleasant events, such as marriage, births, accomplishments, and the year or your age when they occurred.
4. Add the emotions you felt at the time of each of these events.

The following is an example of a sample list of loss and impactful events.

Talent show, age 8, proud

PSAT award, 16, confident

HS graduation, 18, successful

College, 18, excited

angry father, childhood,
rejected

illness, 18-21, discouraged

marriage, 22, love

brother dies, 28, confusion
devastated

birth of child, 24, love

first home, 25, thrilled

divorce, 31, shock

job and promotions, 32,
successful

marriage, 34, love devotion

parent's divorce, 35, shock
confusion

birth of child, 34, love

child dies, 40, devastated

grandchild born. 45, love
thrilled

Assignment 1, Part 2

Creating your Personal Story Timeline

In this second part you'll be adding the events you listed from the first assignment onto a timeline to create your Personal Story Timeline (PST). After the instructions below you'll find an example of a completed PST.

1. The starting point represents your birth, and the ending point represents your current age or the current year. Add "birth" to the beginning of the timeline and write your current age or current year to the end of the timeline.
2. The middle hash line is halfway. Add your midpoint age or year. For example, if you are currently 40 years old, you'll write 20 at the midpoint.
3. The other two hash lines are the halfway between the midpoint and the beginning and the midpoint and the end. These points on the graph will be reference points as you create your PST. Continuing with the example, if you're currently 40, your reference points from left to right will be birth, 10, 20, 30 and 40.
4. Add your events to your timeline rating the intensity of the event. The scale on the left is for reference to help you illustrate the impact of each event. You may find it useful to add the most impactful events first, including the most devastating loss at -10 on the timeline and your most joyful event at +10 on the timeline. Refer to the sample to see how you might include your events on your timeline.
5. List the 2-3 emotions under each event on your timeline. Use the Emotions Wheel in the Chapter 1 material to help you identify the emotions. You can repeat emotions as many times as they apply.
6. Share your Personal Story Timeline with your coach.

Tips:

- There is no right way to do this. Any way you choose to use your timeline is right for you. When you are adding events, you're comparing the emotional impact of that event against the other experiences of your life not against anything else's experiences or opinions.
- The activity will only be helpful to you if you do it and if you are completely true to your feelings. Be honest with yourself and the emotional effect of each event.
- Reach out to your coach if you have questions about completing the assignment.
- Below is a blank Personal Story Timeline. You can use the provided worksheet, or you can do this on a separate piece of paper

