



We Grieve thanks you for participating  
in our Grief Workshop.

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Connecting with other grieving people

In addition to resources and free workshops,  
We Grieve would like to connect you to others  
who have experienced your same loss.

If you would like to be connected to others with your same loss,  
please send an email to [karl@wegrieve.net](mailto:karl@wegrieve.net)

More resources are available at <https://wegrieve.net>



We bring grieving people together to heal

## **We Grieve Workshop Flow**

### *Grieving the Loss of a Parent*

**When we lose a parent, we expect to be sad and we expect we will miss our parent,** but what catches us by surprise are the things we do not expect when we lose a parent. There are unexpected losses, and you need help with how to cope with them. Whatever your expectations are when you experience the loss of a parent, reality will be different. Your grief experience will be unique to any of your friends or family and will be based on the circumstances of the death, your emotional make-up, and the nature and quality of your relationship with your parent.



### **Week One: *Unexpected Losses***

Unexpected losses include not having a sounding board, a best friend who will listen to your stories, a person to call who knows what you need, a sense of protection over you, a handyman who can fix anything, or a vital link to your past and someone who makes you feel like you belong.

#### **Group Discussion:**

- Describe the parent you lost and how the loss has affected you
- What have been your most surprising thoughts, feelings, or behaviors?
- Where do you feel stuck with regard to your grief?

#### **Handouts:**

- Experiencing Grief Exercise
- Physical Grief - information
- You May Not Know - information
- Journaling Exercise

### **Week Two: *Fingerprints on Me***

When you lose a parent, you realize their fingerprints are all over your life. Some of those fingerprints represent positive, loving experiences, and some are painful and even

damaging to us. Healthy grieving the loss of a parent requires an honest appraisal of both.

**Group Discussion:**

- What positive, happy memories do you have of your parent's influence on you?
- What negative, painful memories of your parent have shaped you?
- How are you dealing with those painful memories?
- What are you most grateful for from your parent?

**Handouts:**

- The Journey of Grief Exercise
- Healing a Past Painful Experience

**Week Three:** *Identity, Insecurity & Influence*

These are three huge losses when you lose a parent. We get our sense of who we are from our parents, so when they are gone, we question ourselves and whether we are up for the challenge of taking the baton and competing well. We feel alone and somewhat vulnerable, and wish we had them back to help us on our journey.

**Group Discussion:**

- How has losing your parent changed your view of yourself?
- What do you miss most from not having access to your parent?
- Where do you feel most insecure after losing your parent?
- What quality do you now possess you can attribute to your parent?

**Handouts:**

- Missing My Reflection
- CORE Exercise

**Week Four:** *Moving Forward*

We may have lost our parent, but we are still here, and we have a torch to carry and a mission to complete. We have worth, value, and we belong right here where we are. It will require courage, strength we didn't know we had, strategic tools, and coping strategies that work. We must engage, move forward, and learn how to value the past.

**Group Discussion:**

- In what ways do you feel stuck or that you sabotage your success?
- What is your greatest challenge with moving forward?
- What tools do you use most, and what tools are missing from your toolbox?
- Describe your worst and best coping skills.
- How has your past prepared you for your future?

**Handouts:**

- Domains of Resilience Exercise
- Qualities of Resilient People
- Coping Strategies that Work
- HM Tool for Resilience

My Notes:

# WE GREIVE WORKSHOP



WE GRIEVE

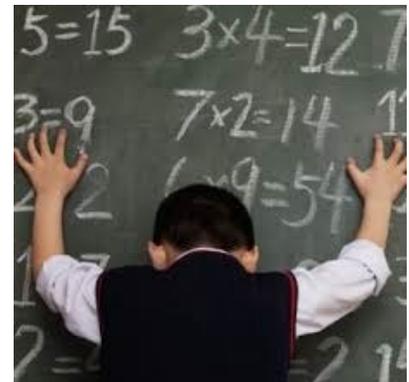
# A HEALING FORMULA

## A Healing Formula

You've probably heard the story of the man who went to the doctor and rotating his arm at the elbow said, "**Doc, it hurts when I do this...**" The doctor glanced at him quickly and said, "**Then I suggest you don't do that!**" Professionals will tell you there is no simple or quick fix to healing from the pain of grief and loss. Someone telling you to just "**get over**" your grief or to "**Stop feeling like that**" really has no concept of the nature of grief. While I agree with the professionals that there is no simple or quick fix to healing, I do believe there is a formula in the process of healing.

### HEALING = FAITH + WORK + TIME

My formula for healing begins with **how we define healing**. Newcomers to grief and loss tend to think of healing as the **absence** of the pain - no longer feeling like you've been punched in the stomach, no more panic attacks where the loss is overwhelming, or the unrelenting memory of your loved one consuming every detail of life. A more realistic picture of healing would be **arriving to a place where your loss is no longer the central thought of every waking moment, no longer the driving influence of your consciousness that dominates and defines your life**.



**Healing from grief and loss is more about a reluctant acceptance of reality** where the pain of loss is still felt, your way of life is altered, but is only one painful experience in your life instead of a loss that defines your life. **One person described experiencing the pain of grief and loss as similar to being a member of an exclusive club that no one wants to join!** Defining the goal of healing allows you to even unwillingly, begin the process with the confidence that you at least have some idea of where you are going.

The first necessity of my healing formula is **faith, the spiritual component**. The contribution of faith in healing from grief and loss is marked in different ways for different people. Some find faith to be that aspect of life that addresses the existential questions of "**Who?**" and "**Why?**" and "**What next?**" Our "spirit" is that force within us compelling us to regain the equilibrium taken from us, the stability disrupted by the impact of our loss. We find **strength from within as well as from beyond ourselves** when we engage our faith in attempting to find elusive answers to these intricate existential questions.





For others faith is the **strong foundation** upon which life is built, and a personal belief in a supreme being who is **present with us** and who **loves us** is a great comfort when being pummeled with the pain of loss. I love the story of the boy who woke up early on a Saturday morning to **play ball with his dad**, and unable to get his dad to join him, headed outside on his own. His dad asked, “Who will you play with at this early hour?” The boy stated simply, **“Its easy dad! I play with God. I throw it up... and he throws it back!”**

Realizing that **we are not alone** and that there is someone who has the **power to bring good from evil** is encouraging when we feel like helpless victims without hope of rescue. To trust optimistically in the existence of someone with **greater power, vision and authority** than myself is key to the role of faith in healing.

The second requirement of my healing formula is **work, specifically the work of the grief process**. Therapy is defined as treatment, or a set of actions or techniques applied in a specific situation. In the case of loss, a therapeutic action might include **remembering** or **celebrating** the person you lost. One person I know asked for permission from a friend to call every day to share one memory or characteristic of their loved one. The calls are most often brief, but the repetition of speaking a memory is powerful for healing.

