




from grief to peace



a guided journal for navigating loss
with compassion and mindfulness

heather stang

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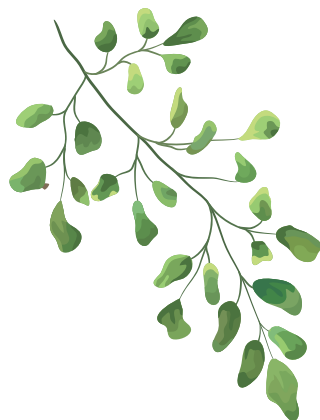
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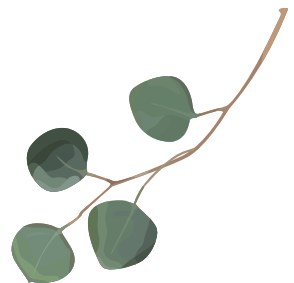
introduction

There is no shortage of people eager to tell you how to cope with grief and loss. However, only one person can honestly know what you need: you. Even though you may not feel like you can hear it, your inner wisdom is already speaking to you. It inspired you to open this journal. A part of you is ready to do something to reduce your suffering and start feeling like yourself again.

I hold a Master's Degree in Thanatology, the study of death, dying, and bereavement, and am a certified Phoenix Rising Yoga Therapist. I facilitate the Awaken Meditation for Grief Online Program through the Mindfulness & Grief Institute and work with local and national bereavement organizations.

I am also a bereaved person who had to find a way to cope with grief. I know firsthand that this is not easy. I also know that with the right tools and the right support, you can do this.

Your grief and loss experience is very personal. There is no single right way to navigate life after loss, and I cannot tell you what to do. What I can do is offer you hope and direction, and empower you to choose the steps you take through mindfulness and journaling.



Mindfulness is a meditation style and a mindset rooted in being present and openhearted. Journaling is a style of writing that gives a tangible form to your innermost feelings.

This guided journal has the prompts, inspirations, mindful movement exercises, and expressive art projects to help you get to know yourself better so you can learn how to do more than just cope with loss; you will learn how to live fully with your loss.

loss and grief

You probably picked up this journal intending to focus on one loss in particular. Naturally, some are more painful. A loved one's death is irreversible and is the most distressing for many. This is not true for everyone. For some, the most significant losses in life are not associated with death.

The prompts in this journal will help you explore and integrate all types of loss. The yearning you feel when someone special dies. The anticipatory grief that follows a life-limiting diagnosis. The traumatic grief you feel when someone dies by suicide, an overdose, or an act of violence. The ambiguous losses that leave you feeling anxious, such as a loved one with dementia, a mental health diagnosis, or an estranged family member. And, of course, those losses that matter to you, but are disregarded and minimized by others because they just don't understand.

We are all connected and face collective losses that impact us as a society and as individuals. To heal ourselves, we need to name what hurts and find a way to continue on.

how to use this guided journal

This guided journal is your sacred space, so instead of rules, I offer a few suggestions below.

There are no right or wrong answers.

Let the truth fall onto the page and resist the urge to edit. When you write, keep your pen or pencil moving at a calm and steady pace without stopping until you complete the prompt.

Mindfully engage with your whole being.

Mindful journaling invites you to notice your breath as you write or draw. Feel emotions in your body when you tell the story. Hear the sounds in the room and outside your window as you draw. When you pay attention to your senses as you write, you are writing mindfully.

Approach familiar subjects as if it were the first time.

Mindful journaling frees you from habitual ways of telling your story so you can relate to it differently. When you encounter a prompt that feels familiar, slow down your thinking and writing speed. Be curious and explore the little details that you previously missed. Tap into your beginner's mind.

Walk up to the edge, but don't fall over.

In Phoenix Rising Yoga Therapy, we often talk about finding our edge: that place in a stretch—or an emotion, or in telling your story—that is just right. If you go over the edge, you experience pain. If you don't go far enough, the experience is boring and will not help you move forward. The edge may feel tolerably uncomfortable, or fresh and exciting, but it is never dangerous or harmful. Be mindful of your edge, and adjust your attention to it accordingly to find the right balance.

Seek out physical and emotional support as needed.

Writing in this journal will help you develop coping and self-care skills, but no person is an island. This is especially true when working through grief and loss. Call a friend or a hotline, schedule regular appointments with a therapist, or join a grief group. Grief research shows that social support is one of the key elements to help you adapt to life after loss. Please do not try to do it alone.

Go through the journal in order. Or don't.

Grief is not a linear experience, yet most people experience a similar arc. This guided journal was created with this trajectory in mind. Many people will benefit from going in order, but if you skip around, that is fine too. When you encounter a prompt that you are not ready to answer, you can always move on and return to it later.

Along the way, you will encounter pages marked with a colored border around the edges. These sections contain a bit more guidance before the activities or prompts. If you are feeling stuck, turn to one of these.

If you are focusing on a non-death loss, you may wish to skip pages 96, 100, and 101, which focus on grief specific to the death of a person or pet.

This journal features inspirational quotes at the start of each chapter. These are from my first book (see page 144), which parallels the structure of this guided journal and is a great companion book if you like to read as well as write.

Grief is hard. Whenever you can, be kind to yourself. At the end of the day, this is the most important thing you can do. May this process bring you peace and free you from suffering.

With gratitude,

heather



Your why is more important than your how when it comes to mindfully navigating your grief. Let's begin with both an aspiration to help you get started and a reminder that you may turn to again and again. Take a couple of mindful breaths, write slowly, and answer with your whole heart.

What inspired you to purchase this guided journal, or if it was given to you as a gift, what inspired you to begin?

What do you hope will be different after you complete this guided journal?