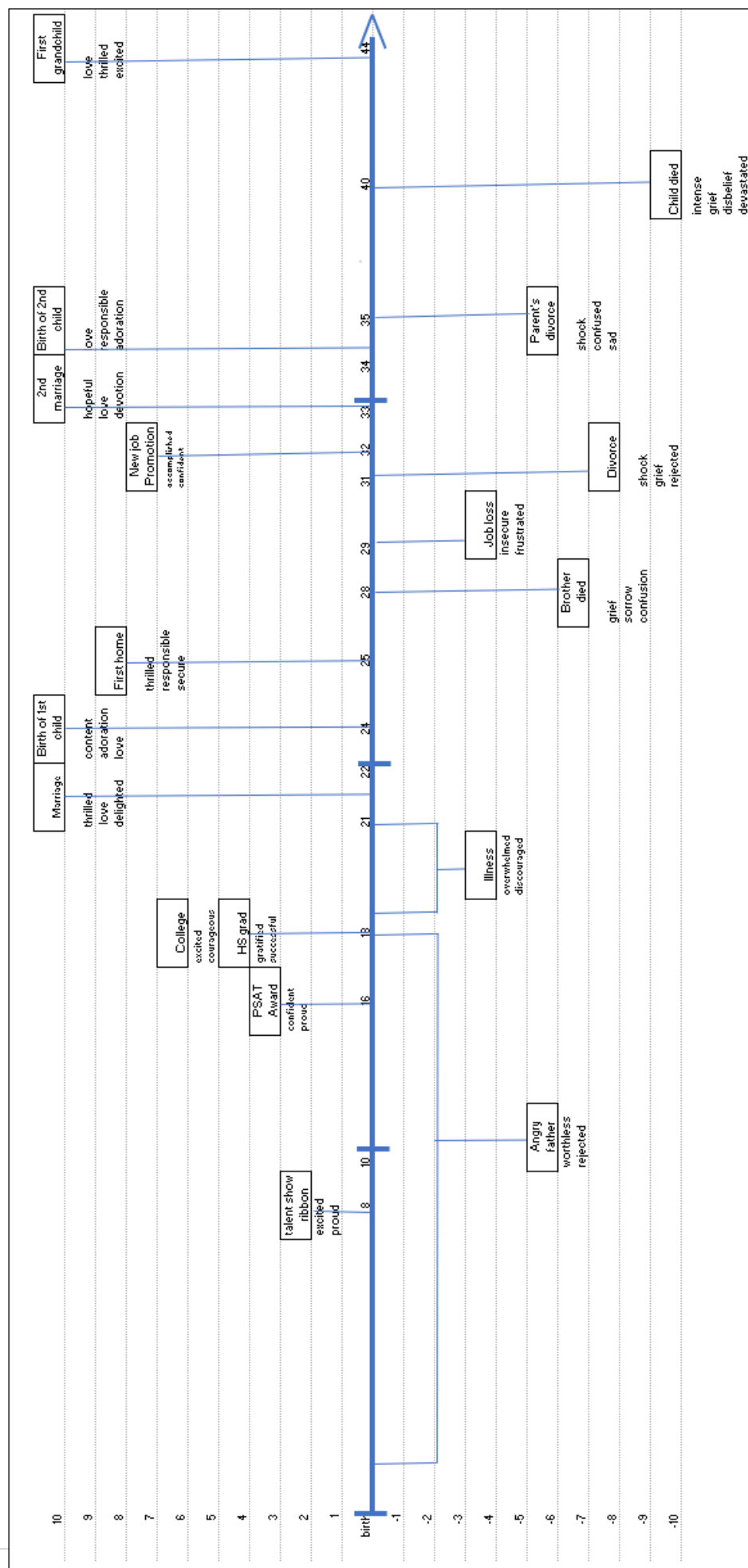
Personal Story Timeline

The image shows a worksheet for a Personal Story Timeline. It consists of a horizontal blue line with an arrow at the right end, representing a timeline. The line is marked with vertical tick marks at intervals. The background is lined paper with numbers 1 through 10 on the left side, and -1 through -10 on the right side, indicating a scale or axis.

On the next page is the sample timeline. You'll notice that the loss events are below the timeline on the scale of -1 to -10, -1 representing a loss that was less impactful and -10 representing the most impactful losses. The positive impactful events are added above the timeline on the scale of +1 to +10, 1 being less impactful and 10 being most impactful.

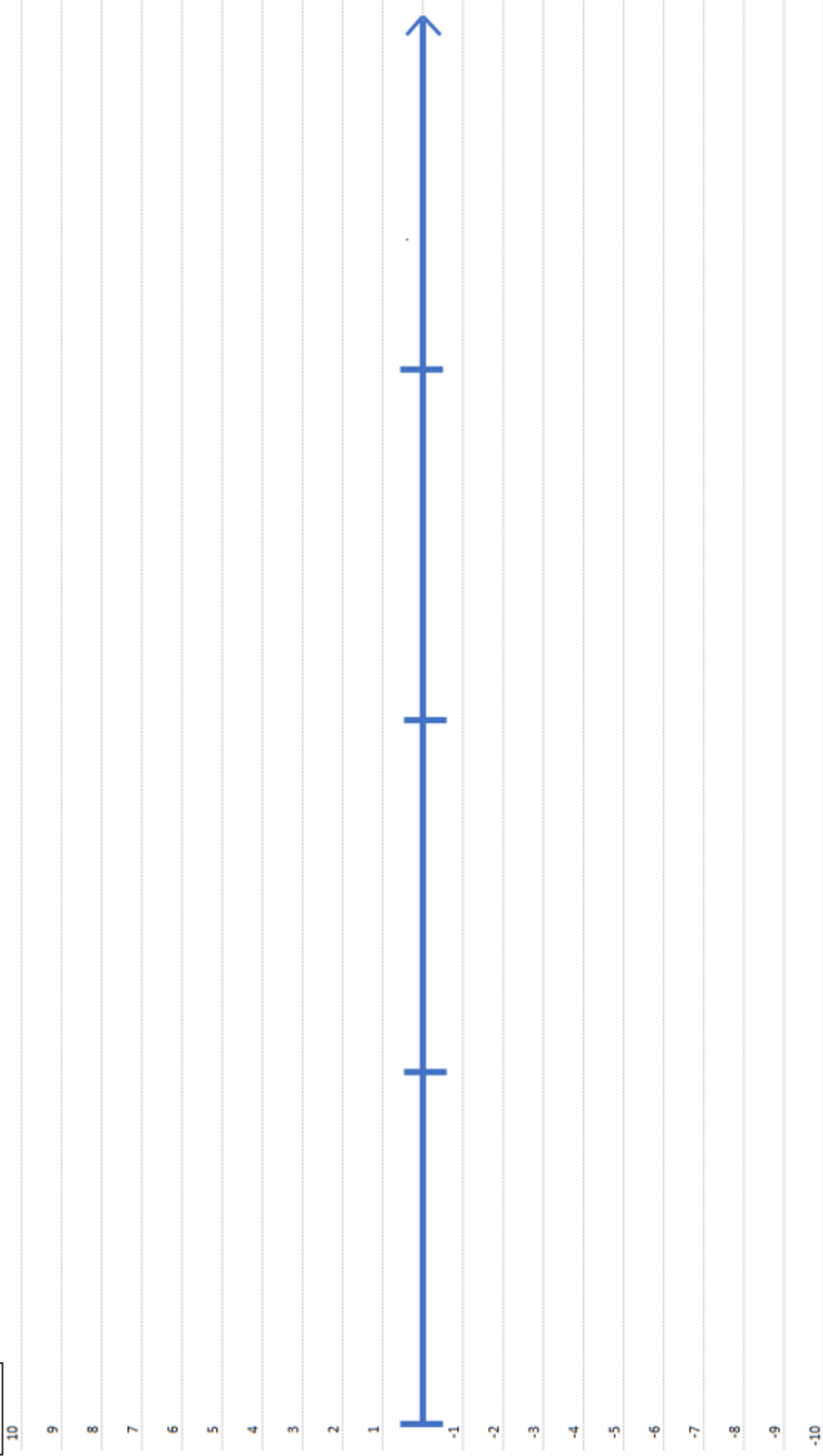
As you carefully review the sample timeline you may have thoughts like, "I would have ranked a divorce more impactful" or "if my brother died that would have been harder than a divorce." And you're right; each person will have a unique view of their life events. Therefore, it is so important to not compare your experiences to other's experiences. Instead, be authentic to yourself and honor your own experiences.

