

DOULAGIVERS GRIEF GUIDE



Doulagivers Institute™

*"Grief is a universal experience -
know that you are not alone in it."*

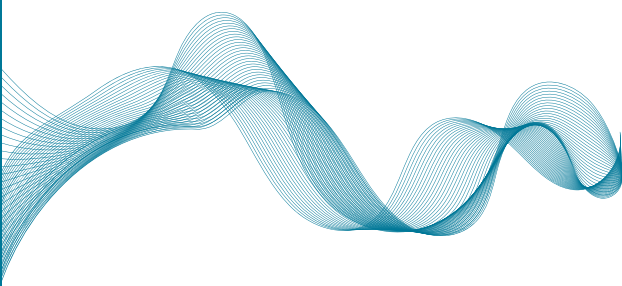
– Suzanne B. O'Brien RN



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Grief Guide

Introduction



It is not a surprise to you when I say that we are suffering from an overwhelming amount of heavy and complicated grief in our world today. What may be a surprise is that, in my opinion, the grief we are experiencing is so much harder than it needs to be and is directly related to the removal of death being perceived as a natural part of our life's journey.

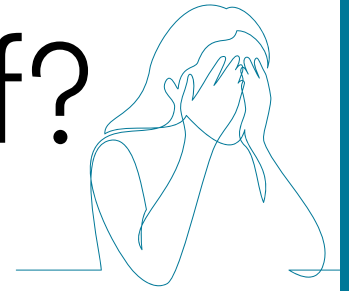
Hi, my name is Suzanne B. O'Brien, and I am a former hospice and oncology nurse. From the minute I stepped into this area of care, it was apparent that almost all education, discussion and planning for the natural way that end of life unfolds has been completely removed from modern society. In fact, we train our doctors (for the most part) to help patients do everything possible to avoid death. Even when that means doing futile and painful procedures and treatments.

In today's society, we are not talking about death as a natural part of life - and we certainly do not know much about grief, how it works or techniques to help heal from it. I know this for sure: each one of us will be touched by death at some point in our life. It is 100% guaranteed. I also know this for sure - that learning about end of life, planning ahead and having support can make the end of life and grieving period a thousand times better. I knew that teaching the [Free Doulagivers Level 1 Family Caregiver Training](#) would help people learn how to care for someone they love who is dying. What I didn't expect was how many people would end up sharing with me how it helped heal their grief!

It is my hope that this guide and education can assist you in your own grief recovery journey.



What is Grief?



Grief is a natural response to losing someone or something that's important to you. You may feel a variety of emotions, such as sadness or loneliness. And you might experience it for a number of different reasons. Maybe a loved one died, a relationship ended, or you lost your job. Other life changes, like chronic illness or a move to a new home, can also lead to grief or grieving.

The Different Types of Grief

Anticipatory Grief



Anticipatory grief develops before a significant loss occurs rather than after. If a loved one is terminally ill, for example, or even if you have an aging parent who is declining in physical and/or cognitive functioning, you may start grieving your loss before it has fully occurred.

Unrecognized Grief



Unrecognized grief can occur when your loss is devalued and not acknowledged by others. Some people may minimize the loss as less important, or even say things like, "aren't you over that by now?" Unrecognized grief can also occur when your relationship to the deceased is a neighbor, beloved pet, work colleague, classmate, or even public figure.

Complicated Grief



The pain of losing someone or something may never completely go away, but the heaviness should become less and less over time. When it doesn't - and it interferes with basic activities in daily life like bathing, eating, and socializing - it may be a sign of complicated grief. Complicated grief usually arises from the death of a loved one where the loss has left you stuck in a state of heavy grieving. If you're experiencing complicated grief and the pain from your loss keeps you from doing daily activities, it's important to reach out for professional support to get what you need to help you heal.



The Difference Between Grief and Grieving



Grief is the often overwhelming feeling of an emotional state of being that comes over us when we experience the loss of someone or something we love.

Grieving is the action of what happens as we adapt to life after loss. Understanding that our loved one is gone - that we are now stepping into a new life without them in it. The good news is that your grieving process will change over time and in the natural process of grieving, it should become easier and easier.



