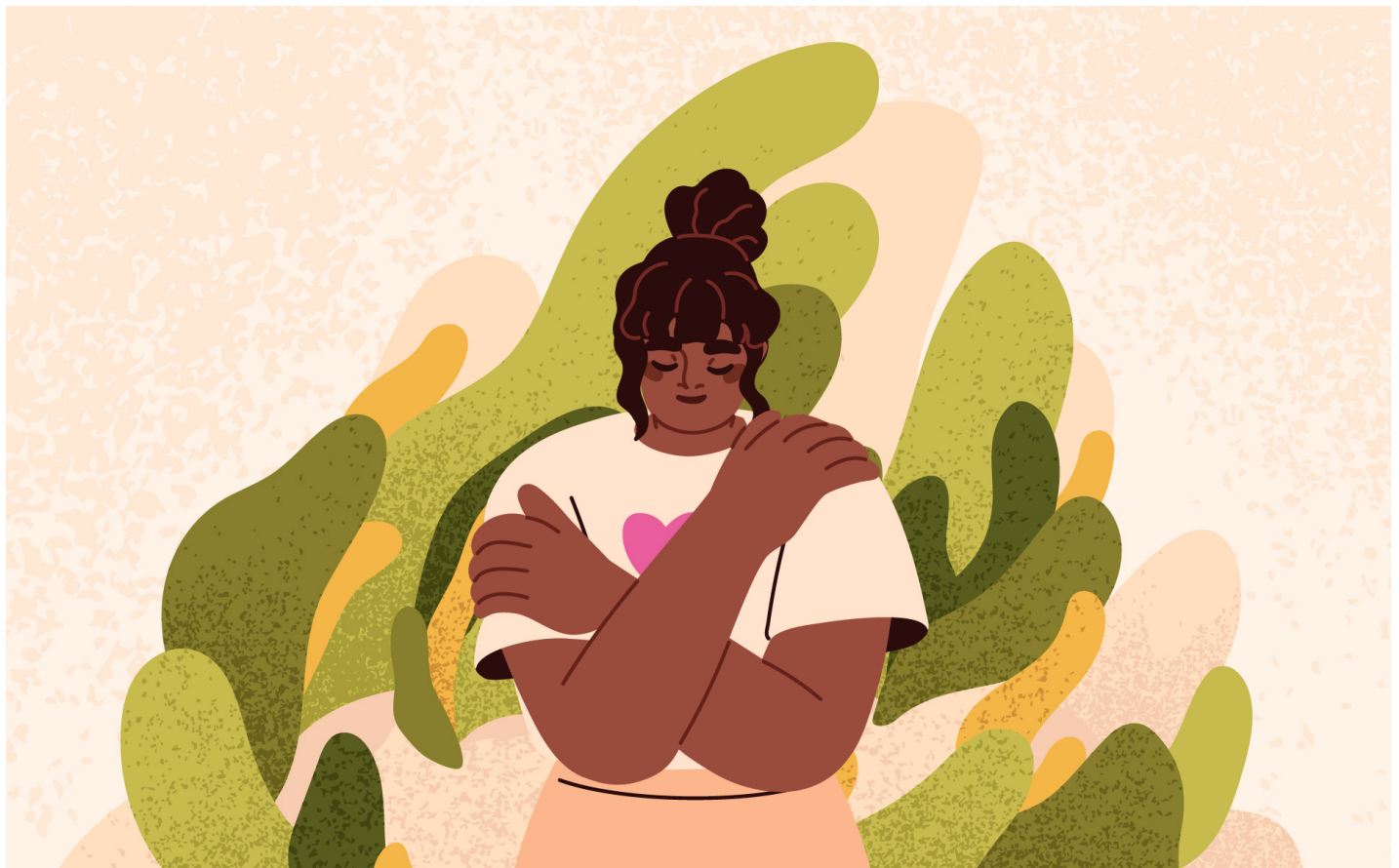


After the Funeral: When Grief is Part of Daily Life

Once all the hubbub dies down...now what? Mindfulness can help us be with our grief, and ourselves, with self-compassion.

BY [ELAINE SMOOKLER](#) | APRIL 14, 2024 | [ANXIETY](#)



After everyone has gone home and you are left with just you, life—which at this moment might feel like it is clearly already against you—could also feel like it has booby-trapped the way forward with the gulp of yet another “Oh no, not that!” As if you haven’t been through enough, you might suddenly find yourself staring into a searing interrogator’s light reminding you that the rest of life is now on you—and you alone—to figure out. Yay.

As much as you might want to escape this part, This, my dear, is part of how grief might present itself. It is likely going to be unavoidable. In its own horrible way, it makes sense. Your life, your habits, your neural pathways were all chugging merrily, or drearily, along—and then the train derailed, leaving casualties behind.