Personal Story Timeline



Personal Story Timeline

Levels



Assignment 2

Creating your Relationship Memories Chart or Map

It's time to identify what loss event you want to focus on first. When you experience loss, you are experiencing the loss of a relationship with a person. In some cases, your grief is associated with the loss of a relationship with a thing not a person, such as a job loss, loss of health or a house fire. As we review the discovery process, we will be referring to a person, but if your loss event is with something other than a person, this process will work for that as well. Just convert the person's name to the appropriate relationship.

After a loss, you have had feelings of wishing you could go back and express your feelings or change some things. You may wish you could continue to make memories with the person. Missed opportunities, unspoken communications, and unrealized dreams are all part of the boulder of grief. To uncover these pieces within the loss experience, you will be reviewing memories.

Relationships are a series of memories or experiences. It's the way you think and feel about that person. Experiences combined with emotion, good or bad, is what creates memories. When emotion is present it signals our mind to pay attention to that moment and store it as a memory for ready recall. Your memories of the relationship are containers of information about what may be left unresolved or uncommunicated.

We've provided two options for briefly recording your memories. The first is a list of memories organized in a chart. The second is organized as a mind map. Choose whichever method is most appealing to you.

Option 1: Relationship Memories Chart

1. Choose a quiet place to work where you won't be interrupted.
2. Completing your chart can be done in one session of 30-60 minutes or it can be done in a few minutes each day for 4-5 days.
3. Circle the 1-3 most difficult losses on your Personal Story Timeline. Currently, which of these three do you want to focus on healing? What relationship is central to this loss? Write that person's name at the top of the Relationship Memories Chart.
4. The Memories Chart is divided into two columns – Positive Memories, and Negative Memories. See the chart below. In short phrases, list your memories of your relationship in these two columns as the memories come to the surface. Don't judge your memories as valid or invalid. Your memories are valid.
5. In the space provided, list the Unrealized Expectations. These are the hopes and dreams you had for the future that won't happen because of the loss.
6. Share your Relationship Memories Chart with your coach.