The Grief Rainbow

There are many emotions that can be part of the grief journey. They are not experienced in any typical order or stage and people can (and often do) go back and forth between multiple emotions during the grieving process.

Shock/Denial

Fear

Regret/Guilt

Anger

Acceptance

Depression

Recovery

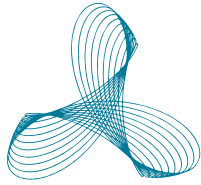
Everyone grieves differently, but if you understand your emotions, take care of yourself, and seek support, you can heal.

Always remember to:

Take as much time as needed

Honor your feelings

Create a solid self-care plan



The 3 Phases of Grief



There are three phases to the grieving process. There is also no set time that a person will be in each phase, as grief is subjective and will depend on many variables. What you should know is that grief is energy and that energy as defined by science cannot disappear, but can change. This means that heavy and painful grief, with the right support systems and given enough time can, and will, change to a lighter version.

Phase 1: The Shock/Disbelief Phase

What it is



This is the phase of grief when someone has just died or the source of your grief has just occurred. There is usually an overwhelming feeling of shock for family and loved ones. This shock can present in many ways such as withdrawal, pain, anger, guilt, and depression.

Why it's Important



It's important to understand that the Shock Phase will be different for every person. It is also important to remember that there is no set time frame. Right now, in the U.S., we give people about two weeks to grieve a loved one and then expect them to "get over it." It does not work that way. People need time, compassion, and permission to grieve in a way that is right for them. This is a process that is unique to each individual.

What You Can Do



Be gentle with yourself. Understand that many times the depth and level of our grief is directly related to the amount of love and connection we had with that person or thing we have lost. If we are grieving the death of a loved one, it is true that we will not have that person in our life in the physical form anymore - but we will always have the love, experiences and memories that that person has brought to our life and those can still be accessed within our hearts and minds at ANY TIME we desire.



Phase 2: Acceptance



What it is



The Acceptance Phase is the time where we are able to fully acknowledge and understand that our loved one has died. It allows us to “shift” into a state where we can start the healing and recovery process. This is incredibly important as we may go back and forth between disbelief and acceptance that our loved one has actually had their end of life. Remember that grief has no set timeline. It can take up to a year to enter the Acceptance Phase and the Acceptance Phase can be dramatically complicated and/or extended with a quick and unexpected death. Be compassionate with yourself. Just know that you are doing the best you can and that where you are in your grief journey is perfectly normal.

Why it's Important



The acceptance phase is where the “shift” will happen. This shift is the first step in the healing and recovery process. It allows us to begin embracing our new reality without this person or thing we have lost. It is a time when we start to readjust and reenter life after loss.

What You Can Do



Remember that there is no right or wrong way to grieve and there is no set time period. Remember that you are going through a lot right now. Give yourself the self-care that you need physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Connecting or reconnecting to your spirituality can be comforting at this time. Utilizing meditation, walks in nature, and forms of dance/movement can be incredibly enlightening and healing.



Phase 3: Recovery



What it is



The Recovery Phase is the time when we create new pathways forward. Creating a new way of life that does not include our loved one in the physical form but will always include them because love can never be erased. This is a time where we will reframe the end-of-life experience and replace the “highlight reel” from heavy painful memories to ones of connection, love, and positivity.

Why it's Important



The recovery phase is also the place where forgiveness of *ALL* things connected to the end-of-life experience should be given and received. Many times, end-of-life moves so quickly that we do not even know or understand everything that is happening. We are in a crisis state and it is only after the fact that we may remember scenarios and parts of the journey that are full of regret, anger, pain, and even guilt. You **MUST** forgive yourself and others. Know that you and others were doing the **BEST** you could with where you were at the time. There are so many layers of grief and pain when someone dies, especially during the COVID-19 Pandemic, that we usually have an entire list of regrets we are carrying with us after the fact. Forgiveness is the key to shifting this energy. Forgiveness is for you. Forgiveness is the way forward.

What You Can Do



We tend to remember the most painful and traumatic experiences in our memory in what I refer to as a “highlight reel.” Reframe the entire end-of-life experience and try to remember the positive moments. They are there. Now, replace the heavy painful memories with the positive ones. Create a new “highlight reel” and when you go back and remember your time with your loved one, it will be attached to a much kinder and gentler memory trace.



