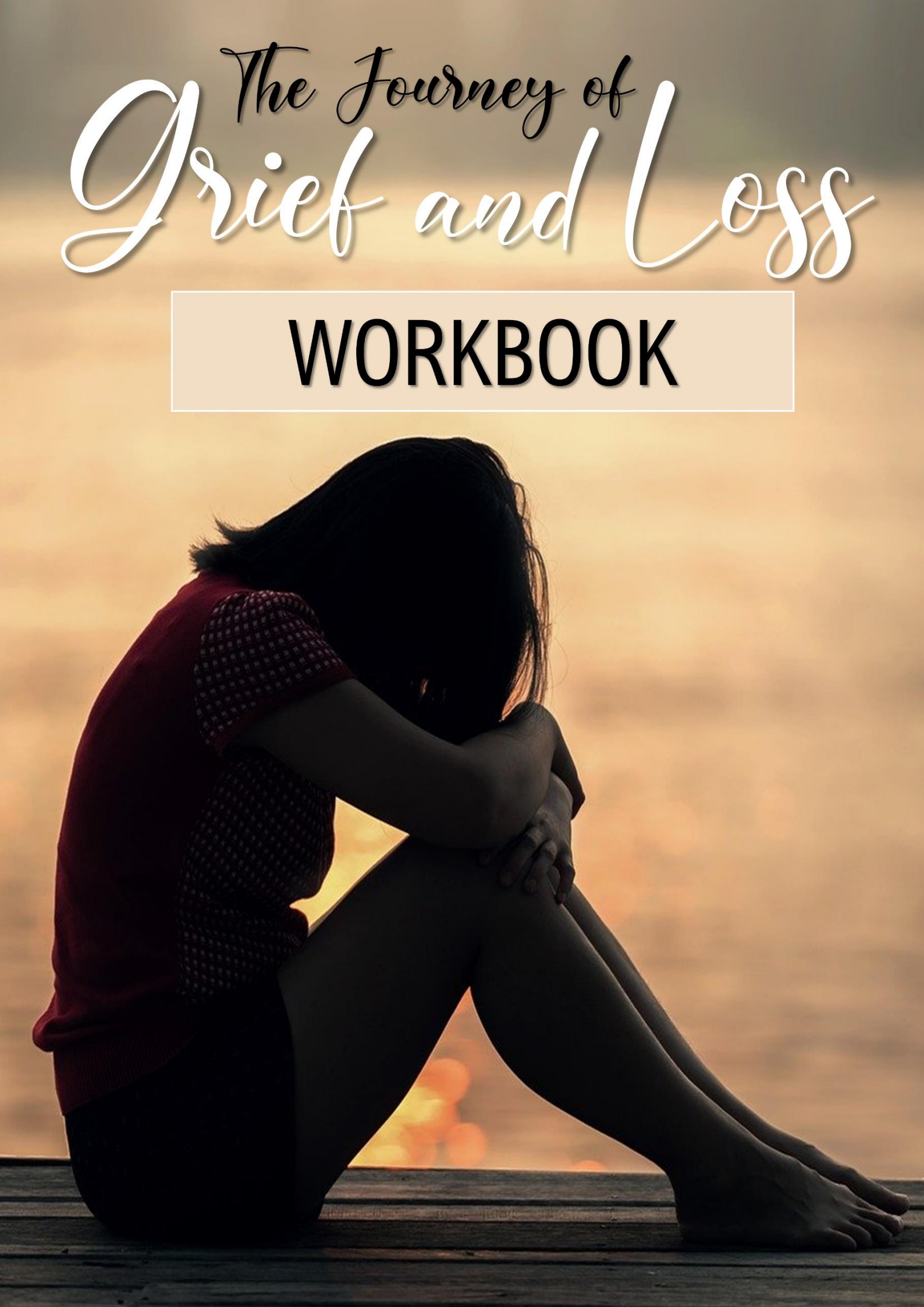
The Journey of Grief and Loss

WORKBOOK



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About Grief

Grief is something you never truly *recover* from. Don't get me wrong, there is healing from grief and loss. You will recover from the intense pain; you will learn to move forward. You will not be forced to live in anguish for the rest of your days.

However, grief is more than just pain. Over time, your grief will evolve into something new. It's important that you hold space for those emotions and experiences because some of them might just be more beautiful than you can imagine. What was once a painful day of memory can evolve into warmth and celebration.

