

5 Ways Mindfulness Can Help Us Work Through Grief

Grief is complicated, and there's no "right" way to experience it. As Jennifer Wolkin writes, grief is also intermingled with self-compassion and resilience.

BY [JENNIFER WOLKIN](#)

There's a question I'm asked often as a psychologist: What IS grief? Psychologically speaking, as Dr. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross wrote in 1969, grief is an emotional response to loss. This emotional response is conceptualized as a non-linear expression of different stages of feeling states including denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance (aka: "DABDA"). It's worth noting that Kübler-Ross formulated this five-stage process to describe the emotional journey of dying people, not the bereaved. Still, since her model has become widely known, many people have found solace in it after experiencing the loss of a loved one.

Biologically speaking, grief is a homeostatic process, a journey that our mind, brain, and body need to engage in to best recover from the trauma of a loss. This is an evolutionary need, since attachment and connection is embedded within our limbic circuitry. Yes, whether we are conscious of it or not, or like it or not, relationships deeply imprint upon our neuronal selves.

Second, I want to note what grief is *not*. Grief is not, by any means, a one-size-fits-all kind of process. In fact, it is a uniquely individual process that often feels amorphous and difficult to capture with words. When it comes to grief, there is no "normal" or typical way to "do it." Despite what some believe, in my opinion, there is no "normal" time period allotted for grief.

It takes a boat load of self-compassion to allow oneself to feel whatever it is you are feeling at any given time, without judgment, without comparison relative to another's explicit portrayal of their own process. In this way, to grieve is to be mindful of our thoughts and feelings.

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Finally, while there is no one "right" way to grieve, to actually grieve is essential for our ability to employ our human capacity to find a renewed sense of meaning. Grief elicits resilience. The capacity to continue to hold a loved one in our heart/mind while still forging forward with purpose and direction.

How to Grieve Mindfully

1. **Accept your feelings:** Allow yourself to feel what you feel at any given moment, with a sense of self-compassion, and without judgment.

2. **Express your feelings:** Just as important as accepting your feelings is expressing them in a way that is helpful to you. Journaling, talking about the experience, scrapbooking, or dancing, for example, are helpful ways to process grief instead of allowing the feelings to stay stuck.

3. **Reach out:** During this time, it is important to reach out in multiple ways. Reach out for guidance from a spiritual counselor or a psychologist. Reach out to share stories of your loved one with others. Reach out to offer support to other grievers. Find a balance between sitting with yourself, and being with others, but ultimately, reach out—don't isolate.

4. **Continue to take care of yourself and others:** Living life while grieving often feels like scaling a mountain. Grieving takes energy and can often feel draining. As much as possible during this tough time, continue to eat well, exercise, and maintain wellness practices.

5. **Celebrate your loved one's life:** It is important through the grief process to keep the memory of your loved one alive in some way that both inspires growth, and reflects and honors your unique relationship. This can include donating to a charity, meditating in their honor, and even planting a tree.