

# Being Mindful of Your Grieving

## Objective

To increase your ability to pay attention to your thoughts and feelings while grieving.

## What to Know

When grief is strong and you feel it interferes with your ability to attend to daily life, or the pain seems unbearable, it is very tempting to try to avoid, delay, or deny it. You might use alcohol, drugs, food, or overwork (to name a few) to bury the grief, hoping it will not come back. But these coping efforts do not work—the feelings do come back, maybe even stronger—and they may add new problems to your already challenging life.

There is an alternative to squashing these painful feelings—mindfulness, which involves paying attention to your thoughts and feelings.

Mindfulness does not take away the pain of grief. Instead of running away from it, mindfulness directs us *toward* the hurt, to feel it and, in a way, befriend it. This may not sound like a good idea! The truth is, it is probably taking more energy to avoid your feelings than it will to just experience them...and you are likely to feel better.

There are many books on mindfulness you may find useful. And if you would like a bit of inspiration, look up, “The Guest House,” a poem by Rumi. Many people have taken great comfort and insight from it.

There are many different ways to bring mindfulness to your grief, and it will take some experimenting to find what works best for you. All of the techniques are based on allowing yourself to feel whatever comes up without judgment and with self-compassion. Remember the following points.

- Critics are not allowed to tell you what you should or should not be feeling. You cannot do this wrong.
- This is a time to support yourself as deeply and fully as you would support the person you love the most, or as you have dreamed of being supported.
- There is no timeline and no need to push yourself in this process.
- It takes some time to learn these skills, so be patient and do not give up.

**Step 1: Get grounded.** When feelings start to overwhelm you, these skills will help you be steady enough to meet and observe them. To be *grounded* means to feel stable, rooted, calm, and present—until you are not. Then get grounded again. Ways to get grounded include:

- **Breathing.** Take deep, slow breaths into your belly, then torso, and finally fill your lungs. Gradually make your exhalations a bit longer than your inhalations. Pretend you can breathe in and out through the soles of your feet. Breathe through whatever you feel without pushing it away.

- **Using your senses.** Focus as deeply as possible on touch, scent, sound, and body sensations to help you get present and relaxed.
  - Run warm water over your hands and *feel* it.
  - Smell something. Concentrate on it as if you could describe it to a person without a nose.
  - Sit, breathe, and listen to all the sounds around you that you do not normally hear.
  - Look at something beautiful so closely that you see it as you never have before.
- **Moving your body mindfully.** Walk or stretch slowly, trying to feel every muscle as it moves. Feel each foot touch the ground.
- **Meditating.** If you have a meditation practice, do it consistently. If you do not practice, there are books, courses, retreats, meditation groups, and online resources that can help you.
- **Inviting help.** When you are trying to do something difficult, it is good to not feel alone. Call in some help—this might be a spiritual figure or someone from your past or present who loves you unconditionally, or helps you feel brave and centered. It might be the most capable, self-loving version of yourself.

**Step 2. Feel the feelings and express them.** Now that you are grounded, you are ready to experience your feelings. Any time your feelings feel like too much, go back to whatever helps you get grounded.

Feelings want to be heard, seen, accepted, and expressed. You are developing the self-compassion and the skills to hear, see, and accept them. But if they stay in your body, they can continue to hurt you. Find ways to get them outside yourself, including:

- **Journaling.** Writing is a great way of witnessing and expressing your grief.
- **Talking.** Whether in counseling or just with friends, talk about how you are feeling and working through your grief. Do not isolate or hesitate to ask for what you want.
- **Doing art.** Scrapbook, paint, draw, make music—represent your grief in whatever way you want. It is not about how good an artist you are, and no one ever has to see it. It is just a way to get your feelings out. What color is your grief? What shape?
- **Moving.** Your body is your ally. Walking, dancing, practicing yoga, engaging in sports—it is all good. Movement expressing your feelings is especially helpful.
- **Yelling and pounding.** Lots of people drive somewhere isolated and yell it out. Others pound on pillows. Whatever actions match the energy of your feelings are right as long as they do not harm you or another person.
- **Honoring your loved one.** Sometimes grief is expressed in graveside visits, ceremonies with friends, donations to charities, planting trees—anything that helps you express your relationship with and feelings about that person.

**Step 3. Bring in your mind.** You have gotten grounded and bravely sat with and expressed strong feelings. Now you can let your mind back into the process and consider some questions.

- **What have you done in the past?** You have had other significant challenges in your life. What qualities in yourself helped you get through them?

- **What resources do you have?** Make a list of internal and external resources you have to help you with your grief, including supportive people, books, practices like journaling and mindfulness, self-care, and so forth.
- **What do you want?** Start to imagine a new future for yourself. See yourself coping with your grief and adjusting to life without your loved one. What does it look like? What do you look like? How will it feel?
- **Do you need help?** Take a look at yourself and how you are coping. Do not hesitate to reach out for help from counselors, grief support groups, friends, etc.

## What to Do

Make a two-week action plan to experiment with mindfulness practices to see what helps you. For each week, choose one of the techniques listed in this worksheet for each step: grounding, expressing, and reflection. Schedule three exercises each week. Make notes about which activities are helpful, or if you are inspired to learn more about them.

### Week 1

Scheduled for: (day and time)	Grounding activity	Way to express feelings	Reflection

### Week 2

Scheduled for: (day and time)	Grounding activity	Way to express feelings	Reflection

What activity helped you the most? Explain.

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Would you like to learn more about any of these techniques or skills? If so, how will you do that, and when?

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### **Reflections on This Exercise**

How helpful was this exercise? \_\_\_\_\_  
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

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