

CIRCLES OF GRIEF

Place your energy where it can support you.

Grief can make life feel both intensely full and strangely empty. The Circles of Grief tool is a gentle way of separating what you can choose today, what you may be able to influence, and what cannot be controlled. It does not ask you to 'move on' or make grief smaller. It helps protect your energy while you learn how to live alongside loss.

There is no correct timetable for grief. The aim is not to control grief, but to notice where care, choice and support are still possible.

THE THREE CIRCLES

Circle of control — allowing my feelings. You can give yourself permission to feel what is present without deciding whether it is the 'right' emotion. Grief may include sadness, anger, numbness, relief, guilt, longing, confusion or moments of ordinary pleasure.

Gentle daily care. Food, fluids, medication, washing, sleep, fresh air and basic routines can become harder during grief. 'Gentle' means enough for today rather than perfect self-care.

How I remember. You can choose whether remembrance today looks like photographs, music, a story, a private thought, a ritual, visiting somewhere meaningful — or taking a break from remembering deliberately.

Circle of influence — who I spend time with. You may be able to choose people who allow grief to be real without rushing you. You can shorten visits, ask for company, decline invitations or say what kind of support would help.

Supportive rituals. Lighting a candle, writing, creating a memory box, marking an anniversary, visiting a place, cooking a familiar meal or carrying a meaningful object can provide continuity.

Asking for space. You cannot control how everyone responds, but you can communicate that you need quiet, fewer questions, practical help or time before making decisions.

Circle of concerns — the loss itself, unexpected waves of grief and other people's timelines. These are not problems you can solve by trying harder. They can be acknowledged without giving them every part of today's energy.

WHEN GRIEF COMES IN WAVES

The wave is real. It does not mean you are going backwards.

Grief is often non-linear. A smell, song, date, place, dream, photograph, administrative task or ordinary moment can bring a sudden wave long after the loss. The intensity of a wave is not evidence that you have failed to cope.

A GENTLE RESPONSE TO A WAVE

- 1. Orient to now.** Notice where you are, what day it is and what your body is touching. You do not need to stop the emotion; simply give your nervous system some present-day information.
- 2. Reduce unnecessary demand.** If possible, postpone non-urgent decisions, lower sensory load, sit down, drink something and make the next task smaller.
- 3. Name what is happening.** 'This is a wave of grief' can be more supportive than 'I should be over this.'
- 4. Decide what you need.** Company, privacy, practical help, movement, rest, crying, distraction or remembrance can all be valid.
- 5. Let the wave change in its own time.** You do not have to force a lesson or meaning from every painful moment.

SUPPORTING SOMEONE WHO IS GRIEVING

Do not impose a timetable. Instead of asking repeatedly whether they are 'feeling better', ask what today is like. Offer specific practical help: a meal, a lift, paperwork, childcare, a quiet walk, sitting together or taking one task off their list.

Avoid assuming that talking is always best. Some people need words; others need presence, routine, sensory quiet or permission not to explain. Continue remembering important dates if the person wants that support.

WORK AND EVERYDAY RESPONSIBILITIES

Concentration, memory, sleep, decision-making and emotional capacity may change during bereavement. Helpful workplace conversations can include temporary workload changes, clearer written priorities, flexibility around significant dates, predictable check-ins, quieter space and permission to step away briefly when a wave hits.

GRIEF IS BROADER THAN BEREAVEMENT

People may grieve relationship endings, infertility, pregnancy loss, redundancy, disability, illness, changes in identity, estrangement, migration, retirement, loss of independence, a changed future or an animal companion. The significance of a loss belongs to the person experiencing it.

MY CIRCLES OF GRIEF

A worksheet for one day, one wave or one difficult situation.

What is present for me today?

CIRCLE OF CONTROL — WHAT IS MINE TO CHOOSE TODAY?

A feeling I can allow without judging it: _____

One piece of gentle daily care: _____

How I would like to remember — or take a break from remembering: _____

The smallest next step that would support me: _____

CIRCLE OF INFLUENCE — WHAT MIGHT I SHAPE OR ASK FOR?

Someone I feel safer spending time with: _____

A ritual, routine or source of comfort I could use: _____

Space, help or a boundary I could ask for: _____

One responsibility I could share, simplify or postpone: _____

CIRCLE OF CONCERNS — WHAT IS NOT MINE TO CONTROL?

The part of the loss I keep trying to change: _____

An unexpected wave, trigger or anniversary: _____

Someone else's expectations or timeline: _____

What I am afraid grief 'should' look like: _____

TODAY'S ENERGY

ACT: _____ ASK: _____ ALLOW: _____

RELEASE FOR NOW: _____

Reflection: **Where would my energy be most useful today?**

What would 'enough' look like for this day? _____

A MESSAGE, RESOURCES & SUPPORT

A message from Maggie

Grief does not need you to perform recovery for other people. Some days you may be able to talk, remember and function; on another day a tiny thing may knock the air out of you. Neither day tells you how well you are grieving. Try bringing your attention back to what belongs to you today: allowing what you feel, caring for your body as gently as you can, choosing who feels safe, and asking for space when you need it. You are allowed to carry love and loss at your own pace.

BOOKS & FURTHER READING

The Grieving Brain — Mary-Frances O'Connor. Explores how the brain adapts to the absence of someone significant.

It's OK That You're Not OK — Megan Devine. A compassionate challenge to cultural pressure to tidy grief away.

Finding Meaning — David Kessler. Explores meaning as an additional way of understanding life after loss, without prescribing a timetable.

Grief Works — Julia Samuel. Reflections and practical perspectives from a UK psychotherapist specialising in bereavement.

PROFESSIONAL & UK SUPPORT CONTEXT

The NHS provides information about grief after bereavement or loss, including common experiences and routes to further support. Cruse Bereavement Support offers information and bereavement support across the UK. NICE guidance on bereavement-related mental-health presentations may also be relevant where grief is accompanied by significant depression, anxiety, trauma symptoms or prolonged functional difficulty.

This resource is psychoeducational. Grief varies between people, cultures, relationships and types of loss. It is not a diagnostic checklist and does not define how long grief should last.

WHEN MORE SUPPORT MAY HELP

Consider speaking with a GP, counsellor, psychotherapist or bereavement service if grief is persistently overwhelming, daily functioning is becoming increasingly difficult, you feel very isolated, or you are struggling with traumatic circumstances around the loss. If you feel unable to keep yourself safe or are thinking about harming yourself, seek urgent help through emergency or crisis services.

SPACE TO BREATHE THERAPY

Educational and coaching resource. Not a substitute for personalised clinical care.