Another action that promotes healing is **moving toward community**. Pain has a tendency to isolate us and **with isolation the imagination can take us to unhealthy and even scary places**. Staying connected to people **we love and respect** that treat us with **understanding** and **compassion** contributes greatly to our adjusting to our new reality.

The final component of my healing formula is **time**. The adage, “Time heals all wounds” is just not true. **Time alone is not a healer**. Time is passive, not active. While time is crucial because it creates a context for therapy and faith to apply their influence, it has no healing power of its own. **People ask me how long their grief process will take... and my answer is always the same. “It depends on you!”** With hard work, the support and encouragement of faith, and the space of time within which you can process, healing will come. Be sure of it!

**Karl Shackelford, MDiv, BCC**  
Counselor, Peaks & Creeks Life Development, Inc  
Founder, We Grieve Community



# EXPERIENCING GRIEF

*"normal reactions to pain & suffering"*

## Thoughts

- disbelief
- confusion
- preoccupation with the death & the deceased
- sense of presence
- lack of concentration
- lack of ability to organize & process intellectually
- trouble remembering
- difficulty making decisions

## Feelings

- shock, numbness
- denial, disbelief
- anxiety, fear, panic
- loss, emptiness
- loneliness
- sadness, depression
- loss of pleasure
- hurt, frustration
- helplessness
- hopelessness
- guilt, regret
- disorganization
- confusion
- relief, emancipation
- reconciliation
- re-establishment
- feeling crazy
- explosive emotions:  
anger, hate, resentment,  
jealousy

## Behaviors

- absent-minded behavior
- crying and sobbing
- restlessness
- inability to sit still
- trying to "stay busy"
- visiting places or carrying
- treasuring objects
- avoiding reminders
- experiencing "grief bursts"
- dreams of the deceased



## Relational Changes

- \_\_\_ social withdrawal
- \_\_\_ fear of being alone
- \_\_\_ dependent, clingy
- \_\_\_ busyness as a distraction
- \_\_\_ irritable, moody
- \_\_\_ argumentative
- \_\_\_ trying to replace the loss
- \_\_\_ changes in role, status, family system, identity
- \_\_\_ avoiding people to avoid conversation about the loss

## Physical Factors

- \_\_\_ fatigue, lack of energy
- \_\_\_ hollowness in the stomach
- \_\_\_ stomachache, other gastro intestinal disturbances
- \_\_\_ sleep difficulties (too much/little, interrupted sleep)
- \_\_\_ feelings of emptiness and heaviness
- \_\_\_ heart palpitations, trembling, shaking
- \_\_\_ hot flashes, indications of anxiety
- \_\_\_ nervousness, tension
- \_\_\_ agitation, irritability
- \_\_\_ shortness of breath, head ache, muscle aches & pains
- \_\_\_ chest pain, pressure, or discomfort

## Spiritual Concerns

- \_\_\_ searching for meaning
- \_\_\_ asking the "why" questions
- \_\_\_ mystical experiences
- \_\_\_ reassessing values, beliefs, and priorities
- \_\_\_ feeling anger at God
- \_\_\_ feeling abandoned by God
- \_\_\_ experiencing comfort from God and faith community
- \_\_\_ exploring new dimensions of faith
- \_\_\_ using rituals like prayer and meditation to help the healing process



# PHYSICAL GRIEF

When we think about loss and grief, we tend to think only of the emotions or feelings. It is important to understand that there are very often physical reasons that we are feeling or reacting the way we are.

To better understand what is happening to us both emotionally and physically when we are grieving, it is helpful for us to know a little more about how our bodies function under stress. This will enable us to take better care of ourselves and hopefully to prevent serious problems.

Since the loss of your loved one, have you experienced a loss of appetite or a sudden increase in appetite? Have you felt depressed and confused? Have there been times when your heart felt like it was racing, or you were short of breath? These reactions, along with many others, are very normal reactions to your loss. They are your body's attempt to get things back in balance, back to some level of equilibrium.



## What is happening to you?

Whenever we go through a major change in our lives, it creates a great deal of stress. Our bodies react to that stress to prepare us to face what is ahead. This reaction is part of our very basic inborn instinct to survive. It happens automatically and involves many physical changes within our bodies. The physical changes that occur are responsible for many of the feelings and reactions that we have and believe to be purely emotional.

Let's look more closely at stress and our basic instinct for survival which is called "fight or flight" response. The "fight or flight" response triggers many automatic changes in our body. It is these physical changes that are responsible for many feelings and reactions that we may be having. Think about a time when you were frightened or startled suddenly. Your heart began to race, your hands became cold and stiff, the hair on your arms stood up, your senses became very keen, and your breathing became very deep. All these changes occurred automatically as your body was preparing to fight off the threat, whether imagined or real.



When that threat or need to adapt occurred, many things began to happen in your internal system. The production of adrenalin and noradrenalin (which are the chemicals that arouse us to action) were produced by the nervous system and this caused your heart rate to increase. Blood flow to the muscles sped up and this increased the amount of oxygen, nutrients, and energy getting to the deep muscles. As the muscles received more blood, they began to tighten, and your breathing became deeper to help you reserve oxygen for strength. The blood vessels on the surface of the skin became smaller or close up. This happens to prevent excessive bleeding if you are hurt by the threat. This is also what makes your hands feel cold and clammy. This all happened spontaneously within a matter of seconds to prepare you to meet the threat. These same chemical reactions occur every time your body is called upon to adapt to a change.

The loss of a loved one is a major change in our lives and our grief involves not one, but many changes. We face changes in roles and responsibilities. Each of these roles and responsibilities contribute to our sense of identity and sense of self. Our emotional security is compromised. We begin to feel very unstable and our stress is compounded. Our body tries to handle that too. To help us readjust, our body produces chemicals and hormones which are meant to help us readjust and return to a level of balance. Our body goes through a stage of resistance. This period is longer because the chemical and hormonal changes occur over time, some being released immediately, and others taking as long as 6 to 8 weeks to come about. During the stage of resistance, ACTH (Adrenocorticotrophic Hormone) is released by the pituitary gland, which is the gland that controls our growth and development. The ACTH stimulates the production of Aldosterone which causes salt to be absorbed in the kidneys. This can lead to a rise in blood pressure, water retention, and sometimes shortness of breath. This can cause us to feel flushed, dizzy, and have headaches. It becomes important to watch salt intake and drink plenty of water. ACTH also enhances the production of Cortisol which causes increased sugar levels in the blood.

