

The Emotions of

# Grief

understanding and healing  
from seasons of grief

a handbook compiled by  
Dr. Chido Rwafa Madzvamutse

## Contents

Acknowledgements .....	3
About the Author.....	4
Seasons of Grief .....	5
The losses that make us grieve .....	7
Loss through Death.....	7
Relationship Changes and estrangement.....	7
Changes in sense of purpose and identity .....	8
Changes in health .....	8
Facing one's own death.....	8
Complicated losses .....	9
Death out of natural order .....	9
Pregnancy loss and Still births.....	9
The death of an adult child.....	11
Death of a young spouse.....	11
Loss of parents for a young child.....	12
Sudden or traumatic death .....	13
Types of Grief .....	15
Uncomplicated 'Normal' grief and the emotions of grief .....	15
Numbness .....	15
Sadness.....	16
Anger and frustration.....	16
Fear and anxiety.....	16
Regret and guilt .....	17
Disenfranchised grief/ Unacknowledged grief .....	17
Cumulative and delayed grief.....	18
Complicated Grief .....	19
Traumatic loss and grief .....	21
The Work of Grieving .....	23
Accepting and adjusting to the loss .....	23
Acknowledging and processing the emotions of grief.....	24
Remaining connected with others around you .....	25
How can I help someone who is grieving? .....	26
Finding meaning and purpose beyond our loss.....	28
Post traumatic growth... healing from loss.....	29
Works Cited .....	31

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Rachel

Tanatswa

Thank you for sharing your stories, your pain and your journey in healing.

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## About the Author

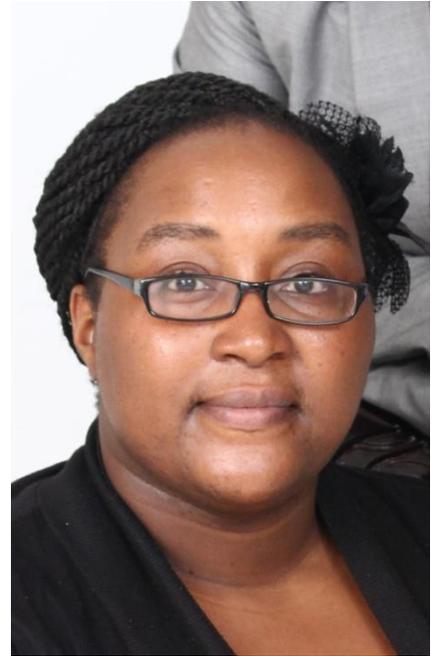
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## Seasons of Grief

**"Grief is the last act of love we can give to those we loved. Where there is deep grief, there was great love" ..... Anonymous**

*"When I lost my wife in the aftermath of having what we had planned to be our last child, it was like a big detour in my life. We had all these big plans then boom my life partner, my co-planner was gone. In an instant all our plans were out the window. I have learnt a lot since she passed and I'm still learning. There are moments of 'grief ambush' that I have come to learn of when a song, a route I have taken, a peculiar sound can trigger a strong wave of grief. Grief is a journey not a destination. I have learnt to live with grief, go through the process and I still am walking that journey"*

*Sif*

Grief is a natural response to loss. Loss comes in many forms but in whichever form it comes to us, we feel the pain of loss because of our love and attachment to that which we have lost. Loss comes with many questions and with many emotions. Loss will challenge our view of life, shift our paradigms and change our narratives.



Grief is an emotional, physical, behavioural, cultural and spiritual response to loss...

Emotionally, when we grieve we may struggle with sadness, despair, anger, frustration, fear, anxiety, regret, guilt. Our emotions may be confusing and conflicted, intense or numbed.

Physically, we may feel exhausted, we may struggle to sleep, our immunity may be affected and we fall ill easily, we may struggle with many aches and pains. We may struggle to eat, lose weight or gain weight as we eat for comfort.

Socially, we may feel isolated and alone, we may withdraw from others, we may struggle to maintain our remaining relationships.

Spiritually, we may struggle to find meaning again, we may question our very beliefs and our value system may be shaken as we ask...what is the meaning of life, what really matters in life.

It is my hope that this little booklet will help us to better understand our grief and walk towards healing. May this booklet validate the many emotions of grief you may be experiencing. As you read through the experiences of Francis, Rachel, Sif and Tanatswa, reflect on your own journey in grief. In this season where many of us are faced with many kinds of losses, may we courageously face the season of grief and walk even if slowly towards healing of our souls.