Relationship: _____	
Positive Memories	Negative Memories
Unrealized Expectations	

Relationship Memories Chart

Relationship: _____

Positive Memories	Negative Memories
Unrealized Expectations	

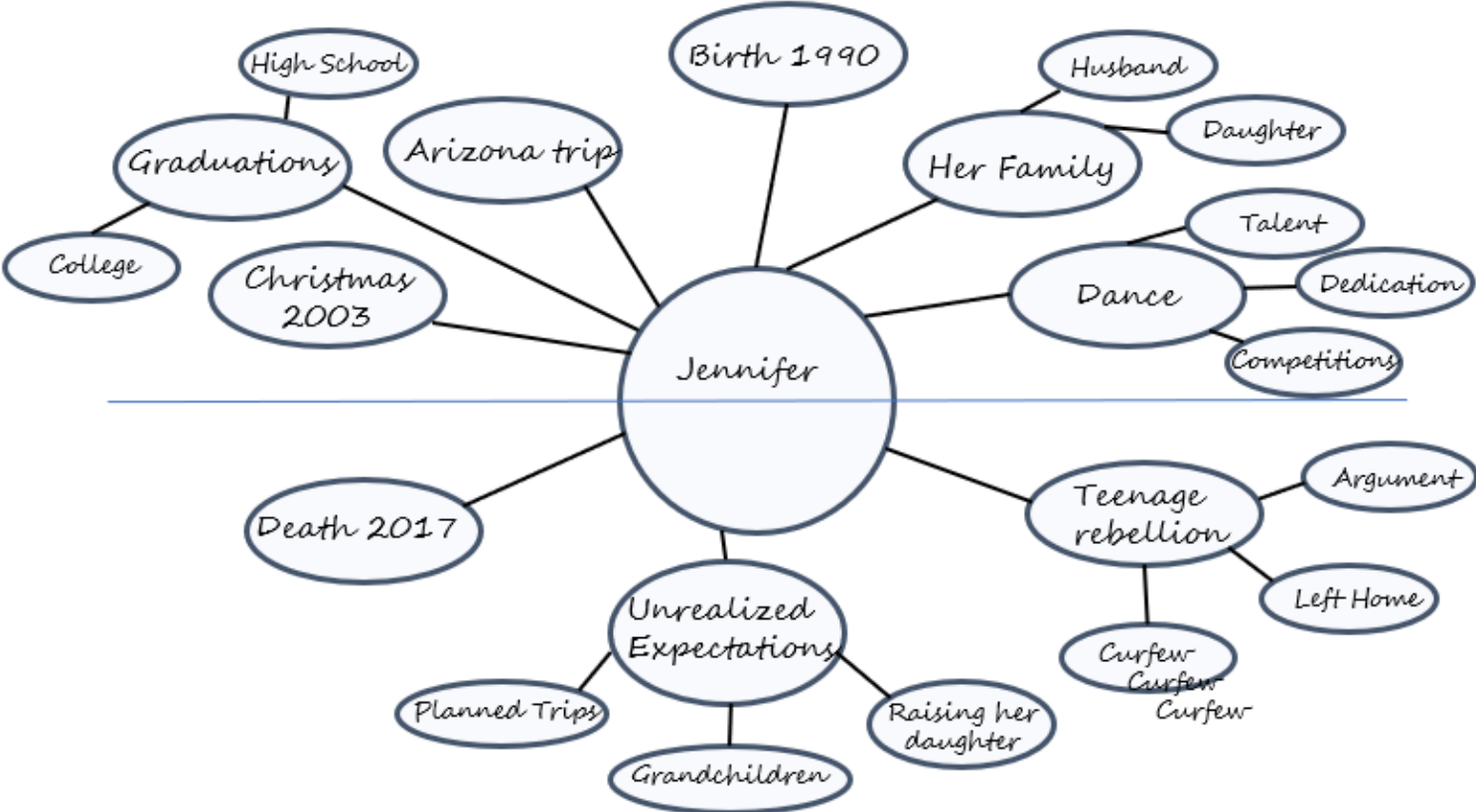
Option 2: Relationship Memories Map

1. Choose a quiet place to work where you won't be interrupted.
2. Completing your map can be done in one session of 30-60 minutes or it can be done in a few minutes each day for 4-5 days.
3. Circle the 1-3 most difficult losses on your Personal Story Timeline. Which of these three do you want to focus on healing? What relationship is central to this loss? Write that person's name in circle in the middle of your Relationship Memories Map.
4. From the central circle connect to "bubbles" of memories adding Positive Memories above the line and negative Memories below the line. You can group some memories together in subheadings. Include a subheading for Unrealized Expectations. See the example on the next page.
5. Share your Relationship Memories Chart with your coach.

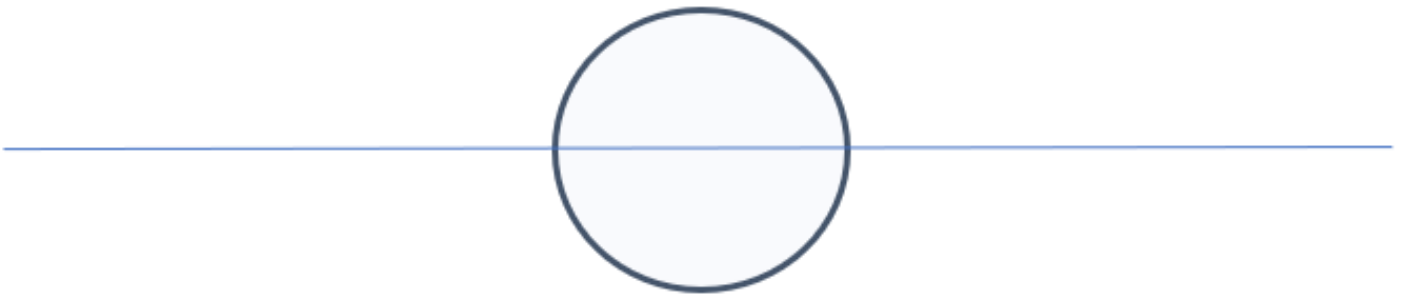
Tips:

- The same tips for completing the Personal Story Timeline apply to completing your graph or map.
- Set an intention that the memories you add to your Relationship Memories Graph or Map are the memories that will help you as you heal your grief. Then trust that the stories that come up for you are the ones you needed to remember.
- Don't spend more than 1 hour on this assignment on this assignment.

Relationship Memories Map Example



Relationship Memories Map



Chapter 8: Resolving

You've completed your Personal Story Timeline and your Relationship Memories Map or Chart. Good work! The work that you've done up to this point is already helping you to heal.

In *Chapter 6: Understanding* you were introduced to the bridge of pain and grief versus the bridge of love and gratitude. Through the process of resolving, you can choose to build the bridge of love and gratitude after the loss of a loving relationship.