Our body cannot handle the excess sugar in our system which leads us to feel anxious and excited. Cortisol also causes fat, protein, and vitamin B complex to break down. When this happens, our energy level drops and muscles become weaker. The immune system begins to weaken, and this makes us more susceptible to infections. We tend to catch more colds and flu bugs. You may notice that you are catching everything that is going around. This is a signal that you need to do something to reduce your stress and take better care of yourself. ACTH is also responsible for the production of Thyroxin, which is released by the thyroid gland. Thyroxin causes increased metabolism which is the rate at which chemical processes take place and fuel is burned within the body. This causes changes in our oxygen consumption, increases the rate and depth we breathe, and puts added stress on the cardiac system. Thyroxin increases the digestive activity and production of gastric juices. It is important to remember that we are unique individuals and that our bodies function very differently. For some of us, increased gastric juices or acids will cause feelings of nausea and not wanting to eat at all. We may even have bouts of unexplained diarrhea.



Thyroxin also causes anxiety, confusion, insomnia, as well as feelings of suspicion and dejection. It also causes muscle tremors and weakness. Those times when you felt like you could not shut off your mind and felt worried and excited at the same time weren't just emotional feelings but were a result of increased levels of thyroxin in your system. They are part of a very physical process that is responsible for a lot of normal grief reactions such as nervousness, sleep difficulties, and exhaustion, to name a few.

It is important to remember that these changes can last from a few minutes to several months because the chemical changes occur over time and occur each time we are faced with doing something we haven't done before. This can have a snowball effect which causes a build-up of hormones and continued weakness of the immune system which could lead to serious physical problems.

### **What Can You Do?**

Knowing this you can begin to take better care of yourself. Express your feelings; don't hold them in. Getting your feelings out in the open releases the tension valve and helps you define alternatives and find insights into yourself that will help you begin to adjust.

- It is important for you to get 6-8 hours of sleep or rest. Sleep and rest give us more energy to help us face what is ahead. If you are having trouble sleeping, try some relaxation techniques such as deep breathing exercises, tensing and relaxing your muscles, imagining yourself in a peaceful, quiet place.
- It is important to eat well-balanced meals. Proper nutrition prevents the breakdown of muscle tissue and builds up the immune system.
- EXERCISE! Exercise helps to cleanse the system. It also helps us feel better about ourselves.
- Reorganize your day to reduce stress. Set priorities and make lists. Delegate responsibilities.
- Plan time for relaxation and enjoyment. Do something fun. Take time for yourself.

by Sherry L. Gibson, B.A., R.N.  
*Wisconsin Perspectives*

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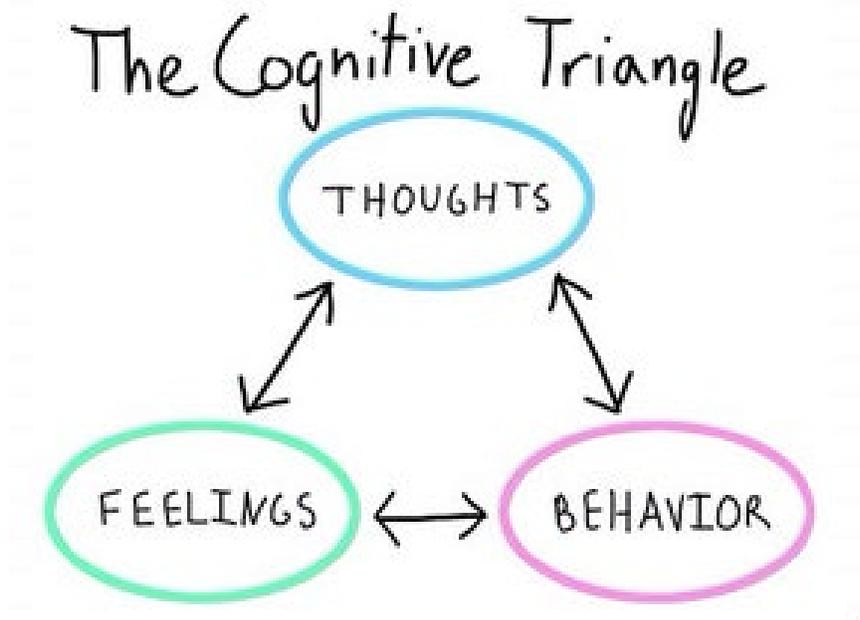
# YOU MAY NOT KNOW...

## You may not know...

- You don't "get over" a significant loss.
- It takes a long time to feel normal again.
- No one can tell you how to grieve.
- Healthy grieving requires the release of emotional pain.
- Grief changes you and your priorities.
- You may feel like isolating and being alone.
- Grieving is not forgetting but remembering in a new way.
- There are primary and secondary losses.
- You will discover triggers that stir your grief.
- Unresolved conflicts and issues from the past will surface.
- Not everyone you think will be there for you will be there.
- Your grief will teach you things about yourself.
- Society will not understand your grief journey.
- You can do more than you think you can.



# JOURNALING EXERCISE



## *Journaling of Thoughts, Feelings, and Behavior*

### **Self-Awareness is the Goal**

One of the best ways to maintain awareness of what you are experiencing is a targeted journaling exercise. Using the Cognitive Therapy Triangle of thoughts, feelings and behavior, stop 3 times a day to write about your experience. In your journal or notebook write the date at the top of the page, then write the time of day. It is best to choose three times each day, such as 11:00am, 4:00pm and 9:00pm.

### **Writing Should Include Specific Details**

Three times a day stop and ask yourself, "For the past 4-5 hours, what have I been thinking, feeling and doing?" Be specific with detailed examples. One or two-word answers will not be as helpful as descriptions and specific details. For example...



- *"I've been thinking about how I have no one to talk to about my concerns."*
- *"I've been feeling anxious and worry that with my sadness I will never feel joy again."*
- *"I've been unwilling to leave the house and find myself drinking alcohol and watching television."*

### **With Time You Will Begin to See Patterns**

Don't worry if you miss a time or even a day. Pick up your journal and resume as soon as you can. Journal faithfully for at least three weeks and you will begin to notice patterns repeating themselves. Pay attention to these and speak with a trusted friend about what you are noticing.

