

Heal Grief Mindfully

FREE YOURSELF FROM THE EMOTION

By Gina Mastroluca



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Grief is a natural process that we can acknowledge and move through.



My friend Ellie and I were driving to the beach when she asked me to pull over.

She was experiencing sharp pain in her chest. We stayed quiet as she put her hand to her heart and focused on her breathing. The pain eased and then stopped within a few minutes. I suggested going to the emergency room, but Ellie insisted she was OK. Earlier that day, Ellie had shared the details of a daughter in crisis, a relationship that was bringing up unresolved issues, and her mother's mental illness and steep decline in a nursing facility. Clearly, Ellie was experiencing tremendous emotional distress and her chest pain was a physical manifestation of her grief.

Mindfulness Exercise for Healing Grief

The following is a helpful and transformative self-care exercise for resolving symptoms of grief.

1. Create some uninterrupted time for yourself. Sit comfortably or lie down.
2. Identify that you may be feeling a loss—sometimes the exact loss is unclear.
3. Ask yourself, and recognize, what am I feeling now?
4. Bring awareness to the center of your chest. Place your hand there and focus on your breath. Notice the sensations. Are they warm, cold, heavy, constricted, frozen? Is there a color? Does imagery arise?
5. If you start to be distracted by outside thoughts, return your awareness to the sensations under your hand on your chest.
6. Stay with the sensations long enough to notice that they are changing and in motion. Your only task is to bring your full attention to these sensations.
7. Rest and integrate. Remind yourself that letting go is painful for everyone and the feelings will pass. Remember that grieving is a natural process.
8. Refocus. Bring your full attention back to your physical environment and continue your day with a sense of accomplishment.



In my practice as an energy bodyworker, I see the ways grief expresses itself in the body: tightness in the chest; restriction in the breath; congestion in the lungs; and rigidity in the neck, shoulders, hips, and low back. Grief can also make you feel depressed, anxious, fearful, weak, or lacking in energy. The human body cannot hide the internal stress and tension of resisting change and letting go. Still, we exert great energy trying to keep everything stable and permanent.

Often, grief is under the surface of our awareness. We haven't fully acknowledged the emotions underlying the loss—the end of a marriage, the recognition that one's child is becoming more and more independent, the anniversary of the death of a loved one, the sudden loss of a job, or the decline of a parent or partner.

When my mother had a heart attack at 52, she was forced to give up a lifetime of smoking. Her remark still reverberates with me: "I feel like I lost my best friend." Saying farewell to habits and dependencies on alcohol, cigarettes, sugar, or coffee is often accompanied by a deep sense of loss. But loss can be even more subtle—a long-awaited vacation coming to an end, saying farewell to a visiting family

member, the passing of a season, or the signs of aging in ourselves or for a loved one.

Grief is a mind-body response to the reality of loss and change. Experiences, relationships, situations—everything in our lives seems to be in constant flux. We tend to fear loss and the grief that accompanies it and feel that somehow if we acknowledge this pain, we open ourselves up to yet more of it. This fear of the acute grief and dread of a future loss can cause us to get stuck there. But unacknowledged grief—and the inability to let go and move on—brings distress, tension, and illness.

Grief is a natural process that we can acknowledge and move through. Impermanence and loss are as much a part of our lives as the things and experiences that we enjoy. Truly experiencing grief is a powerful way of coming to terms with this truth. By releasing grief, we feel a sense of health and wholeness, and we can be at peace with letting go. 

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