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**GRIEF**

## The 4 Tasks of Grieving

Grieving is a healthy response to loss.

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Source: Gary Ross/Pixabay

Grieving is a healthy response to loss. Yet many don't realize how much grieving naturally occurs over the lifespan. From the Jewish literature come the wise words of King Solomon:

*"It is better to go to a house of mourning than to go to a house of feasting, for death is the destiny of everyone; the living should take this to heart."* — Ecclesiastes 7:2

Much ancient wisdom and religious traditions discuss loss, suffering, and sorrow as unavoidable

aspects of life, with the idea that sufferers ought to lament, grieve, and mourn. They posit that there is something right and good about grieving when faced with a loss, and that grieving and mourning are not rarities, but an integral part of normal life. This position can only be true if loss is not exclusively defined as death, but if the definition of loss were expanded to include the loss of a dream, friendship, goal, role, and so on.

Think about it this way: When a friend moves across the country, part of you goes with that friend—the part of you that came alive around them. Or let's say you lose your job. The part of you that came into existence because of your job is gone. Maybe you're going through a divorce at the moment. That relationship—the love you had, the beautiful story being created—has ended.



Grieving is a healthy response to loss  
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Every loss is *like* a death. This is not necessarily a physical death (although the death of a loved one is certainly included), but loss entails that a part of you, a piece of your life, has died.

Sadly, far too many people have no concept of what healthy grief looks like. People think grief is feeling sad and eventually not feeling sad anymore. This couldn't be further from the truth.

There are actually four tasks of healthy grief outlined by psychologist William Worden in his book

[\*Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy: A Handbook for the Mental Health Practitioner\*](#). Worden is critical of the Kubler-Ross stages of grief model, and he's not alone. Many researchers, psychologists, and clinicians are leaving the model behind due to several issues. Worden doesn't believe grief is a passive progression of stages that a person is carried through. Rather, Worden empowers mourners to actively engage with four tasks.

which hopefully will allow mourners to accept the loss and adapt to life after loss.

Worden's four tasks of grieving are:

### **1. Accept the Reality of the Loss**

Some denial can serve a purpose in that it allows you to slowly absorb the full weight of the loss. However, remaining or idling in denial is the antithesis of acceptance. You must confront your own *denial* and accept that the loss has occurred.

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Acceptance is the surrendering to reality as it is. Therefore, you must acknowledge the loss and not pretend that it didn't happen. Your loved one died. Your company passed on you for that position. Your partner said no to your marriage proposal. You cannot make loss disappear through denial. Acceptance is the first step towards adapting and moving forward.

### **2. Experience the Pain of Grief**

For whatever reason, we are afraid to feel in our culture. We take pills, distract ourselves with entertainment, and generally avoid discomfort, but this isn't helping us. *Avoidance* compounds our pain.

You must experience the pain of what you have lost. Allow the emotion into your consciousness and take proper steps to process the feelings. You can process with a trusted friend, mentor, or family member.

Yet, there are many ways to process emotion outside of words. If writing a song, painting a picture, or making a video is your thing, then by all means, do what works. Feelings of grief and pain are natural. What isn't natural is suppressing those emotions.

### **3. Adjust to an Environment With the "Deceased" Missing**

Life is not the same now that your marriage has ended, your friend has moved away, your work has laid you off, or your loved one has died. You may feel like adjusting to life without your loved one is a betrayal of your loved one, that pursuing another goal is a betrayal of your dream, or that getting closer with a new friend is a betrayal of your friend who moved away.

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#### 4. Find an Enduring Connection with the "Deceased" While Embarking on a New Life

Even though that part of you is gone and irretrievable as a result of the loss, what was is still part of who you are. The joy and warmth you experienced from your deceased loved one will always be with you. Try to think of the time you had with them as a gift. Rather than focus on what you lost, put your attention on what you received from your loved one.

When dreams die, there can be blessings and curses. With the passing of your dream comes realizations of other passions. So, start out on a new life, but keep with you those cherished moments and memories as a source of joy and strength. You are stronger for having known your loved one. You are better for having shared those years together.