In an adversarial relationship, such as the loss of trust one will experience because of abuse, you will want to set the intention to break down the wall of pain and grief, let go of the built-up resentment and animosity and let that person go, trusting that they too will find their own healing in their own way.

Ho'oponopono

Dr. Joe Vitale brought light to Dr. Ihaleakala Hew Len's experience of miraculously turning around a state hospital, when he and Dr. Len co-authored the book *Zero Limits* in 2007. Dr. Len tells the story of his time working at a state hospital for the criminally-ill in Hawaii and curing the patients by practicing ho'oponopono (ho' o po no po no), which is an ancient forgiveness practice.

Each day he would go through the patient files and repeat the words "I love you" and "I am sorry". He continued this practice day after day many years – reviewing the patient files and repeating his love and apologies. Over a period of 4 years, the hospital transformed. Employees who hated going to work and would often call in sick, eventually loved their job and were eager to be there. Reportedly, within four years all the patients were healed. It's a remarkable story of love and forgiveness.

Dr. Len said, "The only purpose in your life and mine is the restoration of our Identity—our Mind—back to its original ...of purity of heart ... through nonstop cleaning."

The common words of the ho'oponopono prayer are, "I'm sorry. Please forgive me. Thank you. I love you." There is much more to this ancient Hawaiian practice but for our purposes we will be using a modified version of this standard supplication as a framework for resolving grief.

Ho'oponopono
I'm Sorry. Please forgive me.
Thank you.
I love you.

Expressing Your Pain

During the discovery process, you recorded many memories of your relationship with the central person (or in some cases, thing) of your loss, whether that loss was divorce, death, abuse, loss of job, loss of health or any other loss. As you review these memories, you will discover things that you wish you could thank them for, things that you wish you could ask forgiveness for, things that you need to forgive them for, expressions of regret and expressions of love that you would like to communicate. These items of love, forgiveness, regrets, and gratitude are the rocks and pebbles that make up the boulder of your grief.

Because of your loss, you may feel like you no longer have an outlet for communicating your thoughts and feelings. In the *Resolving* phase, you'll discover an outlet for that expression. In a loving and close relationship, there will be things that you wish that you could tell them now. There will be love and pain to express. In a painful relationship, there will be unexpressed feelings that are still festering within you. It's important that you have a vehicle for this expression.

Assignment: Communications Chart

Your next step is to complete the communications chart. As you review your Relationship Memories Map or Chart, make a list of the *I'm Sorry for...*, *I Forgive You for...*, *Thank You for...* and *I love You...*. A worksheet is provided to help you sort through these reflections. Short phrases that capture your thoughts will work best. For example, in the *Thank You for...* column you may list, "being at graduation" or simply "graduation." You'll have an opportunity to expand on the thought later. Your list does not need to be contained to one page.

In some cases, you may not have something for every column but in most cases you will. Your Unrealized Expectations may go under *I'm Sorry for...*, such as "I'm sorry we were never able to go on that trip you wanted to go on." Or it may fall under *I Love You*, such as "I would have loved to go on that trip you wanted to go on." You choose what feels best for you.

Communications Chart			
I'm Sorry for...	I Forgive You for...	Thank You for...	I Love You...

Communications Chart

I'm Sorry for...	I Forgive You for...	Thank You for...	I Love You...

A Word About Forgiveness

Forgiving others and asking for forgiveness can feel tricky or hard. Perhaps you understand the idea expressed here by T.D. Jakes, “I think the first step is to understand that forgiveness does not exonerate the perpetrator. Forgiveness liberates the victim. It’s a gift you give yourself.”

Forgiveness feels like a gift we’re giving the person we’re forgiving. As you understand forgiveness at a deeper level you understand that you’re giving a gift to yourself by releasing the unforgiveness, resentment and pain. The gift of forgiveness is particularly challenging, especially if you’ve experienced abuse on any level.

Forgiving a loved one may feel freeing and honoring to you. You may feel comfort in the idea that you can offer that forgiveness now. However, do not let the comfort of a promised forgiveness cause you to feel like you can’t acknowledge and express the pain of the hurt at the time of injury. It’s not *either/or*; it’s *both*. In other words, it’s not *either* I acknowledge the pain, *or* I forgive; instead, it’s, I acknowledge the pain *and* I choose to forgive. Acknowledging and expressing your pain and expressing forgiveness will eventually release the triggering emotions of an event and allow you to feel that forgiveness fully in your heart and not just in your head.

Many times, acknowledging that there was both love *and* pain in a loving relationship is the most challenging part of resolving, especially after they have departed this life. Remember that recognizing the full range of experiences and feelings in any relationship is an essential piece in resolving. You cannot resolve what you are unwilling to see. And in any close relationship, love, gratitude, injury, and pain will be present.

An adversarial relationship will offer its own unique forgiveness challenges. On some level, you may understand that forgiveness is not letting them off the hook for the wrongs they have done, but instead it’s letting yourself off the hook of carrying the hurt and pain. However, as attractive as being able to set down that hurt and pain may appear, don’t shortchange the process by believing that just offering a spoken forgiveness will lift it all from your heart. It is not necessary to your healing to force an intellectual forgiveness, but it is necessary that you open your heart to the possibility of forgiveness.