## The losses that make us grieve

Grief commonly occurs due to death, however there are a range of losses that can also trigger the process and emotions of grief.

### Loss through Death

We grieve a loss through death because we love and are attached emotionally to the one who has passed. Though most of us are aware that death is an inevitable part of our lives, it is still a challenging process each time someone we love dies, you never get used to it. Death is an unwelcome guest, one you can't turn away, one you begrudgingly make space for and accommodate.

### Relationship Changes and estrangement

Estrangement... indifference where there was once love (Webster, 2020).

Loss of a relationship, of a marriage, changes in the nature of a relationship also trigger a grieving process. Again we grieve because we have loved, we have lived a life together, shared a life. The changes that result from a separation or divorce can cause us to grieve as we have to detach from someone we have been bonded to emotionally and psychologically.



Changes in relationships can also occur when our children have grown and now leave our homes or marry and start their own families. This, though a joyous moment, can be bittersweet as we learn to transition into a different way of loving and caring for them.

## **Changes in sense of purpose and identity**

Changes in job status, loss of employment, change in the nature of the work you do, changes in work structure such as having to work from home or having to transition back to the office can also trigger a grief process. Transition phases such as finishing school and retirement can also trigger grieving. Significant financial loss, loss of a home and other significant property can result in loss of security and we will grieve over such losses as well.

## **Changes in health**

Severe, life threatening or debilitating illness or injury in ourselves or our family or friends can cause us to grieve. Facing our own terminal illness maybe one of the most challenging grief processes we may have to face.

## **Facing one's own death**

Some of us may have the opportunity to prepare for our own deaths, we may have a chronic or terminal illness or we may be in our old age and start to anticipate the end of our lives. This can be difficult. Facing ourselves, we may reflect on the journey we have travelled in our lives, making amends, seeking and finding peace and contentment that it is well, that our lives have had some meaning and purpose and if not making peace with that too. It is a journey of letting go. Elizabeth Kubler Ross's five stages of grief, denial, anger, depression, bargaining and acceptance were actually seen in those who were dying and perhaps make the most sense when seen through the eyes of one who is now facing their own death (Kübler-Ross, 1970).



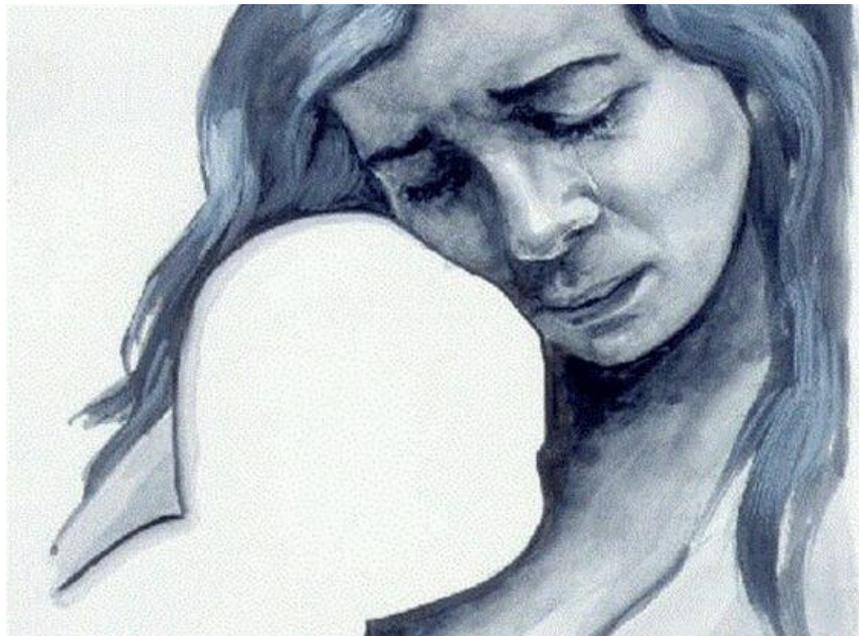
## Complicated losses

Certain losses can make it particularly difficult to walk the journey of grieving to healing. They may result in complications in what would usually be a natural response to loss due to the very nature of the loss.