The idea of not recovering from grief sounds terrifying, but millions of people are going through their normal day, living a purposeful life while still living with an ongoing sense of grief. All of the things we hear people discuss about getting over grief… it's all about getting life back to normal and just moving on. That's a misrepresentation of grief. That's a misrepresentation of loss. While humans always seek closure and enjoy resolution, that's not how grief operates.

That doesn't mean recovery doesn't belong in the grief process, it's just that we need to redefine what we believe it is we're recovering from.

What Recovery Means

Recovery means that you are returning to your normal state of strength, health, and mind. If the loss you are going through is the death of a significant person, then you will never return to the normal you lived pre-loss.

That loss will integrate itself into your normal daily life and change how you live and profoundly influence how you experience the world. However, your emotions, distress, and stress can be recovered, you will return these to your general baseline.

That's the difference between recovering from grief and recovering from intense pain.

You could accuse me of semantics, however, the truth of the matter is when you lose a person you don't want to let them go. You don't have to let them go, but you can move on while keeping space open for them. Now, if your loss is a breakup, you can bounce back from that. If your loss is related to something else, you can probably bounce back from that, too.

The words you use to describe or label your grief – they matter. Unfortunately, those words often get us in trouble because we all interpret them differently. That's when things tend to go awry.

Grief will remain with you as long as your loss is significant.

Perhaps that's the best way to sum it up, no matter your loss. If your grief is related to the loss of a job, you will likely feel that grief until you find another job. If your grief is related to a breakup, then you will feel that until you recognize you're better off or happen to find someone new. Death is different.

Ongoing grief is not dysfunctional, it's normal.

It's also normal to experience unpleasant thoughts and emotions related to that grief. You have to allow yourself space to process those types of emotions. We are going to find joy and sadness in life, death is no different. You can have a fond memory that brings you joy, but through grief-tinted glasses, there will be yearning, pain, and sadness. You can experience all of those emotions related to a single event.

What's important is you understand you don't have to push the pain away, sometimes you have to allow yourself to experience it. That doesn't mean you're negating the healing process.

Think of grief like an old knee injury that starts to ache when the weather turns cold and the rain comes. It's a scary thought, but grief and loss are an

expression of love. It's part of who we are, how we love and connect, and it bonds us to humanity.

Emotions Felt After Loss

There are certain emotions you can expect to experience after a loss.

- Yearning
- Sadness
- Bitterness or resentfulness
- Anger and disgust
- Fear, whether it's generalized anxiety or a specific fear
- Denial, disbelief, or shock
- Emptiness
- Loneliness
- A loss of hope
- A loss of purpose
- Despair
- Guilt or shame
- Agitation
- Disorientation
- Feeling lost

Losses Other Than Those Which Are Death Related

This workbook is not limited to addressing grief related to death. We experience many losses in life and the following exercises are all appropriate to process any grief you feel related to those losses.

Exercise 1 – The Types of Grief & Your Response

Grief is a natural emotion, it's a response we experience following a significant loss. We all deal with our grief differently, with some who feel numb and walk through life in a haze and others who try to keep themselves busy and cry in their downtime.

While some people seem to bounce back quickly, others take a long time. The healing process is a natural one and there isn't a right way to do it. If it takes your life over for years, it's complicated grief.

- Normal grief is dependent on situations, cultures, and people.
- It's a natural process, not all grief requires professional treatment.
- A small number of people experience complicated grief following a loss.
- In the case of complicated grief, professional treatment is necessary.

Type of Grief	Normal Response	Your Response
Acute Grief	It's normal to experience shock, sadness, sleep trouble, distress, poor appetite, and a lack of concentration. This is not just immediately after a loss but can also be for months after the fact. These symptoms will diminish over time.	

Complicated Grief	Sometimes, acute grief doesn't go away. The emotions that came directly after the loss persist for years. It continues to feel unmanageable and unreal. The idea of moving on is impossible to get your head around and fills you with shame.	

Integrated Grief	Following the most intense symptoms of grief, you enter the integrated grief stage. This is the point at which you accept the loss and integrated grief is a lifelong stage. You still miss the person, you may still experience pain, but you have learned to cope with your loss.	

Exercise 2 – The Stages of Grief

Working through the stages of grief.

Denial

- This isn't happening or can't be happening.
- Shock and numbness
- The psyche develops a protective mechanism that initially causes the impacted individual to respond in disbelief
- Helps humans process what is happening by slowing the onset of our understanding thereby allowing us to pace our emotions gradually over time

Initially, it is difficult to accept the loss. It's common to deny or minimize. Record your own sense of denial.