Best-selling Author Carol Tuttle wrote in her book, *Modern Chakra Guide*, “Forgiveness is not a mental act, but a byproduct of emotionally letting go of the pain, hurt, and wounds that have been carried throughout your life. When this emotional shift takes place, your heart chakra opens the energy of forgiveness in you and your mind is opened up to a higher awareness. You become aware that those who hurt you were also hurt.”

Forgiveness may start as a mental act. Then through the mental act you are setting an intention to forgive. Intentions are powerful and overtime you will feel the healing balm of forgiveness. True forgiveness comes from your higher self as you do the work of healing.

Opportunity Assignment: Letter of Forgiveness, Gratitude and Love

Now you are ready to write a Letter of Forgiveness, Love and Gratitude, to communicate everything that you've discovered to start resolving and therefore to start your healing process.

Open your heart to the intention of expressing and sharing the important elements that will bring you to greater resolution and recovery.

Instructions:

1. Set aside an hour and find a quiet place without distractions.
2. Close your eyes, put your hand on your heart and take 3-5 deep breaths as you breathe into your heart and access your higher self.
3. Open your eyes, and take another deep, cleansing breath as you refer to your Communications Chart to help guide you through writing.
4. Start your letter by addressing the person, such as *Dear Dad*.
5. You may add a few words of introduction.
6. Then referring to the *I'm Sorry for* section of your chart, begin expressing your apologies without excuse.
7. Then referring to the *I Forgive You for* section, begin expressing your forgiveness without excuse. For example, say "I forgive you for not showing up for my wedding" instead of "I forgive you for not showing up for my wedding, but I know it was hard for you." If you're not ready to say, "I forgive you for...", say something like "I am willing to open my heart to the idea of forgiving you for..." If you have questions about this, please ask.
8. Continue to the *Thank You for*
9. And lastly, express your I Love You statements.
10. Conclude your letter with any other communication you wish to express, such as I miss you.
11. Close your letter.
12. Share your letter with your grief coach. Reading your letter out loud to a compassionate witness is an important element of the power of this letter to start the healing process. First, there is healing that takes place when you use your voice. Second, you will have expressed yourself to another person who stands in proxy for the person you wrote the letter to.

Most of the time your letter will have all four elements from the Communications Chart. However, this may not be the case always. Talk to your grief coach about exceptions.

Resolution

Having completed your letter and read your letter aloud, you have made significant progress in your own healing. Congratulations on putting forth the effort, following through and giving this mighty gift to yourself.

You may or may not feel a shift in the energy through this process. It's ok, whether you did or didn't. Regardless, the shifts are happening. Have faith in the process of healing.

As memories or concerns about the loss come up in your mind in the coming weeks, remind yourself of the work that you did and that you've offered your forgiveness and love. Rather than ruminate on past mistakes or hurts, express yourself again with simple statements of reminder. *I'm sorry...I forgive you...Thank you...I love you...* Overtime, you will continue to feel the energy shift in your story of loss as you focus on these simple statements. The emotions will diffuse until eventually you will feel the peace of resolution.

If at any time you remember something you wished you had included in your original Letter of Forgiveness, Gratitude and Love, simply write an additional letter to express these feelings.

Chapter 9: Rebuilding

Before you move forward, take the time to reflect and journal on where you started and where you are now.

Questions to Consider

What have you learned since starting this course?

What have you applied?

How have you grown in understanding and acceptance of yourself and your circumstances?

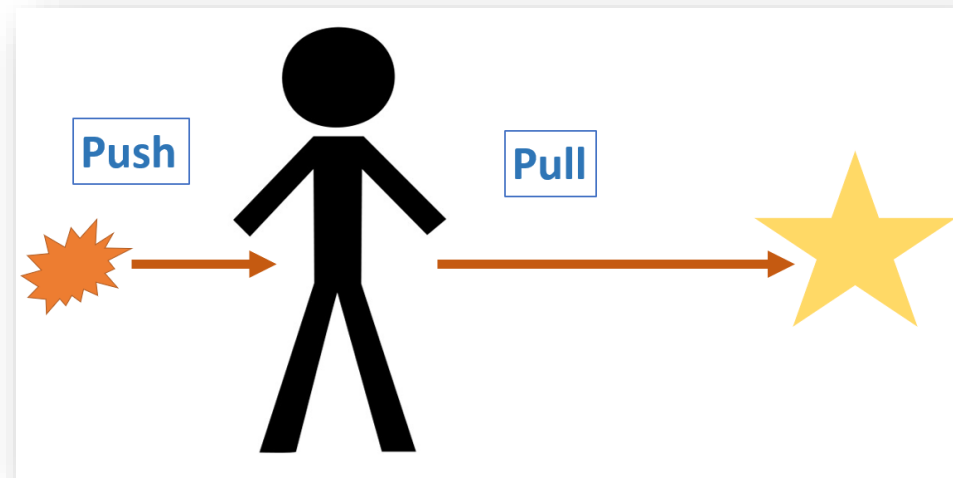
What changes in thoughts or feelings have you experienced?