### Death out of natural order

We will all die. However, we make certain assumptions about when and how. We often expect parents to die before their children and spouses to grow old together before one dies, many hope for a peaceful death free from violence for ourselves and our loved ones and we all hope for a chance to say good bye to loved ones or to put our house in order. When these assumptions are debunked by unexpected and unnatural death, our grieving process may be complicated. These may include:

### Pregnancy loss and Still births



*“I was pregnant, with twins, a girl and a boy. When I delivered, my son was still born.. I struggled, I felt sad, I cried and could hardly feed my surviving daughter. At some point I thought I was better, then I went to see the site where they cremated him and it all came flooding back, all the emotions of his death were rekindled and I wept at his demise more than ever that day. It was a deep pain, that cut my heart.*

*But I consoled myself with the thought that I could have another child but as I came to learn, no human can replace another. So we tried for another baby and when I got pregnant again I felt like restoration had started in my life, I had a son, he was healthy, we went home but a few weeks later... he passed away quietly in his cot in the night..*

*I was more than broken.”*

*Rachel*

Loss of a pregnancy or the loss of an unborn child can be a very lonely loss, grief faced alone because in many societies and cultures, early pregnancy is often kept hidden or secret. This can make it difficult to share the loss of the pregnancy publically and grieve openly. This can lead to a greatly disenfranchised or unacknowledged grief. Some may experience a sense of guilt often wondering if they could have done more to prevent the loss. Pregnancy is often strongly linked to a woman's sense of self, childbearing often being linked to self esteem in many women. Furthermore many cultures often encourage couples to try and conceive again as soon as possible in order to get comforted by a new child. This may not allow much time for the healing process of grief to occur and can complicate our grief.

**The death of a child:** death of a young child is always an unnatural loss and is considered one of the most difficult losses in human life. It is a loss of what we believed would outlive us, of the future we dreamt of. It can shake our beliefs of what is right, what is just, what is fair, what is the natural order of things. We can lose our bearings as the predictability of life is shattered. The death of a child can affect the parent's marriage as spouses struggle to grieve and comfort one another. The death can also affect any surviving children who may be overlooked in the wake to such a tragedy.



**The death of an adult child:** death of one's child at any age is very difficult and often feels 'out of order'. When there is surviving spouse and grandchildren, the grief of a parent may be less acknowledged and one may even feel a sense of guilt at continuing to live into old age while your younger son or daughter's life has come to an earlier end.

**Death of a young spouse:** no one marries with the intent of becoming a young widow or widower. In fact society's view of a widow is often a frail, older woman and a widower, an equally frail older man both comforted and cared for by their adult children and dotted on by grandchildren. No one imagines losing their spouse in their prime of life and left alone in our youth. You may feel out of step with your age mates, out of timing. Young widowhood is altogether a very ill defined role. Such a death comes with its own unique challenges... becoming a single parent, running a household alone, financial pressures and social isolation as age mates are preoccupied with their own families.

## Loss of parents for a young child

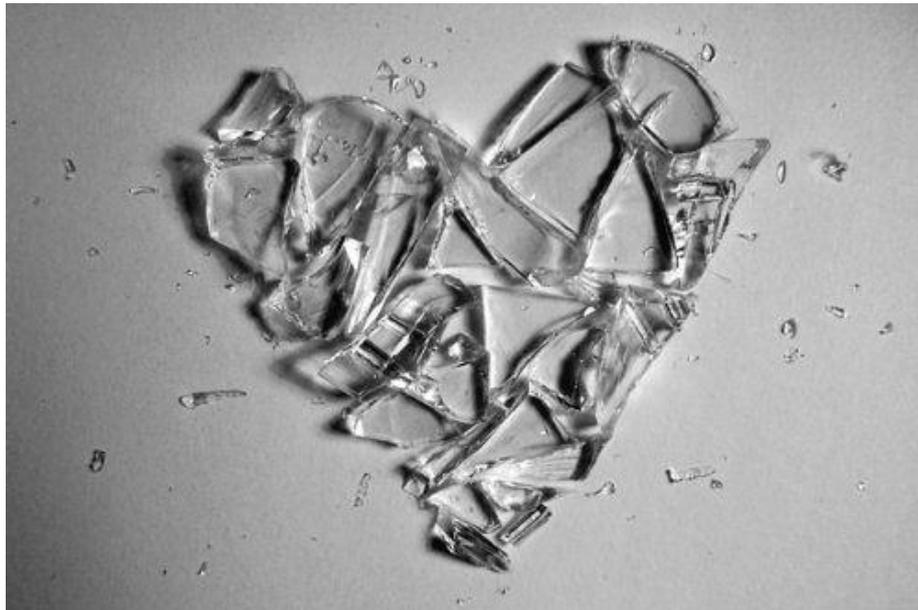
*“I lost my Mum at when I was just five years old. It was in November 1998, she hadn't been sick, she just collapsed and died. My family didn't tell me she had died, or explain what had happened. On the day of her burial they made me do the body viewing and when I saw her in the coffin, I thought she was sleeping. I tried to wake her up but they took me away and I wasn't allowed to be a part of the burial. Years passed and I kept asking where they had taken my mum, 'Mama varikupi?' ... 'Where is Mama?' ... and when I asked these questions my grandmother would just cry.*

