



# The Grief Recovery Method<sup>®</sup> Guide for Loss

61 tips on the experience of Grief  
and how to help people through it.

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## What is Grief?

- 1 Grief is the normal and natural reaction to significant emotional loss of any kind.
- 2 Grief is the conflicting feelings caused by the end of, or change in, a familiar pattern of behavior.
- 3 Grief is the feeling of reaching out for someone who has always been there, only to find when you need them again, they are no longer there.

## Typical responses associated with Grief

- 4 Reduced concentration
- 5 A sense of numbness
- 6 Disrupted sleeping patterns
- 7 Changed eating habits
- 8 Roller coaster of emotional energy

9 There are over 43 losses that are considered Grief. Some examples include:

- Death
- Divorce
- Retirement
- Moving
- Pet loss
- Financial change (increase or decrease in wealth)
- Loss of health
- Legal Problems
- Empty Nest
- End of Addiction
- Starting School

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10 Here are some intangible examples of Grief.

- Loss of Trust
- Loss of Safety
- Loss of Control
- Loss of Faith
- Loss of Fertility

- 11 Grief is individual and unique. There are no stages. Grief cannot be neatly categorized. Elizabeth Kubler Ross's work was on Death and Dying, not Grief. She is very specific about this distinction in her books and yet the media and universities have attached her work to Grief. This common misinformation has confused and hurt many griever throughout the years.
- 12 There are no absolutes in Grief. There are no reactions so universal that all, or even most, people will experience them.
- 13 Grief is normal and natural. It is not a pathological condition or a personality disorder.
- 14 Grief is often mislabeled as ADHD, Depression, PTSD, and many other pathological conditions.
- 15 Sadly, if you misdiagnose, you will mistreat. These mislabeled Grievers are then incorrectly put on various medications, which will get in the way of recovering from loss.

## How do I know if I, or someone I know, is incomplete with a loss? <sup>1</sup>

- 16 If you are unwilling to think about or talk about someone who has died, or express feelings about any other losses.
- 17 If fond memories turn painful, you may be experiencing unresolved Grief.
- 18 If you want to talk only about the positive aspects of the relationship, you may be incomplete.
- 19 Wanting to talk about only the negative aspects of the relationship, might be unresolved Grief.
- 20 Unresolved Grief may be at the root of any fear associated with thoughts or feelings about a relationship.

## The impact of unresolved Grief in society

The following statistics are heartbreaking and could be avoided in many cases.

- 21 13 million Grievors annually due to death. There are 2.6 million deaths per year in the United States with an average of five Grievors per death. (According to US Census Bureau)
- 22 2.5 million Grievors per year due to divorce. This does not include the children grieving this significant loss. (A compilation of US statistical agencies)
- 23 15.6 million Grievors per year due to a romantic breakup.
- 24 A study of 95,647 persons who lost a spouse found that the overall death rate for the surviving spouse doubled in the first week following the loss.<sup>2</sup>
- 25 In the same study the heart attack rates more than doubled for male survivors and more than tripled for woman.<sup>2</sup>

- 26 The surviving spouse was 93% more likely to get into a fatal auto accident and the suicide rate went up 242%.<sup>2</sup>
- 27 Unresolved Grief is cumulative and cumulatively negative.
- 28 Unresolved Grief is everywhere. Thousands of mental health professionals we work with have found that although their clients come to them with some other presenting issue, almost all of them have unresolved Grief as the underlying problem.
- 29 An incomplete past may doom the future. We find that many people alter their life choices after a series of unresolved losses. This is done to protect themselves from further heartbreak. Usually this just translates to living a guarded life and a reluctance to participate fully in relationships or new endeavors.
- 30 Grief is not clinical depression. A recent study of 8800 clients established that a large percentage of people diagnosed as depressed and placed on anti-depressant drugs are not clinically depressed. They are actually just experiencing unresolved Grief due to prior losses in their lives.<sup>3</sup>

**31** Similar symptoms. Difficulty concentrating, roller coaster of emotions, sense of numbness, disrupted sleeping patterns, altered eating habits and massive loss of energy.

**32** Short term energy relieving behaviors. Many people in our society use what we call STERBs or “Short term energy relieving behaviors” in an attempt to cover the feelings caused by unresolved Grief. Some examples of these are alcohol, food, shopping, and exercise.

## Most common misinformation on the topic of Grief <sup>1</sup>

**33** Time heals. Time does not heal, action within time does. We know people who have waited 10, 20, 30 or even 40 years to feel better.