Recording these thoughts and feelings will help you to solidify your new understanding as well as validate your progress.

Throughout this course we've reviewed the importance of emotions in helping you see where you are, what you're thinking and why you do what you do. Now let's look at emotion and how it can help you go from where you are to greater peace and happiness.

Push vs. Pull Energy

The emotion of grief is a push energy. It propels you away from the pain you don't want. Your actions are influenced by negative emotions, such as grief, disappointment, resentment, etc., as you work to reduce your pain. But reducing pain can only move you so far.



Push energy “pushes” you forward away from an undesirable experience.

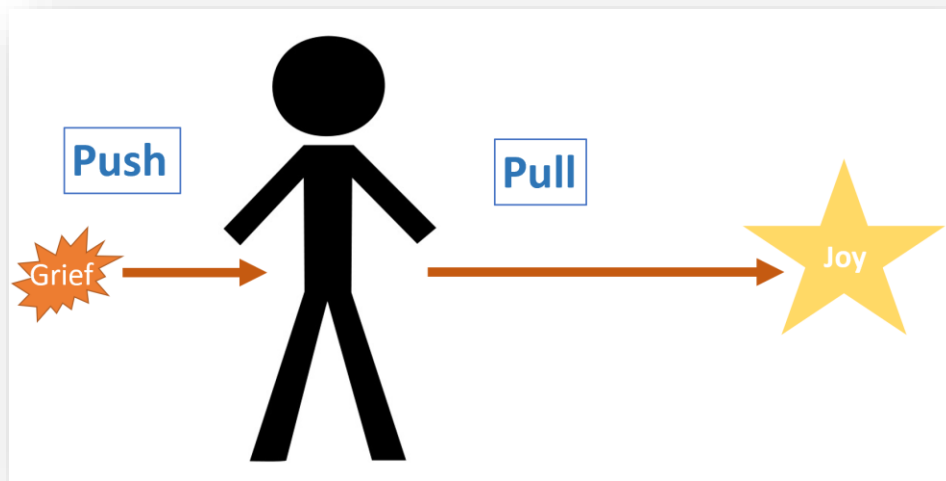
Pull energy “pulls” you forward toward a desired outcome.

As humans we love progress. We thrive on progress. If we don't perceive progress, we feel stuck and unhappy. This is one reason grief is so hard is because we don't naturally have the tools to make progress through our grief, so we feel stuck in our pain and unable to move forward. Now you have actionable tools to help you go from stuck to progressing toward healing and happiness.

But how do you continue to progress? In order, to make greater progress, you must also engage in pull energy.

When we think of peace, happiness, or joy, which are expanded emotions that we wish to cultivate, getting there can feel unclear. When using a GPS in a car, you need to be clear about your destination for the GPS to work for you. Similarly, you'll need to create greater and greater clarity about your desired outcomes to rebuild in a rewarding and sustainable way.

Pull energy is created when you know where you're headed. An important element of future satisfaction in life is knowing how to set and accomplish goals and intentions. To begin, the following sections will help you to understand setting intentions and creating joy in your life.



Questions to Consider

What push energy emotions do you regularly feel?

What pull energy emotions do you regularly feel or would like to feel?

Intention

Intention is a powerful practice that can help you to start creating more pull energy in your life. Setting intentions allows you to make decisions ahead of time of what you want and how you want to experience it. Living an intentional life allows you to be very deliberate in what you create in your life and how you create it. It's more than goals. Intentions can create positive energy around what you want. Wherever you find yourself in the process of healing, you can start living with intention which will aid you in continuous progress.

Progress is happiness. We are made to progress. We feel better when we progress. But be sure not to confuse busyness with progression. This is not about busyness; it's about intentional, thoughtful progress.

3 Steps to Create a Life of Intention

1. Choose an Objective
2. Make a Plan
3. Take Action

First, practice this on a small scale. When you think of a goal, do you tend to think it's not a goal unless it's huge? We commonly think that way. Instead, begin by thinking small scale. You may feel resistance to this and that's ok. We tend to think we have to make huge changes to make progress. In fact, you can create big shifts in your direction through small, incremental progress.

The following exercise will help you to start living with intention while also helping you connect to your personal wants and desires. Like many people, you may discount what you want. You think your desires don't matter, or you are being silly to want such a thing. But your desires are a real part of who you are and when you think your desires don't matter, you inadvertently tell yourself that you don't matter. Of course, you do matter and what you want matters too.

The following simple exercise is designed to help you begin reconnecting to yourself and your wishes.

1. **Choose an intention.** The intention is an objective that you're going to put into action. Choose something *you want* to do tomorrow that's easy to do and that takes little energy or time commitment. Focus on what you want, not what you think others expect or even what you think you *need* to do. Set the intention: "Tomorrow I will _____" Fill in the blank. Focus on your intention.
2. **Make a plan.** How are you going to make your intention a reality? For example, if you want to take a walk, make decisions now about when and where you'll walk. Set out your clothes and your shoes. When you make a plan, do simple things now that will set you up for success tomorrow.
3. **Act on your plan.** Tomorrow, focus on "Today I will _____" Then simply do what you set the intention to do.