*Tanatswa*



Children will many times outlive their parents but again the expectation is that we will lose our parents when are adults and parents ourselves, when we have our own families and support systems to help us cope with what is a natural process. This is not so when a parent dies young and leaves young hearts not yet ready to face the world without the protection and love of a parent. Loss of a parent in childhood is also the loss of their whole world, they most probably have no capacity of their own to turn to for comfort. Children are heavily reliant on others to help restructure and rebuild from the loss. Without adequate support and sometimes even with all the support provided this can still result in a complicated and prolonged grieving process, a lifetime of grief for some.

## Sudden or traumatic death



*“I am a doctor and have some insight into what depression can do to someone, I had a sense of what could happen, I did everything I could to try and get my sister to get her life back. But I saw her slide down into a deep depression and when she decided to stop her treatment I was worried. But I still could have never been prepared for the early morning phone call from my brother in law to inform me that she had died by suicide. I don’t say she took her life, I believe depression and suicide is like a heart attack... it is like a brain attack.*

*Depression and suicide took her life.*

*The initial reaction was utter shock, disbelief, insurmountable sorrow, it was a depth of darkness that I never experienced before, a depth of pain, the most painful thing I have ever felt. She was my best friend, she checked on me, dreamt for me, she prayed for me. Sometimes I do think, did I do enough for her?”*

*Francis*

Many deaths often feel traumatic to those who lose their loved one. However, a sudden death through illness or accident is devastating. There is no warning to help brace oneself psychologically. There are no goodbyes, no chance to prepare oneself. Death in this case barges in the room rudely and is a most unexpected and unwelcome guest. When the sudden death is through murder or homicide, this is further traumatising. Families that are victims of such crimes may become traumatised, feeling

unsafe. They may also often feel stigmatized themselves after the death and may struggle with guilt and shame.

Death from suicide is very traumatic, not only sudden and traumatic but often families face much stigma in the aftermath of the death. Grief is difficult even in the most normal of circumstances but with suicide we are left with so many unanswered questions. We doubt ourselves, we question ourselves, our role in the tragedy, we muse over what we could have done differently, what we could have said differently. We question the validity of our grief, we battle with feelings of heart wrenching loss yet also deal with the judgement of others.

Experiencing and dealing with a traumatic death can result in us becoming psychologically traumatised. If you feel you may have been traumatised by the sudden, traumatic death of a loved one, please complete the following self assessment on Traumatic Stress Symptoms and reach out to your nearest health provider if you need help.

**Trauma Screening Questionnaire**

**Your Own Reactions Now to the Traumatic Event**

Please consider the following reactions which sometimes occur after a traumatic event. This questionnaire is concerned with your personal reactions to the traumatic event which happened a few weeks ago. Please indicate whether or not you have experienced any of the following AT LEAST TWICE IN THE PAST WEEK:

	YES, AT LEAST TWICE IN THE PAST WEEK	NO
1. Upsetting thoughts or memories about the event that have come into your mind against your will		
2. Upsetting dreams about the event		
3. Acting or feeling as though the event were happening again		
4. Feeling upset by reminders of the event		
5. Bodily reactions (such as fast heartbeat, stomach churning, sweatiness, dizziness) when reminded of the event		
6. Difficulty falling or staying asleep		
7. Irritability or outbursts of anger		
8. Difficulty concentrating		
9. Heightened awareness of potential dangers to yourself and others		
10. Being jumpy or being startled at something unexpected		

Score of 5 or greater indicates possible Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

(Brewin, 2002)

## Types of Grief

### **Uncomplicated 'Normal' grief and the emotions of grief**

While nothing about the death of a loved one and the grief that ensues may seem or feel normal, grief is essentially a normal human reaction to our loss. Grief is a process not a state or a destination. It is a journey, often with swinging in and out of grief. Grief often comes in waves with ebbing and flowing. We all grieve in our own unique way and the process can take months or years. There is generally an acute phase to grief which then eases into a more integrated phase of grief or abiding grief (Zisook, 2009). Abiding grief is less intense, the memories and longing for the deceased still exists but are less overwhelming as we integrate our grieving for the dead into our continued living with and for those around us.