Anger

- Why is this happening to me?
- Once the reality of the loss sinks in shock and numbness become replaced by rage and resentment
- Though displayed as anger, this is truly just displaced pain
- As the psyche tries to find a rationale for why the loss took place, in the initial stages there often are not logical/acceptable answers and this lack of sense causes hurt which we experience and project as anger

Once the denial stage passes, the anger stage enters. They may be angry at the situation, themselves, the loss. It's common to paint the situation as unfair and look for someone to blame. Detail the anger stage of your own grief – you can talk about a previous loss or one you're dealing with now.

Bargaining

- I will do anything to change this.
- Involves going to a higher power and essentially trying to barter for the return of whatever is lost or in the process of being lost.
- Asking God to save the life of a loved one pronounced brain dead or trying to make a deal with a boss to get a job back after just being fired.
- Thinking in “what if” or “if only” terms.
- Stems from a desire to return to a life before the loss, so one focuses on scenarios that could have potentially prevented the loss from occurring

The bargaining stage is when someone tries to delay or change the loss. In the event of a breakup, someone might try to convince their partner to come back. For someone receiving a life-threatening diagnosis, they may seek an unlikely cure. What bargaining stage have you dealt with?

Depression

- Realization of the loss takes place.
- Characterized by deep sadness and sorrow.
- Length of this stage varies from person to person, and its length and severity are heavily influenced by the type of loss experienced.

The loss has occurred, what's the point? It's common for people to cry, grieve, and isolate themselves at this stage. Depression is generally the step before acceptance. Write about your feelings.

Acceptance

- I'll be okay.
- Acceptance is simply the realization and acknowledgment that the loss has occurred and is reality. Not the belief that a person is in agreement with the loss that has taken place, but the realization that nothing can be done to change the outcome
- Focus shifts towards moving forward versus trying to go back or getting stuck in the loss.

Finally, acceptance. There is a logical acceptance of the situation, and most of the emotions related to the situation are controlled. Detail your acceptance.

Exercise 3 – Journaling and Processing Greif

Journal writing can play an important role in healing from grief and loss, whether you're an avid writer or not. A journal provides you with space to process your thoughts and emotions. While there won't be enough space in this workbook to maintain a journal, we are going to get you started and provide you with helpful prompts.

First, you should make time to write continuously in your journal for 20 minutes daily. This is for you and you alone, this isn't something you have to share. If you start to feel frantic or as though you're going to lose it while you're writing, then change the subject matter. At the end of each session, ask yourself four questions, and use a scale of 1-10 to rate it.

- How did I express my deepest feelings and thoughts?
- How sad or upset do I currently feel?
- How happy do I currently feel?
- How meaningful or valuable was today's writing?

Journal writing offers an unparalleled opportunity to look deeply within yourself to find your strengths, weaknesses, helps you build resilience and grow through bereavement.

What loss did your experience?

Name three people you're comfortable opening up to.

1.

2.

3.

Name places you can go that is safe and comfortable.

1.

2.

3.

Name three people or things you can do or be with that will allow you to release your anger safely.

1.

2.

3.

Name three people or things you can do or be with that will allow you to release your sadness safely.

1.

2.

3.

Name three ways to release sadness and/or anger that are non-harmful.

1.

2.

3.

List three things you can do when life feels a bit meaningless.

1.

2.

3.

List three activities that you can do to express your feelings
For example, talking with someone or writing

1.

2.

3.

What can you do to help you keep your mind off of your loss?

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

My support system includes

What is your relationship with grief?

Is it new, old, conflicted, or peaceful?

Is your relationship with grief unpredictable or predictable? Is it a give and take relationship or does grief constantly take?

How do you feel about grief?

Do you feel loved, safe, lonely, angry, or afraid?

What would you like your relationship with grief to be?

5 ways I will get through today

What helps me feel peaceful

Is there anyone else sharing your loss?

Can you share memories together?

What would your loved one want for you?

How can you keep their memory alive?

I feel

I feel saddest when

Since my loss, everything feels different because

The thing I miss most

My family feels

If I could ask just one question, it would be

Describe the circumstances when you feel most safe

List things that bring you comfort

For example, being with a friend, gardening, yoga, meditation, listening to music, journaling, being with your pet.

How do you feel?

Write whatever comes to mind.

Memories

There is nothing like a sweet memory to make your spirit soar and inspire your heart. That's what we will focus on today. Write about the sweetest memory of your lost loved one.

One of my favorite memories of you is…

What emotions are you feeling now as you look back on this memory?

When I think about my loss, I feel...