You may feel resistant to doing what you planned. As much as possible do it anyway. If you find you aren't doing what you planned, consider journaling for a few minutes with curiosity about why you didn't do what you planned. Then journal how you want to think, feel and act differently. Exploring why and how you want to change will give you great insight that will help you move forward.

Tips:

Take small steps. Here's several examples of small steps you might take: take a 5-10 minute walk, water the plants in the kitchen, sit in the sun at the window for 5 minutes, do a 5-10 minute yoga routine, read a book for 5-10 minutes, or drink your tea on the patio.

Do this daily. Daily, set an intention, make a plan and act on your plan. Consider keeping a record of your intention for the next day and checking it off as you complete it.

Use a daily tracker. A daily tracker is provided at the end of the chapter. As you do this each day you will collect a list of checked and accomplished intentions. Remember to feel the energy of your accomplishment.

By doing these simple acts, you are creating trust in yourself and strengthening the value you place in what's important to you. How easy is it to make so many commitments to others that you never find the time to commit to yourself and follow through? This is a trap that many people find themselves in as they commit their time and energy to others but never to themselves. The above practice is designed to help you to start undoing that pattern of unintentionally discounting yourself.

Ralph Marston said, *“The quality of your commitments will determine the course of your life.”* By following this practice, you will begin to become more committed to your happiness, your wants and your needs. You will start to create integrity with yourself.

Questions to Consider

After practicing intention for 2-3 days, what have you learned about yourself and your desires?

Discovering and Creating Joy



In addition to creating more intention, now is the time to start recognizing and creating more joy in your life. Too often we think that happiness and joy just happen; you either have it or you don't. But in fact, you have more influence over the joy you feel in your life than you realize.

It's never too early to have more joy in your life. Following are five ideas to help you to find and intentionally create more joy in your life.

1. **Pay attention to the little things that bring you joy.** Too often we don't note these moments and we don't even remember or connect to the moments of fleeting happiness. To pay attention, when you feel a spark of joy, take note. For example, perhaps you feel a moment of joy when you look at nature, see the sun coming through the windows, hear a child's laughter, reflect on a happy memory, or work on a personal project. At the end of your day or throughout the day, think about the moments where you felt glimmers of happiness. As you practice reflecting on these moments, you'll find they happen more frequently and you notice them more often, making it easy to pay attention to the things that bring you joy. (A daily tracker is provided at the end of the chapter to assist you in noticing more joy in your life.)
2. **Do things you love more often to connect to your heart energy.** We steal our joy by feeling guilty for "indulging" in activities that create joy, yet these are the very things that connect us to ourselves. By incorporating the things you love into your day, you will develop a daily practice of intentionally connecting to your heart energy.

Questions to Consider

What do you currently love to do or what have loved to do in the past?

How can you find ways to include these activities in your week?

3. **Feel accomplished.** Feeling accomplished is a choice. Coach Dan Sullivan is known for reminding us to “measure the gain, not the gap”. To measure the gain, reflect on where you were and the progress you’ve made instead of always looking at the gap between where you are and where you want to be. To practice this, each day reflect on the things you accomplished that day, then allow yourself to feel accomplished.
4. **Savor joy.** When you notice something that brings a spark of joy, slow down and savor it. In the first suggestion you were reminded to pay attention to moments of joy because we often don’t notice these opportunities to feel happy. Now expand on this idea by savoring those moments. Pause a little longer in front of the sun-filled window, sit in the joy of hearing a child laugh, linger a little longer on the happy memory or smile at the love you feel. Noticing and slowing down and relishing in the moment of happiness will strengthen your joy muscle.
5. **Create more joy.** Noticing and savoring will allow you to know what creates joy for you so you can see more of it and create more of it in your environment, in your heart, in your activities.

Start Here: Write down one moment each day where you felt a moment of joy. A tracker is provided at the end of the chapter to assist you in this. By tracking moments of daily joy, you will train your brain to look for more opportunities to feel joy. Also, consider practicing the affirmation, “I am noticing more joy in my life today.”

LeAura Alderson said, “it is in the momentum of creating daily that we learn how to create more and how much more we can create.” To assist you in adopting these two powerful daily habits, we’ve provided tracking sheets for each. Combined each activity will take less than 3-10 minutes a day. Choose which habit you would like to start with first and then add the other a week to ten days later. As you incorporate these practices, you are creating more momentum and joy in your life through powerful intentions that create pull energy.

Suggested Build a Life After Loss Podcast Episodes:

- Ep. 112 Reflective journaling
- Ep. 113 Living with intention
- Ep. 114 Creating joy
- Ep. 115 Connection for Real Results

Intention Tracker

Ck	Date	Intention

Joy Tracker

Date	Joy Moment