Acute grief comes with a range of emotions:

#### **Numbness**

*“My sister died in another country, while we awaited the repatriation of her body back home, I still hoped she would just come back alive, somehow that this was all a big mistake. But when the body finally arrived, I came to and realised she was gone, I couldn't contain myself, I broke down and I cried.”*

*Francis*

In the immediate aftermath of a significant loss we may feel shocked, numb and be in some state of disbelief about what has just happened. This mental numbing is often our mind's way of protecting us from the excruciating pain of losing someone we love. We may feel dissociated from reality and disoriented.

## **Sadness**

The intense pain of grief often comes with a deep sense of sadness and despair. As memories and thoughts about the deceased flood our minds we may start to realise the gravity of our loss. Tears will often come in a flood and we may feel inconsolable. We may even be so in despair that we want to die too.

## **Anger and frustration**

*“I had so many emotions since my wife died, I felt sad, deep sadness, a feeling of being so alone, sometimes emotional confusion, a mixture of sorrow and great sense of being lost. Anger was also another emotion... anger at God, at myself, and even at my wife, anger at the doctor who handled her delivery of the baby.”*

*Sif*

Mixed with the sadness we may get angry, angry at ourselves, at the person who has died, at others often those involved in medical care of our loved one, at our families, friends, at God. We may feel cheated, abandoned, betrayed. Loss often feels unjust, unkind and cruel.

## **Fear and anxiety**

Loss always comes with change and the uncertainty of change can bring about much fear and anxiety. Fear of the unknown, fear of having to live without our loved one. Death in particular often makes us aware of our own mortality and the fear of our own death may loom over us.

## Regret and guilt

*“After my second son died, I was devastated,, I felt so guilty, I felt like it was my fault that the child had died, I should have woken during the night to check on him, I had so many questions, I still do... what happened to my healthy baby?*

*I wanted to die, I thought of killing myself and my children..my faith in God and the love and support of my husband and family were what kept me going”*

*Rachel*

We may feel guilty, over care or protection we could have provided prior to the death, over words said or left unsaid, should have, would have, could have's. We may mull over our last conversations, last words, last actions.

Whatever emotions you may be experiencing, these mentioned here or a myriad of others, remember all emotions are valid. You may feel like this is a new and strange experience, you may feel misunderstood and out of step with others but this is still very much a part of our natural response to our loss.

### **Disenfranchised grief/ Unacknowledged grief**

Sometimes we experience a loss but it is not acknowledged by our community, families and those close to us (Doka, 2009). Our grief may be viewed as not important, unnecessary or even wrong. Some examples of losses that may lead to disenfranchised grief are:

Pregnancy loss, still birth or loss of a new born infant

Loss of a non relative (friend, colleague, neighbour, teacher, employer)

A complicated relationship with the deceased (an affair, as an unacknowledged child of the deceased)

Loss of a beloved pet

A loss not related to death (as mentioned previously in the losses that cause us to grieve)

Even if others do not see or acknowledge your grief, remember, it is your right to grieve. Acknowledge your grief and the emotions that come with it and seek help and support if you need it.

### **Cumulative and delayed grief**

When we experience multiple losses, one after another without much chance to work through the multiple cycles of loss, we may end up with compounded or cumulative grief. This can result in complicated grief as we bottle up emotions in the face of so much pain and loss. In other situations due to the nature or circumstances of the loss we may be forced to shelve our grieving process. The grief is then triggered at a later time often with similar intensity of acute grief.



## Complicated Grief

*“In 2001, I was now 8 years old and my grandmother took me to the cemetery to see my Mum’s grave, to help answer my questions. It was the first time I had seen the grave. That is when it clicked and the grieving process started for me, reality kicked in that Mum was dead and she would never come back, all I had left of her was just a few pictures. I really wept that day, wept profusely, with so much anger and so much pain...from then on it all became very real. I grieved for maybe 12 or 13 years and my childhood was a dark, lonely phase which I never enjoyed. I felt alone and abandoned. I often wondered if she was here how things would have been different, if my mother was alive, this or that would not be happening to me, I wondered what advice would I have asked for, what steps would she have encouraged me to make?”*

*Tanatswa*

Grief can however become complicated and we struggle to transition from acute grief to abiding or integrated grief (Zisook, 2009). Grief becomes the focus of life making it difficult to accept and heal from the loss.

Complicated grief or Persistent Complex Bereavement Disorder affects 10% of those in mourning and occurs when our grief continues to be exceedingly intense and persistent (Shear, 2003). We continue to yearn for the deceased and lose our sense of self. We are frequently preoccupied with thoughts of the deceased, thoughts about the circumstances of the death and details of the death and funeral. We may have intense feelings of emptiness or loneliness and may feel frequent urges to join the deceased. Life remains without meaning.