### **Grief Writing Prompts**

- Write down a list of people you can turn to for support, either in person or virtually.
- One feeling I've felt coming up a lot lately is...
- Write about where you feel your grief in your body. Where does your grief stay?
- Where does your mind go when you let it wander?
- What is one thing you could try to make today easier on yourself?
- I need more of...
- I need less of...
- What is something that makes you feel taken care of?
- Do you feel comfortable asking for help? Why or why not?
- I feel most connected to my loved one when...
- What is a way you can celebrate your loved one's memory? Can you plant something, cook something, watch something, volunteer something?
- One thing I wish I could do over with them is...
- If I could forgive them for something, it would be...
- If I could forgive myself for something, it would be...
- Write about a time you got along well with your loved one.
- Write about a time you had difficulty getting along with your loved one.
- If you could tell your loved one about your day, what would you tell them?
- How did your loved one make you feel?
- Write a mantra you can return to when you feel overwhelmed by grief.
- What is something you wish your support system would understand?
- What is something you wish your support system could help with.
- What songs make you think of them?
- Make a photo collage in your journal with some of your favorite pictures of them.
- Is there anyone else I know going through this right now? How can we support each other?



# THE JOURNEY OF GRIEF

## *Elements for Healthy Grieving*

*These elements of healthy grieving describe the journey of grief, and how to experience emotional pain in a healthy way. Each person's journey through grief is unique. Measure your success at facing each one and determine what is needed to move forward.*

- **Accept the reality of the loss;** prepare to experience emotional pain
- **Feel the feelings** normal with your loss; express & release emotional pain; celebrate happy memories; refuse to stuff your emotions
- **Take care of yourself** in every way along the journey - physically, mentally, spiritually, relationally, and emotionally
- **Adjust to the new reality** created by the loss experience; relearn to live in the world
- **Remember the good** about who or what you have lost; you choose your point of focus
- **Develop a new self-identity** based on life after loss
- **Relate your loss to a context of meaning;** grief is a spiritual journey; a reexamination of core truths, values, passion, purpose & goals
- **Reinvest in life** and go on living and loving after loss

Based on the work of Alan Wolfelt and William J. Worden; edited by Karl J. Shackelford



# THE PRINCIPLE OF REPLACEMENT

## **“I can’t turn my brain off! How do I get these painful thoughts to stop?”**

Traumatic and emotionally powerful images, memories and thoughts root themselves in our brain and by force of their emotional weight create well-worn neural pathways that our brain uses to remember and recall. A problem with these thoughts is they carry with them painful emotions that make us feel like we are experiencing our loss all over again.

Sometimes the thoughts come as we are lying down to sleep, or they wake us in the middle of the night and keep us from returning to sleep again. Often, they appear with no perceptible trigger or reason at all! The resulting onslaught of painful emotions can leave us with an inability to concentrate or focus, a panic or fear of re-experiencing a painful memory, or an overwhelming sadness or hopelessness associated with significant loss.

## **Refuse to argue or fight with thoughts**

Because arguing or fighting with painful thoughts can embed them even more deeply, an effective course of action is to use the principle of replacement to “*replace*” the thought with a new and better one.

Imagine a painful thought knocking at the door of your mind. Seeing it through the peephole with your mind’s eye, instead of welcoming it in and offering it a comfortable chair or inviting it for dinner to spend the night consuming your precious time and energy, simply refuse to open the door. If the painful thought is already deep inside and creating anxiety, choose a more desirable thought to take its place.



## **We cannot stop painful thoughts from knocking at the door, but we can refuse to invite them in**

When you see the painful thought at the door, recognize it for what it is. There is no need to deny the reality of the pain and what caused it. Acknowledge the reality of your loss, but realize you are free to focus on whatever you want, and you do not have to be a victim to these anxiety producing thoughts. *“I see you and I recognize you, and I know that you really did happen. I am not denying you, but I am refusing to give you control of any more space in my thoughts.”*



### **Initiate the principle of replacement**

Instead of inviting the painful thought inside, inhale and exhale a deep, slow breath and as you begin to breathe normally again, relax your breathing slightly just a little deeper and a little slower than normal. At the same time, select a thought from your library of positive, regenerative, and happy memories. Play the thought like a video, welcoming it in and enjoying it as it unfolds.

Allow for plenty of detail as you follow the story activating all your senses. Imagine how what you're experiencing feels, tastes and smells, along with vivid colors and even the sounds involved. Memorize how this feels and make a sincere attempt to hold the feeling for as long as you can.

### **Recognize your choice point**

From this place of calm, you realize you have a choice. You do not have to be a prisoner to your painful thoughts. You have agency. There are a few things you control. You can choose the thoughts to which you give more time and attention. Making healthy choices will always be easier from this place of calm.

Keep working to collect a library of positive, regenerative videos from the stories you have in your memories. Some of those stories will involve the person you lost, and while connected to the painful memory, they are rooted in happier experiences and have the power to shift your emotions to healthy.

### **Create new neural paths**

You will become expert over time at recognizing thoughts that demand access at the door of your mind, and skilled at replacing them with more encouraging, uplifting ones using the principle of replacement. This will create new familiar neural pathways in the brain and minimize the impact of previously painful memories. You will also find your other tools of mindfulness, being present in the moment, and grounding exercises to be helpful in replacing painful thoughts and memories.



# Recovering from Past Painful Experiences

Low self-esteem can be deeply rooted, with origins in traumatic childhood experiences such as prolonged separation from parent figures, neglect, or emotional, physical, or sexual abuse. In later life, self-esteem can be undermined by ill health, negative life events such as losing a job or getting divorced, deficient or frustrating relationships, and a general sense of lack of control. This sense of lack of control may be especially marked in victims of emotional, physical, or sexual abuse, or victims of discrimination.

Past painful experiences such as those described above, can continue to speak negative, hurtful messages to us deep within our emotional, psychological and spiritual core. They can hold power over our image of ourselves long after the experience has passed. For this reason, it can be helpful to go back to that painful experience and establish the truth of it in the light of day. These painful experiences can be de-mystified, and relieved of their power over us. Lies can be revealed and truth can become the new message.

Use the following template for each painful experience causing you emotional, psychological or spiritual pain today. The three examples listed in the template are there to help you understand your specific painful experience and do not necessarily have anything to do with your situation.

*(Be sure to write out your thoughts in complete sentences)*

## 1. Identify the painful experience

- When did it take place?
- Where were you?
- Who was involved?
- What was done to you, or by you?