**34** Grieve alone. Often this advice is subtly implied, “Give your mom her space” or “He just needs a few minutes alone in the other room.” As children, we learn that this means that sad feelings should be hidden or experienced alone.

**35** Be strong. Usually the Griever is asked to be strong for others. “You have to be strong for your [wife]” or “Be strong for your children.”



- 36** Don't feel bad. This is usually followed by an intellectually true statement but is not helpful at all to the Griever, "Don't feel bad, his suffering is over." or "Don't feel bad, at least you knew her as long as you did."
- 37** Replace the loss. This is common with pet loss or the end of a romantic relationship. "On Tuesday we'll get you a new dog" or "There are plenty of fish in the sea. You just have to get out there and date again." Most likely there has been no action taken to grieve over the loss of the pet or relationship, just an attempt at not feeling the emotions attached to the loss.
- 38** Keep busy. "If I just keep busy then I won't have time to think about the loss." This one is sad because some people spend their whole lives with this mentality and never get a chance to grieve and complete what was unfinished with the particular loss.

## Common complaints expressed by Grievors

A survey asked Grievors to decide which comments were helpful following a loss. Out of 141 comments, they found only 19 helpful.

Here are some of the types of comments that were not helpful:

39 You'll be fine in time.

40 I know how you feel.

41 You shouldn't be feeling that way still.

42 Look on the bright side, at least they're in a better place.

43 Don't feel bad, his suffering is over now.

44 Don't be angry with God.

45 You're young; you can still have other children.

46 It was just a dog, cat, bird etc.

## Helpful things to say to someone grieving a loss

- 47 “I can’t imagine how you feel.” or “I can’t imagine how painful – devastating – heartbreaking – that must have been for you.” Every relationship is unique, therefore, every Griever is unique. You cannot know how they feel so this is always a truthful statement that will never offend the Griever.
- 48 “I can’t imagine how you feel; I know that when I lost my mother I felt ....”
- 49 Do listen with your heart, not your head. Allow all emotions to be expressed, without judgment, criticism, or analysis.
- 50 Do ask, “What happened?” Most people will avoid this question. However, most often we find that Grievers feel isolated because most people will tend to avoid them as if nothing happened. This can be very isolating for someone who’s grieving.

51 Follow their words in your head as they are spoken. In other words, stay in the moment while they're speaking. If you leave the moment for one second, you have just become an unsafe person to talk to about Grief.

52 Be empathetic. This means that if you tear up during their story, let that be ok. You are allowed to be human while listening to another human. By doing this, you set the tone in that interaction that sharing sad emotions is ok with you.

53 The "G" word. This might help you as the word "guilty" is often used by a Griever.

- Griever: My son committed suicide, I feel so guilty.
- Grief Recovery Specialist: Did you ever do anything with intent to harm your son?
- Griever: No. (This is an almost universal response.)
- Grief Recovery Specialist: The dictionary definition of guilt implies intent to harm. Since you had no intent to harm, can you put the "G" word back in the dictionary...You are probably devastated enough by the death of your son, you don't need to add to it by hurting yourself with an incorrect word that distorts your feelings.
- Griever: Really? I never thought of it that way.
- Grief Recovery Specialist: Are there some things that you wish had been different, better, or more?
- Griever: Oh, yes.



## The Grief Recovery Method<sup>® 1</sup>

- 54 Recovery from loss is achieved by a series of small and correct choices made by the Griever.
- 55 Sadly, most of us have not been given the necessary information with which to make correct choices in response to a loss.
- 56 Recovery means feeling better.
- 57 Recovery is finding new meaning for living, without the fear of being hurt again.
- 58 Recovery is being able to enjoy fond memories without having them turn painful.
- 59 Recovery is acknowledging that it is perfectly all right to feel sad from time to time and to talk about those feelings no matter how those around you react.

- 60 Most importantly, recovery means acquiring the skills we should have been taught as a child. These skills allow us to deal with loss directly.
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- 61 Recovering from a significant emotional loss is not an easy task. Taking the actions that lead to recovery will require your attention, open-mindedness, willingness, and courage.

## REFERENCES

- 1 James, John W. and Friedman, Russell P. The Grief Recovery Handbook, 20th Anniversary Expanded Edition. New York: Harper-Collins, 2009.
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- 3 Wakefield, Jerome C., PhD, DSW; Schmitz, Mark F., PhD; First, Michael B. MD; Horwitz, Allan V., PhD. "Extending the Bereavement Exclusion for Major Depression to Other Losses: Evidence from the National Comorbidity Survey." *Arch Gen Psychiatry* 64.4 (2007):433-440.