With complicated grief, the shock, numbness, disbelief and inability to accept the loss continues on for months. The anger and bitterness continue on for years, and we may become increasingly socially isolated and internally focused, struggling to trust others and struggling to care about others. We may struggle with intense reactions to memories or reminders of the deceased and try to avoid any reminders of the deceased.

Eventually this may start to affect our ability to function in our family, community and workplace.

## **Why do some people experience prolonged/ complicated grief?**

Risk factors for experiencing complicated grief include individual and environmental factors and then factors related to the nature of the loss.

### Individual factors:

- A history of mental health challenges can make us more vulnerable to complicated grief
- Previous significant losses can also increase risk (Cumulative grief)
- Age: loss of parents and guardians or other significant family members in childhood can also predispose to complicated grief
- Gender:
  - Widows express more symptoms of depression but recover quicker than widowers
  - There is an increased mortality among widowers (17%) vs widows (6%) and widowers have a higher mortality compared to married men
  - Widowers are more likely to have preventable hospitalizations during the grief period
- Unhelpful family, social and cultural rituals (particularly family disputes, stigmatization that occurs with suicide deaths and also funerals or burials where the remains are treated as highly infectious as we are faced with currently)
- Lack of social support

### Factors related to the nature of the loss

- Sudden unexpected loss: from road traffic accidents and natural disasters, suicide
- Violent, horrific deaths: from war, terrorism, physical and sexual assault
- Multiple losses
- Loss where one feels responsible for the death (e.g. a road traffic accident where one was the driver at fault)
- Disenfranchised loss, where some may view the grief as invalid (e.g. miscarriages in some cultures)

- Where one is a lone survivor or one of very few survivors (Survivor's Guilt)

### **Traumatic loss and grief**

Traumatic loss makes grief difficult because:

- There is no preparation for the bereaved and the changes that the loss brings are instant
- In addition to grief, one also has to deal with shock and horror. The emotions associated with grief are also more intense
- The loss shatters ones beliefs and assumptions about how the world works
- The question **Why did this happen?** can be overwhelming
- The difficulty of not having had the chance to say good bye...

Could you be struggling with complicated or persistent grief? Please take some time to answer the questionnaire below on Complicated Grief and seek help from your nearest healthcare provider if you need help.

TABLE 2: SYMPTOMS ON THE INVENTORY OF COMPLICATED GRIEF	
Rating 0 [Not at all] to 4 [Severe] Score $\geq 25$ defines Complicated grief	
1. I think about this person so much that it's hard for me to do the things I normally do...	
2. Memories of the person who died upset me...	
3. I feel I cannot accept the death of the person who died...	
4. I feel myself longing for the person who died...	
5. I feel drawn to places and things associated with the person who died...	
6. I can't help feeling angry about his/her death...	
7. I feel disbelief over what happened...	
8. I feel stunned or dazed over what happened...	
9. Ever since he/she died it is hard for me to trust people...	
10. Ever since he/she died I feel like I have lost the ability to care about other people or I feel distant from people I care about...	
11. I have pain in the same area of my body or have some of the same symptoms as the person who died...	
12. I go out of my way to avoid reminders of the person who died...	
13. I feel that life is empty without the person who died...	
14. I hear the voice of the person who died speak to me...	
15. I see the person who died stand before me...	
16. I feel that it is unfair that I should live when this person died...	
17. I feel bitter over this person's death...	
18. I feel envious of others who have not lost someone close...	
19. I feel lonely a great deal of the time ever since he/she died...	
	Score

(Shear, 2003)

## The Work of Grieving

**“Grief is not a disorder, a disease, or a sign of weakness. It is an emotional, physical and spiritual necessity; the price you pay for love. The only cure for grief is to grieve.” Dr. Earl A. Grollman**

If ever you have grieved you will recognise that it feels like work. Its work to face the practicalities of a loss; it is work to receive comforters and condolences; it is work to organise funerals and memorials. We also need to work through the process of grief itself, working to learn to accept and live with the reality of the loss; to process and work through the emotions of grief; and find new meaning and purpose beyond the loss.

Grief is a journey involving many adjustments as we heal. Some adjustments occur naturally but many require us to be proactive (Worden, 2009).