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## 2. Describe the pain you felt

- Use at least 5 of your own 'feeling words' in your description to describe the pain (*examples below*)
  - *wounded, attacked, alone, hopeless, judged, used, betrayed, lied to, misunderstood, isolated, devalued*

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## 3. Discern fault and assign blame

- List all the people who were at fault in the experience and what they did wrong (*examples below*)

- *“My father was at fault for molesting me sexually”*
  - *“My spouse was at fault for cheating on me”*
  - *“I was at fault for drinking too much and getting drunk”*
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- Write a statement assigning blame for each person at fault  
(examples below)

- *“I blame my father for hurting me, using me for his own pleasure, not protecting me, and making me feel worthless”*
  - *“I blame my spouse for lying to me, breaking his/her promises to me, sleeping with someone else, refusing to communicate with me, and not valuing me and our relationship”*
  - *“I blame myself for not maintaining control and for making poor decisions”*
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#### 4. Determine motives and the resulting false belief

- Write a statement identifying as best as you can, the motives of each person at fault  
(examples below)

- *“My father’s **motive** was to satisfy his own pleasure, and to exert power and control over me and others. My father’s actions created a **false belief** that I am not worthy of love, without value, a tool to be used for someone else’s pleasure, and must always submit my needs to the needs of others”*
- *“My spouse’s **motive** was to meet his/her own needs, experience selfish pleasure, and send a destructive message of being unhappy in our relationship. My spouse’s actions created a **false belief** that I cannot ever trust again, that I am not worthy of someone working hard on a relationship with me, and that I am flawed and unable to have a happy and satisfying mutual relationship”*
- *“My **motive** was to escape my pain and let go completely. My actions created a **false belief** that struggle has no purpose, I am unable to endure pain, I do not control my life, and I am defined by the poor decisions I make in life”*

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**5. Decide to move forward**

- Write a statement of resolution for each person at fault
  - *“I resolve that my father’s actions will be judged by a higher power, so I choose to turn over punishment to that higher power, and accept the reality that my father was a deeply flawed person, and that I am not responsible for his actions”*
  - *“I resolve that my spouse’s actions will be judged by a higher power, so I choose to turn over punishment to that higher power, and accept the reality that my spouse’s actions were a result of his/her flawed character, and that I am not responsible for his/her actions”*
  - *“I resolve that my actions were the result of poor decisions, and placed me in a vulnerable and compromised position. I ask my higher power to forgive me, and I choose to forgive myself and learn from my painful experience. I am guilty of making poor decisions, but I will not be defined by my poor decisions. I will make better decisions in the future”*

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- **Write a statement of new belief based on truth for each false belief**
  - *“I am worthy of love, a person of great value, a person who may or may not choose to bring pleasure to another, and my needs are just as important as the needs of others”*
  - *“I can learn to trust again, and to identify the signs of someone building trust with me; if necessary, I deserve someone working hard on a relationship with me because I am a person of worth and value, and because I bring value to a relationship, I can have a happy and satisfying mutual relationship with someone who sees me for who I am”*
  - *“I believe there is value in struggle and I do not have to escape pain to be happy; I am able to endure pain, and I control the decisions I make in my life, and I will be defined by the overwhelming number of good decisions I make in life”*

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# MISSING MY REFLECTION

**Loss reminds us of the power held by significant people in our lives.** When our loved one dies, we are overcome with emotion. We feel the deep sadness of loneliness engulf us like an impenetrable fog, and we have trouble imagining a future without our person. For those people with considerable impact on our life, there is an even deeper level of loss we may experience.

Sarah revealed much about her relationship with Josh when she told me she had lost herself when she lost Josh. As we unpacked her thoughts Sarah shared about how she felt most alive when she was with Josh, and about how being around him made her feel connected with something larger and more significant.



**For Sarah, Josh was a mirror.** We all have people in our lives who reflect back to us what they see in us and inspire us to become the best possible version of ourselves we can be. The way Josh spoke to Sarah; the way he looked at her, and the way he treated her was how he reflected the value he saw in Sarah. For the decade and more of years Sarah had Josh in her life she enjoyed how it felt to be known intimately, accepted without judgment, and loved without condition. *Life felt better because Josh made it better.*

Sarah became accustomed over the years to finding her worth and value in Josh as her mirror, and gradually her dependence on Josh as the source of truth for how Sarah defined herself increased. If she wanted to know the truth about Sarah, she would go to Josh for the answers. Sarah felt safe when Josh was close by and confident because Josh was consistently reflecting for Sarah the amazing person he saw in her.

**Sarah's relationship with Josh was perfect until it wasn't.** When Josh died suddenly, Sarah's emotional world came apart. As the overwhelming emotional pain slowly morphed into a dull ache, Sarah was left with an emptiness she had trouble recognizing at first. She began to realize that when she was with certain people, she felt more valuable, but alone she struggled and felt increasingly worthless. Sarah confided in me, *"When I lost Josh, I lost myself."* As we talked about her revelation, she concluded that maybe she had not lost herself, but that she had lost her mirror. *Living without Josh, Sarah was missing her reflection.*



**Sarah asked me a thoughtful question, "How do I find my "self" again?"** I assured Sarah that her "self" was intact and still where it had always been, and maybe what she needed was a new and healthier way to see it.

*Deep in our core there exists a place where we hold the truth about us. For people of faith, we believe that truth was written there before we were born when our creator wrote it within us. Then on the day we were born the significant people in our lives began writing alongside our creator's truth by the way they related to us. Often what they wrote was in direct alignment with what God says is true about us, and at other times it was in direct opposition to God's truth. Consequently, we came to live with ideas and concepts about ourselves that were not all true. Our challenge became discerning which beliefs we lived by were actual truth and which were lies.*

**It was time for Sarah to do the hard work of going deep into her core to discern for herself what was truth and what was not.** She grieved the loss of Josh who had helped her see her worth and value, and Sarah decided that getting back in touch with her creator might help her re-establish a solid foundation for worth and value. Over time she began to realize her faith could provide a trustworthy reflection template against which she could measure the reflections of others in her life.