#### "Cheap" Grief

Engaging with the four tasks empowers you to adjust to a new normal and continue with the stuff of life. But too many want the moving-forward part without the hard work. A kind of "cheap" grief process isn't really moving forward at all. It's ignoring and avoiding, which actually accomplishes the opposite. It keeps you stuck.

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"Cheap" moving forward cements you where you are. Physically, you are getting older, your kids are growing up, and the place you live is changing; but inside, you are still in that same place.

Yet grief is not devoid of silver linings. It has been the observation of many that suffering and loss deepen a person.

To quote King Solomon again,

*"Sorrow is better than laughter, for sadness has a refining influence on us." —Ecclesiastes 7:3*

From the Muslim mystical traditional of Sufism, the mystic Rumi had this to say about loss:

*"Be full of sorrow, that you may become hill of joy; weep, that you may break into laughter."*

*"What hurts you, blesses you. Darkness is your candle."*

Healthy grieving is not easy; that's for sure. But what in life is easy? The things people cherish most are typically things that bear the greatest cost.

Don't let the cost of healthy grieving scare you away from engaging with the four tasks. The four tasks will help you move beyond the grief and discover the same insights of King Solomon, Rumi, and many others—that loss and suffering deepen and enrich you as a person. They help you appreciate better what it is that you have.



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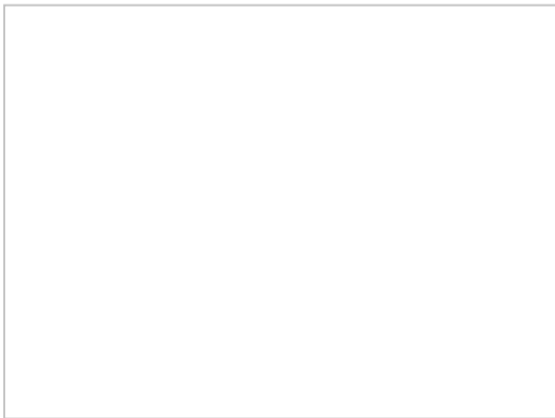


**Dan Bates** is a clinical mental health counselor, licensed in the state of Washington and certified nationally.

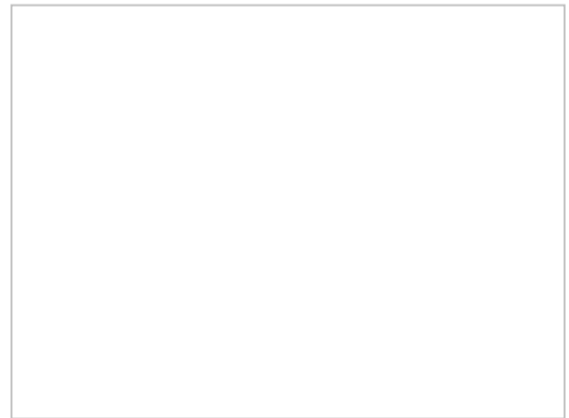
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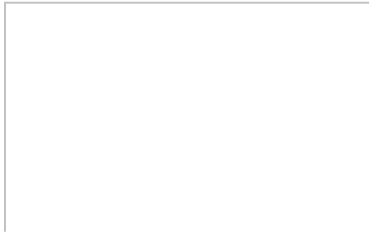
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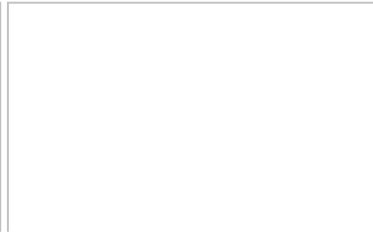
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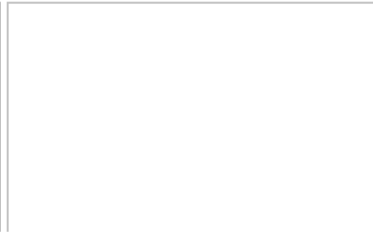
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