### **Accepting and adjusting to the loss**

Loss can leave us shocked and numbed. The reality of the loss needs to be accepted cognitively and practically. Rituals and ceremonies that help bring reality to the situation through the funeral processes, memorial services, visiting a burial site and any other practices that one can do to help us see and accept the reality of the loss. Attending and participating in these final rites even virtually can help in the healing process. Even when such rituals may not be possible e.g. a miscarriage, consider a private ritual where you can find a way to say good bye.



Death affects our day to day lives and there are many external adjustments that need to be made, new roles and responsibilities that need to be taken up. Maintaining some sense of routine for yourself can help reorient you in the world you are now learning to live in without your loved one. Try to wake up at a regular time, take a bath, eat even small meals and attempt a few simple chores or tasks each day. There are also internal, emotional adjustment such as changes in one's beliefs and perceptions of life.

### **Acknowledging and processing the emotions of grief**

*“Do not suppress your true feelings, crying helped me because after I cried I would experience a sense of relief from the heaviness of my heart because it would often be really heavy.*

*I have learnt to forgive many who said hurtful things to me having lost two children, that I was bewitched, that I had bad luck and maybe I wasn't meant to have a son and I have also learnt to forgive myself.“*

*Rachel*

*“Allow yourself to feel the full range of the feelings that come with grief, cry when you need to and allow yourself to remember as well. Have a picture of your loved one that you can look at often and allow yourself to remember good memories when you could be together, when you laughed together. I never thought a picture of my sister could be healing but I have kept one close to me and I look at her everyday, it was painful and difficult at the beginning but it has become easier”*

*Francis*

There are many emotions we may feel as we grieve, we should allow ourselves to feel the pain, fear, guilt, anger and any other emotions that we have and we should express these emotions. Journaling our emotions and thoughts may help us express our emotions and monitor our grief journey. Talking with family and friends or a health worker also helps. We can learn to identify some of the situations, events, that

may trigger the pangs or waves of grief. We need to acknowledge their significance and start to build ways to ride the waves of grief and cope.

### **Remaining connected with others around you**

*“If I didn't have good family support from both my wife's family and my own, I would have lost it mentally. Having family gave me room to grieve, firstly by myself which was important and then to also grieve with my children. Knowing there was family and friends to support us was very important because I had just lost my wife, to then be left alone by my family would have been devastating.”*

*Sif*

*“In your grief, don't isolate yourself, find people who you can surround yourself with, that you can relate with, people on a similar journey, surround yourself with people that can love you. What helped me the most was a Champions for Life youth psychosocial camp. It was the breaking point in my chronic grief and the healing journey began. I allowed myself to be vulnerable with God and with others and God brought in mother figures into my life, mentors I could turn to when I need help, I found people who became the mother I had been yearning for.”*

*Tanatswa*

Allow yourself to be vulnerable to a few close people. Allow those people to see your pain so that they can help you to continue living for the living even though you mourn for the dead.

## How can I help someone who is grieving?

Death is part of all our lives and if we are not working through grief we almost always are supporting someone else who is walking through this journey. How can I help?

### **Make time**

*“Having so much love around me has kept me strong, people came to stand with me in my most heartbreaking and helpless moment, some travelled from far, friends, colleagues, my senior mentors came and this was like a bandage to my pain. Their actions ministered further than they may know. Come and be there, genuinely stand by even if you don’t say a word. It is important to be there and to look after one another.”*

*Rachel*

Let us give each other the precious gift of time, sometimes to just sit with each other in our pain. Expressing painful emotions is difficult and takes time. Take time and listen, truly listening and not thinking of what to say next. Sometimes saying nothing is okay too. Make time to attend funerals and memorials where possible (and virtually where not possible) and mourn with those who mourn.

**Non judgemental warmth:** remain warm no matter what. When someone is grieving they may say things or act in a way that seems unusual. Be empathetic, loving and kind even if you may not fully understand what they are going through. People are impacted more by how we make them feel rather than what we say.

## Help solve practical problems

- Funeral and memorial arrangements
- Practical support for child care and meals
- Thinking through living arrangements, lifestyle changes after the funeral
- Working through changes that result from loss of any kind

