INTRODUCTION GUIDE
Understanding and Working with Grief
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Loss and the grief that follows are some of the deepest processes a human can go through. The practices I’ve included here can be used for both small losses and griefs (such as losing a job opportunity) and large losses (such as death or losing a partnership).

The experience of grief and loss
Grief and loss are very unique processes. People will respond differently to them and with a whole range of emotions. Despair, misery, bitterness, resentment, and rage are all equally as valid as ecstasy, bliss, hopefulness, and joy.

There are no expected emotions during grief and loss, so let your client feel whatever they feel during this time. Validate and honor your client’s process.

In my own life
Grief is also very unpredictable. When my dad died, I felt like I was walking in between worlds, not entirely here and not entirely gone. It was very strange and disorienting.

Grief and shame
Grief can take a very long time, and your clients might feel shame or judgment on themselves for how long the process is taking. When you, as a coach, support grief and loss, it means that you’re supporting them for however long it takes. How can anyone say how fast you should get over a heartbreak or death?
Just be with your client and really listen to them. Let them feel and give them space. They don’t need an extra burden of self-shaming, so encourage your client to feel what they feel without judgment.

Your clients might also shame themselves for feeling too much or for feeling numb. They might shame themselves for taking too long to grieve, not grieving properly, or not doing enough.

Remind your client to just let it be. Whatever they feel is okay, whatever shows up is fine, whatever their process looks like is allowed.

The Seasons and Grief and Loss
Loss corresponds to the fall phase of our seasonal map. It’s a time when things get lost or dissolve.

Grief corresponds to winter. It’s a time of slowing down and of stillness. There are some deep, unexpected emotions that can come up during grief.

Grief may also have a spring element to it. Because it is the deepest stage of wisdom, there is inherently so much life in it.

But you can’t access that life by clinging. When a woman fully surrenders to her grief without resisting the process, that’s when life can emerge. Embracing the finality of death is what allows life to come through.

In the case of heartbreak, the heart shatters and the end of that relationship can feel like a kind of death. If that death is embraced and you take it all the way in, a new quality of the heart emerges.
The Portal of Grief
Part of coaching in grief is holding space for whatever is. If and when your client decides they have the space in their lives to really feel, you can invite them to feel; don’t push them into feeling, but invite them into it. Encourage them to feel their sensations without past or future.

There is a deeply meditative quality of your emotions when you experience them moment by moment. Sometimes in the grieving period, you might think, “I cannot imagine enduring this forever. I can only take it moment by moment.”

That sense of letting go of the past and the future can bring your client into a really beautiful portal. Just be careful not to push your client into this portal. Listen for where your client is in their process and see if it’s something they’re drawn to.

Coaching someone through grief might be about listening and holding space, or it might be the opening of this portal. Just remember, you can’t force someone there.

If your client is in a past orientation or future orientation, they won’t be able to integrate their grief and loss. They won’t enter the portal of feeling moment to moment and they’ll just cycle. They might be causing themselves unnecessary suffering.

In the grief exercises, you’ll see that there is an invitation to meet the quality of presence. The invitation is there and the portal is there. Invite them to experience the difference between being in the past or future story, and being present. Focus on that difference when you do your self-practices so you understand what I mean.
Taking a client through the grief practices
With all the grief tools, talk your client through the process step-by-step before you lead them through it. Ask them how they feel about each step and if they're ready for it. The worst thing you can do here is push someone into something they aren't ready for.

The nervous system is especially sensitive during grief and loss. If your client is particularly sensitive, you can strip each of these practices down to their bare simplicity. You should be gentle and slow with these practices, and I encourage you to do so. Don’t try to cram things into your sessions. Create spaciousness and permission for your client.

Keep an eye on your client and be aware that grief can change really quickly. When you’re leading a client through a process, something that might have been fine at first may turn bad very quickly, so be attuned to your client.

Outside your sessions
Also encourage your client to take stressful or unnecessary things off of their plate while they’re going through their grieving process. Help them find as much support as you can so the nervous system can have time for deep rest if that’s what they need.

Your client may prefer to stay busy during the grief process and that’s okay, too. There is no “should” during this time. Allow them to do what feels in alignment.

However, if they’re staying busy during a period of grief just to avoid their feelings, remind them that they can’t skip out on them; all of their feelings need to be felt at some point. If they need to be in shock or be dissociated or numb for a while, that’s okay. But they need to feel at some point, or else the grief and the loss will stay with them.

The feeling of grief is necessary. If someone doesn’t feel grief, it can turn into things like addiction or depression. Even if a client isn’t ready to fully embrace
their feelings, communicate to them that it’s important for them to feel, at least a little bit.

**In my own life**
When my dad died, I stayed pretty busy. But I also made it a point to allow myself fifteen or thirty minutes at a time to feel anything that needed to be felt as deeply as possible. I would lock myself in my closet and just sob for my allotted time.

When my time was up and I went back to my life, I didn’t feel that deeply. And that’s okay. It’s important that you give yourself the space you need to feel, at least some of the time.

**Self-Forgiveness and Self-Compassion**
In grief and loss, there can be a sense of regret about what wasn’t done or what could have been different. If your client voices these concerns, lead them into self-compassion. All of us make mistakes, and none of us are perfect. Honor and validate their feelings, but point them back to self-forgiveness and self-compassion.

If you think it might be helpful for your client, encourage them to view the pain of regret they’re experiencing as a teacher to help them do it differently next time.

**In my own life**
This is something I had to deal with when I broke up with my first real boyfriend. Even though I was the one who broke up with him, there was so much heartbreak. I realized how reckless I had been with his heart and that shattered my own heart. I had messed up so badly and hurt him so much.

I made a commitment to myself that I would never hurt someone that badly again. When I made that commitment, from the very depths of my grief, I changed so radically that I could hardly recognize myself afterwards.
The physicality of grief
Grief can also come with physical symptoms. Your client might describe feeling sick, feeling exhausted or experiencing headaches. Grief is a very physical process.

If that’s coming up, I recommend some gentle investigation about what’s going on. What’s the message of this symptom? What does your body need?

Being witnessed
Being witnessed in your grieving can be healing. True mourning - the art of sobbing, unraveling, and letting go - is something we don’t have in our culture. We feel that our grief needs to be private.

But I’ve seen that real healing happens when our grief is collective. Being witnessed in your grief can be so powerful.

In my own life
When my dad died, my friends invited me to share what I loved about him and then they embodied those qualities through interpretative dance. I got to sob, wail, and be in my misery and loss. There were people that loved me and witnessed me in my grief. It gave me a level of healing that I didn’t know I needed.

Ask your client if they have friends or family members who can witness their grief: not just talking about it, but really being in the grief and the pain. The pain feels less unbearable when there’s collective support.

A word of warning
Usually this goes without saying, but I want to reiterate it here especially: As a coach, you do not ever want to offer platitudes. “Everything happens for a reason” or “They’re in a better place now” are not helpful things to say to someone experiencing grief.
If your client is ready to look for a lesson in their grief, work with them to find one. But do not offer platitudes to your client. Be receptive to your client and honor their process, whatever it looks like.

Do these practices yourself to get a good sense of them before using them with a client. You can either go really deep into these practices or keep them gentle and easy. It depends on what your client desires and what will genuinely be of service to them.

Layla Martin