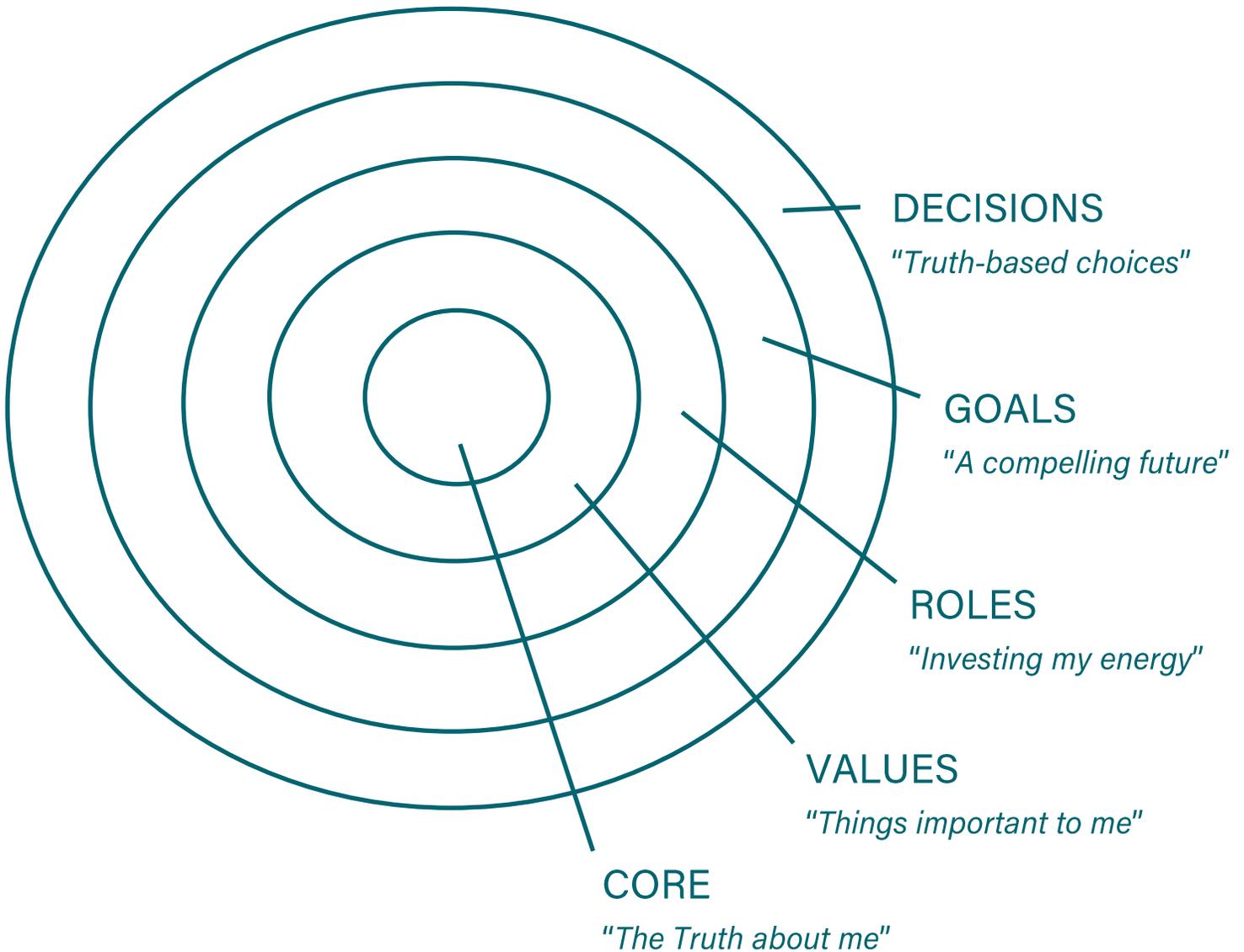
Sarah's journey of grief and loss has been painful, but it is leading her to deeper and more meaningful ways of discovering the amazing person and purpose that is Sarah. Loss changes us, but not always to destructive and meaningless ends.

Refer to the document in Member Resources titled, "**CORE Exercise**" for a template to do this work yourself.



# CORE EXERCISE

*Discovering & Accessing the Truth about Me*



**CORE:**

- What is the truth about me, and from whom, what or where does the truth originate?
- Are there any lies that need to be exposed?

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**VALUES:**

- What is most important to me, that flows out of the truth about me?

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**ROLES/ENERGY:**

- Based on my various roles as child, sibling, parent, spouse, friend, co-worker, etc., what energy am I investing in each role? How do I align with my core & values?

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**GOALS:**

- What are the goals I want to accomplish that rise from my roles/values/core?

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**DECISIONS:**

- What are my next steps to accomplish the goals I have set?

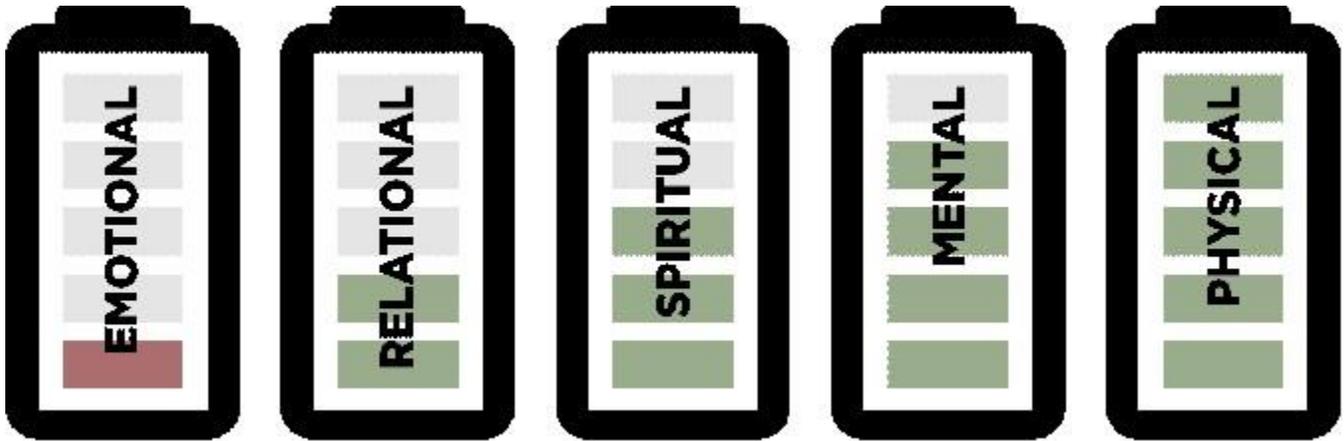
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# DOMAINS OF RESILIENCE



Domains of Resilience are internal batteries in each of us from which we use and renew energy.

Our challenge is to plug energy leaks and discover what best charges each battery in us.

Work to maintain an awareness of the energy level in each battery all the time.

## EXERCISE

1. What does each battery represent in your life?  
*(for example: physical = exercise, quality sleep, healthy food)*
2. On a scale of 1-10 with 10 being completely full, what is the level of each battery within you?
3. What drains each of your batteries the fastest?
4. What one action could you do that would raise the current level one number for each battery?