Today, I really miss

I am having a hard time with

The hardest time of day is

I am angry because

I am sad because

I am confused because

I need

I would like

I wish there was less

I find it helpful when

How can I honor my loved one

How can I honor myself

Self-Compassion

How will I practice self-compassion. For example, Be a friend to yourself, say kind things. For example, “I’m so proud of you for finding your inner-strength” or “you are going to be okay” or “I love you.” Try saying these types of things while looking in the mirror.

What can I do for someone else

Doing for others helps take you out of yourself and your head.

What am I grateful for right now

Gratitude reduces, stress, promotes positive healing and is a major catalyst in healing.

Exercise 4 – Write A Letter

Write a letter to the person or thing you lost. Let out any emotions you need to. Don't think too much, just write. Say whatever is on your mind.

Exercise 5 – Remember The Good

Remembering the good is an excellent way to heal from loss and grief. Don't be afraid to give yourself permission to remember what you have loved and lost.

As long as you remember, you can remember for good. Remembering for good is an understanding of the difference between remembering and ruminating.

You can also remember for the good of others. Your remembering of what you have loved and lost can inspire others and allows you to share your wisdom, too.

Remembering can also be a unique way to navigate your journey. It's a recognition that you know how to live wholeheartedly, even after a loss. You can trust the part of yourself that knows that to guide you through this situation.

What do I miss most about what or who I lost

Are there spaces, rituals, or practices for remembering and celebrating what I have loved and lost?

How do other people react to the way I remember what you have loved and lost?

Complete the sentence

If I find a way to remember what I have loved and lost, others will think…

How does your response make you feel?

Does it make you feel liberated? Or, do you feel pressure to find closure or let it go?

Who are the most supportive people who will help me remember

Which of these has allowed you to remember in a way that encourages positive emotions?

Exercise 6 – Write Another Letter

Write another letter to the person or thing you lost. Let out any emotions you need to. Write what you will miss, your memories, say goodbye.

Exercise 7 - Life After Loss

How has this loss changed me

What lessons, benefits or gifts has going through this loss given me

How have I grown as a result of my grief journey

How will the lessons of loss and the grief process continue to shape me and my life

Now that I experienced this loss, I will

My "forward" plans

For today

For this week

For this month

For this year

What is my life like after this loss

What would I like my life to be after this loss

Exercise 8 - Write Your Goodbye Letter

Write another letter to the person or thing you lost. Say goodbye. Write how you will honor their memory or learn from the loss to be a better you in the future.

Exercise 9 – Live Wholeheartedly

How has this loss influenced your willingness to live wholeheartedly?

How has it influenced you to open up your heart connect with others and love large?

How would you describe living wholeheartedly?

How will you know when you're living wholeheartedly?

What emotions would you experience when living wholeheartedly?

How will you spend your time?

How would that influence your relationships?

What do you seek to contribute to the world or create?

How would your body feel?

What does a day look like?

Exercise 10 – The Stages of Grief Part Two

Let's look at the stages of grief again. You detailed an experience of grief and loss above. Now, consider how you could deal with loss in the future. Loss comes in all forms, and not just death.

Denial **Anger**	
Bargaining **Depression**	
Acceptance	

Exercise 11 – How You View Grief

Which stage of grief are you in right now? Tick the box which applies to you.

Phase 1	I have recently experienced loss and I am still overwhelmed with grief.	
Phase 2	It has been over 18 months since my loss.	
Phase 3	I am no longer intensely grieving or upset for long periods of time.	

Let's take the temperature on how you view grief.

1. After the death of a close relation, how long should a survivor grieve?
    - 0 – 6 months
    - 6 – 12 months
    - 1 – 2 years
    - Over 2 years?

2. How long does society expect grief to take?
    - 0 – 6 months
    - 6 – 12 months
    - 1 – 2 years
    - Over 2 years?

3. Do you believe you would express your feelings of grief publicly?
    - Yes
    - No
    - Maybe, it depends.

4. How long, following death, would you worry about someone grieving abnormally?
    - 0 – 6 months
    - 6 – 12 months

- 1 – 2 years
- Over 2 years?

5. After how long is it acceptable for a survivor to…
    - Remarry -
    - Return to work -
    - "Finish" grieving -

6. What is the first thing a survivor needs to do to heal?
    - Stay busy
    - Accept reality
    - Detach from the pain
    - Experience the pain
    - Set goals
    - I'm not sure

Final Thoughts – Don’t Rush The Grief Process

Grief is an ongoing process, don't let anyone rush you through the process. It will take as long as it takes, just keep pushing one foot in front of the other and do your best.