Write a few words of encouragement and gratitude to yourself for taking this next step on your journey, even if you are not yet sure where it will take you.



*mindfully relating to your grief means
being fully aware of your experience of
loss while simultaneously embracing
whatever arises in you with compassion
and loving-kindness.*





mindful awareness

When grief has shattered your assumptive world, mindfulness will help you find stability in the present and empower you to choose how you relate to your experience. Freed from habitual ways of thinking, you will see more clearly the next step you need to take on your grief journey.





Connect with the part of you that is **aware that you are aware**.

Note what you sense in your:

breath

body

thoughts

emotions

What one thing stands out to you the most?



Lie down and soften your body as much as possible. Place one hand on your belly, another over your heart. Spend a few moments and several rounds of breath for each item below:

1. Notice your natural breath.
2. Now breathe low and deep into just your belly for a few breaths. Expand your belly on the inhale, release your belly on the exhale.
3. Next, breathe first into your belly, then into your mid-section up to your lower ribs. Exhale and let it go.
4. Fill your belly first, then your mid-section, and finally breathe all the way into your lungs before letting go in a complete exhale.
5. Let go of all effort and rest with natural breath and in mindful awareness. Just be.

Describe the places in your body that feel stuck or tight.

Describe the places in your body that feel open or relaxed.

Are there places in your body that feel neutral or in between?

build your resilience toolkit for grief

Two resilience boosters are coping skills and self-care techniques. These will help you feel more at ease in the short term and teach you powerful tools to manage future stress with more confidence than before.

Coping skills are things you can do to reduce feelings of distress in the heat of the moment. Your list might include taking a few deep breaths, counting to 10, going for a walk, listening to your power song, or calling a supportive friend.

Make a list of the difficult emotions and feelings you encounter regularly. Next to each difficult emotion, write down your typical reaction. Ask yourself, is this reaction healthy (skillful) or unhealthy (unskillful) for you in the long term?

Difficult emotion: _____

Typical reaction: _____

Skillful or unskillful? _____

Difficult emotion: _____

Typical reaction: _____

Skillful or unskillful? _____

Difficult emotion: _____

Typical reaction: _____

Skillful or unskillful? _____

Difficult emotion: _____

Typical reaction: _____

Skillful or unskillful? _____

Difficult emotion: _____

Typical reaction: _____

Skillful or unskillful? _____

Difficult emotion: _____

Typical reaction: _____

Skillful or unskillful? _____

For any unskillful reaction on the previous exercise, write down a healthy coping skill that you can do the next time this feeling arises.

When I feel

in the past I reacted by

but now I choose to respond by

When I feel

in the past I reacted by

but now I choose to respond by

When I feel

in the past I reacted by

but now I choose to respond by

Self-care techniques are preventative activities that help you maintain a sense of inner peace and calm while boosting your overall health and wellbeing.

Make a list of daily, weekly, and monthly self-care practices that you can plan to do regularly. Put these on your calendar and commit to regular self-care, knowing it will help you navigate grief and stress with less suffering.

Daily self-care practices:

Weekly self-care practices:

Monthly self-care practices:

resources

Thank you for spending time with me in this guided journal. Here are a few other resources for grief and loss that I hope you will find helpful:

Awaken Meditation & Journaling for Grief Online Group

Facilitated by Heather Stang at
MeditationForGrief.com

The Mindfulness & Grief Podcast

Inspirational guests interviewed by Heather Stang. Listen wherever you get your podcasts.

The Mindfulness & Grief Institute

Free mindfulness-based grief resources and articles: MindfulnessAndGrief.com

Find a yoga therapist near you

Phoenix Rising Yoga Therapy practitioner directory: PRYT.com

International Association of Yoga Therapists: IAYT.org

Association of Death Education and Counseling

For all grief professionals: ADEC.org

Other books by or featuring contributions by Heather Stang

Mindfulness & Grief: With Guided Meditations to Calm Your Mind and Restore Your Spirit (CICO Books, 2018)

Superhero Grief: The Transformative Power of Loss (Routledge, 2020)

Intimacy and Sexuality During Illness & Loss (Hospice Foundation of America, 2020)

Techniques of Grief Therapy: Assessment & Intervention (Routledge, 2016)

Feeling overwhelmed? Help is a call away:

National Suicide Prevention Hotline (US):
1-800-273-8255

Canada Suicide Prevention Service:
1-833-456-4566

Samaritans Suicide Prevention Hotline (UK):
116 123

references

Page 66: The RAIN acronym was first coined by mindfulness teacher Michelle McDonald.

Page 67: Stroebe, M.S., and Schut, "The Dual Process Model of Coping with Bereavement," *Death Studies*, 23, pp. 197–224 (1999)

Page 98: Calhoun, L.G., and Tedeschi, R.G., *Handbook of Posttraumatic Growth* (Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2006)

transform the heartache and pain of grief and loss into love and resilience

Grief is a natural reaction to loss and the mourning process can be a difficult and stressful experience. Time alone does not heal our wounds—it is what we do with our time that matters. But in the wake of devastating loss, how and where do you begin? One way is through grief journaling which can help you record and process your experience of grief. This guided journal offers the writing space, guidance, and freedom to express your feelings without judgment. Mindful journaling prompts, tips, and practices allow you to tap into your natural resilience and find the meaning you need to thrive.

In turn you will learn and grow through your grief journey.



Heather Stang, MA, C-IAYT is the author of *Mindfulness & Grief* (CICO Books) and hosts a podcast by the same name. A thanatologist and yoga therapist, she is the founder of the Mindfulness & Grief Training Institute, where she facilitates meditation for grief groups and offers private sessions and professional training. Find out more at mindfulnessandgrief.com. She lives in western Maryland, USA.

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