Phase 3: Recovery



Forgiveness



Remember that you did the best you could with where you were at that time! Be compassionate and kind to yourself. Use forgiveness to heal your heart and to release anger or resentment you may have towards others.

Why it's Important



Forgiveness is for you! It is the most powerful tool to shift and release energy. Reframing will change the heavy memory to a lighter one. Both of these techniques will help you to heal on many levels so you can go forward in a loving, positive, and constructive manner.



[Download Free Doulagivers Forgiveness Guide!](#)



Prolonged Grief Disorder & When to Get Help



Prolonged grief disorder is characterized by someone not being able to engage in activities essential to daily quality of life after six months or a year after a death or loss. The pain of losing someone or something may never completely go away, but the heaviness should become less and less over time. When it doesn't - and it keeps you from doing activities of daily living like bathing, eating and socializing - it may be a sign of prolonged grief disorder resulting from complicated grief.

Prolonged grief disorder usually arises from the death of a loved one where the loss has left you stuck in a state of heavy grieving. If you're experiencing Prolonged Grief Disorder and the pain from your loss keeps you from doing daily activities, it's important to reach out for support to get what you need to help you heal.



What to Say to Someone Who is Grieving

When you care for someone who is going through the painful and difficult process of losing someone, it is so important to remember that it really is about being there for them in true presence. Remember to show up for this person in a loving and non-judgmental way. Listening to them and seeing where they are in their grieving process is the first step. Ask them, "What can I do for you?" Understand that you are not here to "fix" it or to try to cheer them up. Your presence is the most powerful antidote you can give to a person experiencing grief. Show up for them and let them know that you will be with them as they walk this path every step of the way.

Things You Can Say:

I'm so sorry for your loss

What can I do for you?

I'm here for you

Please know how much I care

You can call me anytime

I am holding you in my thoughts and prayers

Can you share some of your favorite stories about them with me?

Say nothing and just hold the space for them in the highest level of love and compassionate presence



Doulagivers Pearl



When you have aging parents, try to make both individuals as independent as possible. Many times, complicated grief is due to the inability of a living spouse or partner to navigate day to day life on their own because the deceased person “took care of everything” for them. Make sure to help educate them with these skills as they age.

Here is Your Loving Reminder & Checklist to Help You Heal Grief



- 1 **Take Your Time.**
- 2 **Be Present.**
- 3 **Lean into the Grief.** Grief is natural and expected. Honoring it will help to move it.
- 4 **Talk about it.** Speak it. Find a support group. Speaking about your grief and honoring it moves you towards healing.
- 5 **Get a Grief Journal.**
- 6 **Reprocess the entire journey or experience.**
- 7 **Reframe the experience.** Reframing requires seeing something in a new way - in a context that allows us to recognize and appreciate positive aspects of the experience. Reframing helps to process the entire end-of-life or grief experience, work through any guilt, pain or anger we are still holding onto and then highlight all the positive aspects of the experience.
- 8 **Develop a Self-Care Routine and practice it daily.**



Here is Your Loving Reminder & Checklist to Help You Heal Grief

continued...



9 Practice Gratitude. In positive psychology research, gratitude is strongly and consistently associated with greater happiness. Gratitude helps people feel more positive emotions, relish good experiences, improve their health, deal with adversity, and build stronger relationships.

10 Be of Service. This is the true secret to happiness!

"For it is in giving that we receive." - Saint Francis of Assisi

"The sole meaning of life is to serve humanity." - Leo Tolstoy

"We make a living by what we get; we make a life by what we give."

-Winston Churchill

"Making money is a happiness; making other people happy is a super happiness."

-Nobel Peace Prize recipient Muhammad Yunus

"Giving back is as good for you as it is for those you are helping, because giving gives you purpose. When you have a purpose-driven life, you're a happier person."

