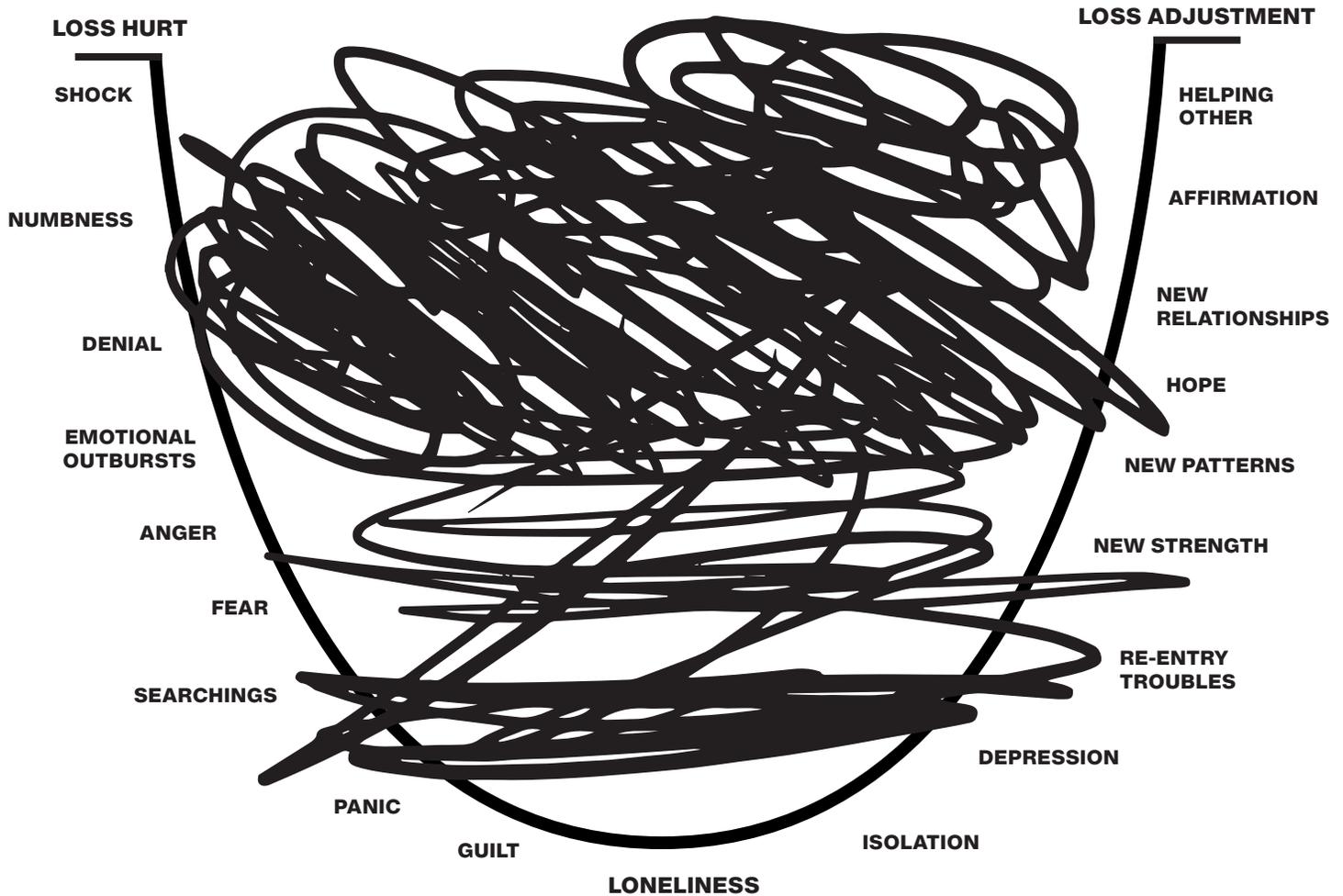


RESOURCE GUIDE

# GRIEF & LOSS

Tools and Insight for Navigating Grief & Loss





# Understanding the Grief Process

Most would like to believe that the process of grief happens in a linear fashion, nothing could be further from the truth. While there are markers along the process of grief, one does journey through, or experience these identifiers in a linear fashion. As the above diagram shows, the process of grief can happen in waves, all at once, slow over time; not only can it be disorienting, but it can with a host of unprocessed emotions and challenges. What's important is to give yourself grace throughout the journey, room for your feelings, time to heal, and space to process your experience - past, present, and future.





# Saying Goodbye

Every loss in life needs the recognition that the connection is broken and life will be different. That's why we have retirement parties and other types of goodbye get-to-togethers like funerals, or when a friend moves away.

Being able to say goodbye helps us move towards a sense of closure and brings back some of the feeling of control over our life and circumstance which were diminished by the loss.

Saying goodbye is not morbid or a signal of hysteria or of being out of control. It is a healthy way to make the transition into the next phase of life. How do you go about saying goodbye?

Identify what you think needs to be expressed. It may be words of appreciation or regrets. Or, you may need to complete something which was never finished between the two of you (for example: a project you were going to do together).

## Write a Goodbye Letter

Often, it can be hard to find the words verbally, so many people find writing to be a powerful tool to unlock feelings and thoughts that they may be avoiding. Write a goodbye letter or talk out loud to the person/object you've lost.