# Qualities of Resilient People

Why do some people rise above adversity and excel under pressure, and others doubt themselves, or crater in pain? *What separates them is attitude.* Resilient people meet adversity head-on and bounce back from difficulty. Drawing on decades of research, scientific analysis, interviews with nearly 1000 highly resilient people working in unusually stressful professions, this book pinpoints the traits that define the most resilient people on earth. *Which of these do you see in your life, and at what levels?*



**ACTIVE OPTIMISM**

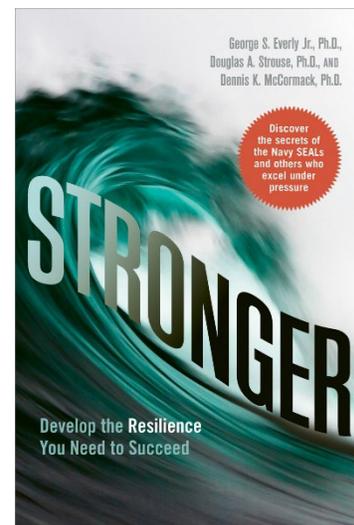
**DECISIVE ACTION**

**MORAL COMPASS**

**TENACITY &**

**DETERMINATION**

**INTERPERSONAL SUPPORT**



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# COPING STRATEGIES

*"You don't heal from the loss of a loved one because time passes, you heal because of what you do with that time."*

~ Carol Crandell

## COPING STRATEGIES THAT WORK

### Self-Care

- **Exercise** – dance, run, walk, hike, sign up for an exercise class.
- **Allow time off** – take time off from your routine, house, job, or even from grieving for a while.
- **Allow time for yourself** – see a movie or play, listen to music, read, daydream, journal, watch TV, or just do nothing.
- **Nurture yourself** – take a hot bath, get a massage, garden, do activities you enjoy. Make sure that you are getting enough to eat and drink, and try to make healthy choices. Be gentle with yourself.
- **Rest** – get enough sleep, take breaks and rest throughout the day.
- **Concentrate on breathing** – remember to take deep breaths. Give your body the proper oxygen to function efficiently.
- **Play** – participate in sports, go shopping, socialize with friends, eat out, play video games, visit the art museum, library, botanic gardens, theater, film, or concert.
- **Use humor** – cultivate your own sense of humor and seek out opportunities to laugh or at least smile (read the comics, watch a comedy, etc.).
- **Visit nature** – take walks or sit in the park and enjoy seeing nature surround you.
- **Meditation and prayer** – practicing meditation, prayer, or other rituals from your faith traditions can be a source of strength and healing.
- **Prepare for difficult days** – make plans for how you will spend holidays and other special days. Think about what rituals may need to change, be added, or stay the same. How will you include the memory of your loved one?
- **Be creative/Use creativity** – draw, paint, sculpt, dance, sing, play music, garden.



## Support

- **Communicate** – tell others clearly what you want and need.
- **Make time to talk** – share with family members, friends, co-workers, neighbors, or a religious advisor (clergy person).
- **Seek out grief support** – speak with a trained professional to seek support and education about grief. Also consider joining a support group.
- **Rely on outside help** – ask for support with simple things like chores. Asking for help is not a weakness.

(Over)

## Writing

- **Keep a journal** – express your feelings, thoughts and needs. Use it as a space for release, exploration, and introspection. Looking back will help you see your progress.
- **Write a letter** – write to the person who has died, telling them exactly what you are going through or expressing any feelings or thoughts to resolve “unfinished business.”
- **Write lists** – list good things about your loved one, the loving things they said to you that you never want to forget, etc.
- **Organization** – grief can influence our concentration, memory and decision making abilities. Writing down to-do lists can help us stay organized and more in control.

## Developing Resources

- **Set small goals first** – accomplish them, and then set more or bigger goals.
- **Reach out to others** – be open and talk about your thoughts and feelings.
- **Cry!** – tears are as natural as laughter and just as healing. Tears, whether shared with others or shed in private, can help release bottled up sadness, anger, guilt, exhaustion, and loneliness. It takes a great deal more energy to keep your feelings inside than to let them out.
- **Safe/nurturing place** – go to a safe space, in person or in your mind, whenever you feel overwhelmed or in need of nurturing.
- **Use imagery** – for example, imagine the shower as a waterfall – washing away the pain and fatigue, covering and filling you with peace, strength, and protection.
- **Help others** – reaching out to others who are hurting, donating or volunteering for good causes can help you to feel needed and connected to others.



- **Try something new** – explore new activities or hobbies to help get you out of a rut and to connect with others.
- **Enjoy good memories** – reminisce, by yourself or in company, over personal belongings or family pictures of your loved one.
- **Talk out loud** – speaking out loud to your loved one may bring a sense of connectedness and comfort.
- **Visit the place of burial**
- **Create rituals or sacred space** – to honor your loved one and help keep his or her memory alive. Consider planting a tree, placing a bench or stepping stone, creating a ceremony for special days or an everyday ritual to connect with your loved one.



# Self-Regulation Tool for your Resilience Toolbox!

Would you be interested in a tool that would allow you to take back control of your response to stress?

Instead of fight, flight or freeze, and the 1400 biochemical reactions that take place when your emotions shift from calm to stormy, it is possible to self-regulate your response to stress. You are not a victim to the upsetting circumstances you encounter on a daily basis.

HeartMath® is an organization I discovered a few years ago that completely changed the way I respond to stress. I learned to use and now train people to use a simple fundamental technique for accessing and utilizing the body's autonomic nervous system, to response to stress in a healthier way.



The technique is used to prepare for, recover from or adapt to stress, challenge, adversity or change. When you sense the stress or even see it coming, begin eyes wide open and in your stressful situation to practice these simple steps.

## **Step one: Self-regulate your breathing**

Take a deep breath and gradually slow your breathing, focusing on your heart or chest area, and begin to notice your posture change, the sounds around you, and your lungs fill and release, and your heart rhythm begin to match your breathing.

## **Step two: Self-regulate your emotion**

Bring into your mind an image, story, memory, or interaction that creates a positive renewing, or regenerative emotion. Allow this thought to fill your mind and heart until you begin to feel the change and the negative stressful emotions are replaced with happiness, joy, gratitude or admiration.



The two steps done together actually changes the physiology of your body as one set of reactions are paused and another begins, and your body establishes a coherent rhythm and flow that brings calm, peace and a new outlook on your present circumstances.

I would love to hear from you about how your practice of this tool is helping you become more resilient to the stress you encounter from day to day!



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# HEALTHY HEALING

**We live our entire lives knowing at some point we will lose our parents.** In the natural order of things, children outlive their parents. We can live decades with this knowledge and still be devastated when loss occurs. This article provides some healthy and helpful exercises for ways to heal from losing a parent. **Healthy healing equals faith plus work plus time, the formula for healing.**



Healthy healing is not about pushing your emotional pain down, trying not to think about your missing parent, or pretending everything is okay when it certainly is not. Losing a parent shakes your sense of self to your core, and anything that touches or potentially threatens your core needs your attention.