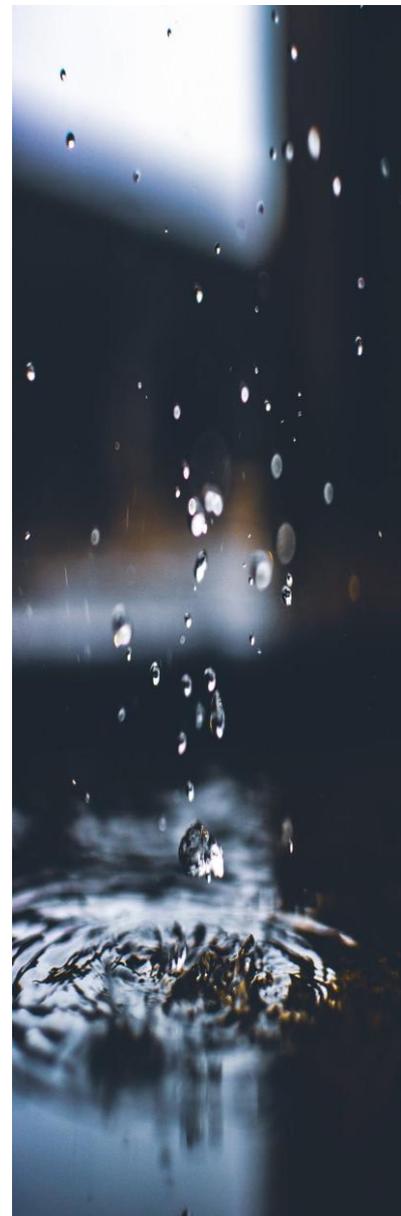
**Allowing people to express their emotions...**learn to sit with the feeling of being uncomfortable when someone is crying. Many people don't get opportunity to express their distress without being shushed.

**Tolerate crying...**its cathartic and therapeutic.

*“I went through the stages of grief... I did deny, I did bargain, then I came to a stage when I cried. Crying is okay, it is acceptable, it doesn't matter if you are man, this has nothing to do with masculinity... if I had not allowed myself to cry, I wouldn't have started healing.”*

*Francis*

**“There is a sacredness in tears. They are not the mark of weakness, but of power. They speak more eloquently than ten thousand tongues. They are the messengers of overwhelming grief, a deep contrition, and of unspeakable love.” Washington Irving**



Finally, when necessary, **guide** anyone who is grieving to where they can get further help (medical, psychological, legal, social help) and follow up that they have actually managed to get help.

## **Finding meaning and purpose beyond our loss**

One of purposes of grief is to find a new way of maintaining the connection with the deceased because our emotions do not die when they die. Preserving rather than repressing fond memories and making memorials is encouraged. We also do not die with our loved ones. As we mourn for the dead let us not give up on living for those still living. Death can bring about many questions about the meaning of life and what is really important in life. Let us face these questions courageously and without shame. Death wakes up from our 'normal' lives and shakes our beliefs and value systems, it always changes us. That doesn't need to be a negative thing.

### Changing narratives

We live our lives and remember our lives in stories. We tell ourselves stories and narratives all the time. It is how we describe our world, how we make sense of our experiences. We need these stories to figure out what is going on and what to do. In crisis, we often reach back in our past and find a story or narrative of how we have reacted to something in the past or how others in our family or community have dealt with similar issues and then we replay often the script. However some events can shatter our internal narrative, our beliefs, our story of 'this is how the world works and this is what I can do'. We then have to rebuild it and find new narratives, hopefully more authentic, shaped and forged by our pain but real and strong.

**How has your grief changed the story of your life, the narrative of, the purpose and meaning of your life?**

## Post traumatic growth... healing from loss



### Where there is life, there is hope... Ecclesiastes 9 vs 4

Richard Tedesch and Lauren Calhaun in the 90s studied the transformative effects of traumatic events (Tedeschi&Calhoun, 1996) . They postulated that loss and trauma can change us for the better, we can learn to make sense of what seems senseless. Pain and trauma can help us get a clearer understanding of ourselves, our relationships, the world we live in and what really matters in life. They called it, Post Traumatic Growth and they described trauma survivors gaining an appreciation of life, and relationships, personal strength, seeing new possibilities in the trauma, and spiritual growth.

Loss can be traumatic and can shake and damage us. But we can grow from it,

- Gaining a new appreciation of life
- Appreciation of our remaining relationships
- Growing as a person (our understanding of ourselves, our understanding of our thoughts and emotions, spiritually)
- Realisation of our own resilience and inner strength

Loss, particularly loss of someone you love dearly can make us question ourselves, our motivations, our understanding of our purpose in this life. It will make realise we are mortal, we are fragile, we may not always be able to protect our loved ones, we are not God. However, we are still alive and therefore there is hope. We can continue to be a conduit of life and hope to our family and our community. May we be more intentional about our remaining relationships. Death highlights life. Through loss we are reminded of the need to live intentionally, with purpose, especially with each other. Life is precious and it is fragile and we can appreciate each day more as we realise this.

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