-Goldie Hawn



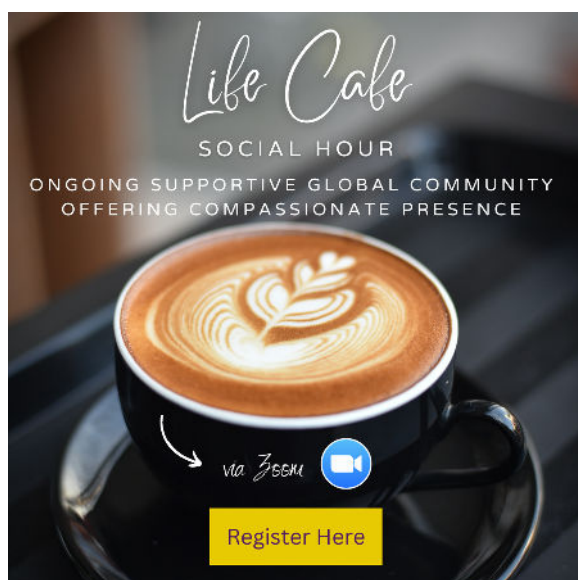


Be of Service to Help Heal



Scientific research provides compelling data to support the anecdotal evidence that giving is a powerful pathway to personal growth and lasting happiness. Through fMRI technology, we now know that giving activates the same parts of the brain that are stimulated by food and sex. Experiments show evidence that altruism is hardwired in the brain - and it's pleasurable. Helping others may just be the secret to living a life that is not only happier, but also healthier, wealthier, more productive and meaningful.

Additional Resources



Doulagivers LIFE CAFÉS are a free resource of a global community that is inclusive of all people and focuses on the Doulagivers pillars of Kindness, Compassion, Non-Judgmental Presence and Being of Service. This is an accepting, respectful, and confidential space. Everyone is welcome no matter what race, religion, gender, or sexual orientation. Everyone's opinions are respected and heard. The intention of these gatherings is to connect with others and help to raise the individual and collective consciousness through practicing compassionate presence and understanding.



FORGIVENESS IS THE SECRET KEY TO UNLOCKING AN EXTRAORDINARY LIFE!
Forgiveness is a continued, deliberate decision to release feelings of resentment, anger, or shame toward a person, group - or even yourself. Whether it's a simple spat with your spouse or long-held resentment toward a family member or friend, unresolved conflict can go deeper than you may realize - it may be affecting your physical health and holding you back from the life you truly want. Forgiveness will set you free and allow you to create the future exactly the way you want it to be.



Participate in the **FREE Doulagivers 90-Minute Level 1 End of Life Doula Training!**

Infused with real bedside stories, this free training empowers people with the skills to care for their loved ones at the end of life, help heal grief from past experiences with death, and reduce the fear of death in general. It also aims to provide insightful and priceless wisdom from those ready to leave

this world about how to truly live fully and make the most out of life's journey!

Hear how this training webinar has helped others heal their grief:

"I was drawn to this session in a search for a meaningful and effective grief guide. I know this session was actually focused on death doula and helping others through the end-of-life process, but it was the most useful tool I have also seen in processing loss and grief. I have tried grief counseling with 2 therapists and attended several online grief support workshops. I had yet to find any of that helpful in any way. I was frustrated in not being able to resolve my own grief, but even more so for the others who were grieving alongside me or bigger than my grief. I was disappointed in not finding a helpful resource. This training has been so amazing, I can see how closely it is related to grief and processing loss. I want to thank you for this free session. I have paid for so much less than once. I appreciate you; I want to learn more about being a death doula and follow this journey deeper :) I feel very connected here." -Kristen O'Hanley

"Thank you so much. When my son died I just felt broken when he kept saying he wanted to go home. I replied that he was home. I get it now. He was telling his momma he wanted to go and that was his goodbye. Thank you." -Theresa Himes

"Thank you! Thank you! Thank you! I feel healed from my parent's death issues that I have carried for the last 40+ years. I learned so much. Your compassion comes through every word. I can't thank you enough for sharing this beautiful journey." -Viv Hol



Conclusion



Grief is a Universal Experience - know that you are not alone in it.

I hope this guide has helped put you on the path to healing from your own grief process and I would love to see you in a free Doulagivers Training or Life Cafe.

In Love & Service,

Suzanne B. O'Brien RN and The Doulagivers Team