Your **faith** is a critical element in grieving because you are going to need something bigger than you are to hold onto. When the ground beneath your feet rumbles and shakes you reach for something sturdy to steady yourself. Faith in God, faith in your surviving family, faith in the process; losing a parent will require you to trust in what your eyes just cannot see. Allow your faith to support you in your loss by praying, talking with a trusted friend who shares your same beliefs, and searching for answers to the deeper existential questions of meaning and purpose we find rising to the surface.

The **work** of grieving the loss of a parent involves choices that may feel counterintuitive to you. Your heart will tell you this cannot be true. They cannot be gone. They will come walking through the door any minute now. The work of grieving is to gently and lovingly remind yourself that what has happened is real. Acceptance of what is real does not mean you have to like it. It just means we have to recognize and acknowledge it. Your mind will tell you that you will heal faster if you turn off the tear ducts and refuse to allow yourself to cry. Just ignore those painful emotions and it will not hurt so much. The work of grieving is allowing yourself space in your life to feel your feelings. Healthy healing involves the release and expression of emotional pain. Well meaning friends will tell you it is time to dive back into responsibility and distract yourself by getting back to work. The work of grieving is carving out time after your loss to talk about, reflect on, consider carefully, treasure deeply, appreciate gratefully, and resolve thoughtfully the meaning of your parent's life coming to an end.

Questions grieving people ask seems to always include, *"How long will I feel this way? Will I ever feel normal again?"* Healthy healing takes **time**. Time does not heal anything but is a necessary space where healing can take place. If you will step into your faith, do the work of grieving, and allow yourself the time to make the journey, you will heal.



You will come to a place where the pain is not as intense, and having realized your normal has changed, you will begin to adjust to it. Your traumatic images of loss will gradually shift to positive memories of your favorite times together and the grateful appreciation for all your parent meant to you. You will recognize the consequences of your loss, and you will choose to go on living and loving. At times you will feel

sad, your eyes will fill with tears, and you will wish they were here again to help you, listen to you, or just to witness a moment in your life. In that moment you will resolve to be a better, stronger, happier, and healthier you.



# WHAT YOU MIGHT NOT EXPECT

**When we lose a parent, we expect to be sad and we expect we will miss our parent,** but what catches us by surprise are the things we do not expect when we lose a parent. There are unexpected losses, and you need help with how to cope with them. Whatever your expectations are when you experience the loss of a parent, reality will be different. Your grief experience will be unique to any of your friends or family and will be based on the circumstances of the death, your emotional make-up, and the nature and quality of your relationship with your parent.



**Many grief reactions may catch you by surprise.** As a Chaplain I attended the death of a father in his early 60's who left behind a wife and a sizable number of adult children and spouses in their late 20's to early 40's. I observed several expected grief reactions including crying, sobbing, and extreme sadness. In addition, I saw a few things I did not expect. During a two-hour period following the death of their father I saw one adult child run screaming to the bathroom, lock herself in and refuse to come out. I saw one sibling shortly after the death walk to the refrigerator and make themselves a sandwich. Another sibling asked the nurse if she could help bathe and dress her father into clean clothes. One sibling and her spouse brought a cardboard box from the garage and began walking through the house collecting possessions of the father they wanted to keep, creating an argument between several of the siblings that escalated into physical pushing, shoving and some very serious name-calling! Losing a parent can elicit a variety of responses, many of which you never expect to see.

**You may not expect to feel your loss physically.** Fatigue and a general lack of energy is common with the loss of a parent. You may feel a hollowness in your stomach or even a stomachache. Heart palpitations, trembling, shaking, nervousness, agitation, and irritability are not uncommon. As thoughts of shock and numbness wear off, they may be followed by physical



symptoms of emptiness and heaviness. It is likely that your regular sleep pattern will be interrupted.

*Help yourself physically by staying grounded and taking care of your physical needs. Grounding is about creating ways to stay in touch with reality when your mind takes over and drags you into worst case scenario thinking. When you feel yourself spinning into fear and anxiety, take deep breaths, recite your contact information, describe out loud your surroundings, or ask someone nearby to talk with you to distract your spiraling thoughts. Get outside and go for a walk to get exercise and your blood flowing. Sunshine, a cool breeze, deep breaths of fresh air, healthy food, and quality sleep will all help you grieve well physically.*

**You may not expect for your loss to affect your relationships.** Losing a parent may draw you closer to your siblings, or disagreements about how to handle a funeral, service, or possessions belonging to your parent may pull you apart. Grief creates irritability and moodiness and can make communication difficult and misunderstandings more likely. Grieving the loss of a parent can make you want to isolate and increase anti-social behaviors. You may hear others describe you as having changed and wishing they could get the “old you” back.

*Anticipate the emotional pain and resulting frustration that grief and loss creates among family and friend systems and be proactive to simplify as much as possible. Lowering expectations will go a long way to heading off relational trouble. Keep life as uncomplicated as possible. You will need high levels of empathy to see the loss from the perspective of those in your relational bubble. Put yourself in the shoes of others and do your best to understand how grief is affecting them because it affects everyone differently.*

**You may not expect your loss to dominate your thoughts so completely.** Grieving the loss of a parent can destroy your ability to concentrate. Organizational skills may seem to have disappeared along with your memory and the ability to recall facts or details. Constant thoughts of your parent and a preoccupation with the death can make it difficult to make decisions. You may find it difficult to believe the death has actually happened. In some cases, a grieving person believes their loved one is “visiting” them as they can sense their presence nearby.

*When your mind races or is filled with thoughts about your loss, exercise the mental muscle of choosing the thoughts upon which you want to focus. Practice choosing a specific positive memory of your loved one and hold that thought in your mind not allowing it to escape and be*



*replaced by another. This will also help with traumatic thoughts and images. Use the principle of replacement to choose the healthier thought and the mental muscle to hold it. It will also be helpful to break tasks or projects down into very small parts you can complete easily in a short time. Less is more!*

**You may not expect to reflect so much about yourself.** Losing a parent can cause you to reflect on what your parent meant to you in terms of influence, sense of self, friendship, acceptance, and love. It can also surface negative feelings of being abandoned, devalued, abused, judged, or ignored. You may wonder how much the impact of your parents shaped the person you have become, and thoughts of re-evaluating your priorities, adopting new goals, or making changes in your life would be a normal reaction.

*Use this time and these thoughts to consider the positive qualities you have that you owe to your parent and find space for gratitude as you reflect. If you are considering changes, allow them to rise from a place of appreciation and love for the person you want to become. Your grief journey may afford you the opportunity to offer grace, mercy, and forgiveness for hurt or pain generated by your parent. The work you will be doing is as much about healing your heart as establishing blame and seeking justice for pain caused.*