You can address a goodbye letter to a lost dream, a lost hope, a business, or even a change in your vocation. Indicate that it is a goodbye letter and then share what you want to say. The more regrets and "if onlys" you have, the more important your letter is, since this is your opportunity to express what was never verbalized.

## How to Write a Goodbye Letter

1. Be completely truthful.
2. Be sure you have identified incomplete business, this should include the following.
  - Making amends – things that you were sorry for either having said or done or not having said or done.
  - Offering forgiveness – things you need to forgive another for, real or imagined.
  - Expressing significant emotional statements: "I miss you", "I love you", "Thank you", "I forgive you".
3. Write alone.
4. Write the letter as though the person was going to receive it.
5. Recall your last conversation and share what happened within it.
6. Read your letter to someone you trust.
7. Say goodbye.





# Grief & Loss during the Holidays

We know that navigating grief and loss can be challenging; especially during the Holiday season. Below are 10 ways to help you navigate the holiday season.

**1. Mark Your Calendar.** Make an appointment with your grief. By doing so you can be intentional about when, where, and how you experience it.

**2. Grieve Ahead of Time.** The art of pre-grieving as you head into the holidays (ie. Think through how things use to be and who used to do them. Anticipate what that is going to feel like.)

**3. Make a Plan.** Plan your holiday, month, what events you are going to.

**4. Everyone Has Their Process.** Remember that others may not feel the same way as you and allow for them to process how they need to.

**5. Self-Care Is Critical.** This is a marathon not a sprint. Making sure that you have the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual energy to get through this is vital. Refueling yourself through self-care is a great way manage your energy.

**6. You Need a Support System.** Get a support system – people you know will be empathetic to your need. Give others who can't be there emotionally for you to do something practical for you.

**7. Check-In With Your Body.** Pay close attention to your physical well being. Eat right, exercise, get sleep. The body does keep score and your brain will suffer and depression will creep in.

**8. Plan Some Fun.** Allow yourself to have fun. Many don't because it feels dishonoring. But it's important that you do something that you find fun. This will allow you to have bright moments during a time when you can feel down.

**9. Write Your Feelings Down.** Journal all the things. Write down the intense thoughts, the outrageous emotions, the sentimental feelings, your journal can handle any and all of your emotions.

**10. Know Your Buttons.** We all have buttons that when pressed they can trigger an emotion or memory. It's important that you recognize buttons that push you and avoid them. I.E. certain music, places, foods, etc.



# Plan for Success

The key to getting through the holidays is to plan. Here are some suggestions as you plan your holiday calendar.

**1. Anticipate there is going to be some difficult moments and decide to develop a strategy in advance as best you can.** You can't control every moment or memory, nor avoid the pain, but you can do some things in advance to make this time less difficult.

**2. Prioritize events and don't overcommit.** When the holidays are filled with so many parties, dinners, and events, save your energy for those that are most important. Look at everything you need to do and rank them in order of importance. Plan for the most important and skip the rest.

**3. Look ahead and think through each holiday.** Reflect on what traditions you may want to keep, or change. Introduce a new event, outing or activity into your holiday schedule. If you have children, allow them to speak to the calendar too.

Make it a fun activity where you sit down together and plan the holiday activities. It will give them something to look forward to, as well as a sense of stability.

**4. Decide where you want to spend the holidays** – you may want to switch up the location, or it may be of comfort to keep it the same. Either way, make a conscious decision about location.

**5. Daily record one thing you are grateful for.** No matter how small. This will help you to battle “holiday funk” and remind you that there is always something to be grateful for.



# Ways to Help Children Navigate Loss during the Holidays

**1. Plan your holiday calendar as a group.** Ask them what is important to them. Allow them to come up with a new tradition, activity or event and do this as a group. If there is a tradition that is especially important to them, allow them to speak to that and talk about how you can continue it.

**2. Give them permission to feel.** Talk to your kids about the holidays and let them know it's ok to feel happy and it's ok to feel sad.

**3. Keep communication open.** Talk with them about their loved one. Be specific with good memories. Let children share their feelings and stories. Children may not always have the correct details. Talk about anything and everything.

Keep the communication lines open by spending one-on-one time with a child who is grieving. This is especially important as you and the child remember your loved one's favorite holiday activities.

**4. Be Transparent.** Don't feel like you always must be composed. It is okay for the children to see your tears and to feel your pain. Ask your children for a hug on your down days.

**5. Allow for celebration.** Let them go to holiday parties and family get-togethers. Make new memories and new traditions. Candlelight memorial service ... Let them honor the memory of their loved one.

**6. Laughter and play are very important.** Kids need a break from grief. Allow them to have fun and not feel bad if they are having a good time.

**7. Make a craft.** Plan a memorial activity/craft of some kind

**8. Encourage them to journal if they are old enough to write.** Or create a simple daily calendar that they can place feeling stickers, or draw happy, sad, angry, scare faces on.

**9. Provide structure.** Loss can be especially scary for kids as they don't have to developed skill set to navigate this new normal. Routine during the holidays helps them to feel stability.

**10. Allow close friends and relatives to help.** Friends and family can help support the children through the holiday and take some pressure off yourself.



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