This is inner wisdom bubbling up to help you navigate this new and strange landscape.

That’s not a nothing burger. You may well share some of the behaviors attributed to shock victims. And the treatment for shock is gentleness, understanding, rest, quiet, making time to recharge, and creating a sense of safety. So if you are craving that, know that this is inner wisdom bubbling up to help you navigate this new and strange landscape.

Life stretching you into new shapes might be uncomfortable, but these shocking moments can be like diving into the awakening effects of ice-cold water. *Brrr*. The good news is, this attention-getting moment might make it easier to see where you are mercilessly clinging to the past, or fearful of trying something new.

Returning to You

If you can be this brave, you might notice that along the way you may have put aside things that you enjoy, to lovingly care for a family member, a friend, or even a job that

DOES taking a walk make you smile, or ice skating, or singing karaoke? Are there friends you have lost touch with because you were caught up elsewhere? Check in with yourself. How does it make you feel to consider volunteering in Argentina, or down the street?

It's never too late to return to yourself in this way.

It's never too late to return to yourself in this way. I know several friends who went back to school when they were in their 80s. I know many more who have learned to play the saxophone or sponsored refugees, or helped a neighbour-in-need take their garbage out. You may not remember this right now, but giving of ourselves feels so good and helps us feel connected to life in so many ways. What might this awkward, echoey space allow you to do that you were always curious about but may have never given yourself permission to do?

Alone Time

Most of us have never been taught how to be alone, as a positive thing. In fact, some of the greatest punishments available to adults and children are solitary confinement or Time Outs, where you have to go it on your own. True, we are a relational species, and we absolutely do need each other to survive, and since most of us aren't always that happy about being alone, when something ends and the alone-time comes, you might feel like you are drowning in a vast ocean.

But, we all have only a certain allotment of time for everything from growing a family to changing the world. Even twiddling your thumbs won't last. You are here now, for who knows how long?

Times of great change give you a special opportunity to ask yourself what you might still want to taste, touch, smell, see, feel, share while you are still here. May this painful time of change take you to your best self. May it help you be as open and curious as you can about the *Now what?*

It, like you, will never come again.

Some first steps to finding our way back to the surface:

1. **Be gently honest with feelings** that you may have never felt, never wanted, and might have been expertly avoiding your whole life. If sadness or anger are here, welcoming these weather fronts helps the actual chemical underpinning get processed more quickly. Feel it to heal it, honey.
2. **It might help to imagine yourself riding the difficult feelings that arise as though you are riding a surfboard.** When a wave of distressing or overwhelming sensations threatens to drown you, try not to tense up and resist, instead stay extremely present to the sensations that are picking you up. As they rise, see yourself riding them, like riding a wave. And if you fall off, no big deal. If possible, see if you can get back up and ride it some more. In this way, you are increasing your capacity for difficulty by showing yourself ways to welcome whatever comes and ride through these difficulties the way expert pilots might ride the storm.
3. **Make a list of things that bring you ease or even a little bit of simple pleasure.** Put this list somewhere visible and when you are in trouble, reach out and call that friend, or crochet that blanket or learn that language you've always wanted to explore. What dishes at life's banquet table do you still want to taste? Don't wait. Yes, it might all feel so hard—but this too is part of life. Don't waste a morsel.

A Guided Meditation for Coping With Grief

A 12-Minute Meditation for Coping with Grief by Elaine Smookler

A 12-Minute Meditation for Coping with Grief

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1. **Grief is a natural and normal response to loss**, but it can also feel painful and overwhelming. Find a comfortable and quiet place to sit or lie down. If it feels helpful, close your eyes and breathe in for a count of three and out for a count of five, three times.
2. **If thoughts come in, that's okay.** When you notice, gently refocus on the counting. It can be helpful to find some stability.
3. **Let's do some exploring.** Begin by bringing your attention to your feet. And again, when thoughts come in, that's okay, just redirecting your attention to your feet right now. And noticing if you feel any sense of grounding or connection or calm that comes when you allow yourself to bring your fullest attention to just being there with the sensations of contact, tingling, or whatever you might feel right now in your feet. We may find stability in different places at different times. So right now, your feet might not offer you what you need. So let's explore some other possible anchors of attention.
4. **On your next in-breath, bring your attention to your seat**, feeling this real-time sense of pressure, presence, contact.
5. **Now let's explore the hands as a possible anchor for attention.** We started with the feet. And then explored the seat, and now we're noticing whether the hands offer us a place to stabilize right now. Feeling any qualities in the hands—pulsing, maybe the touch of your hand on your legs.
6. **And now let's explore one more anchor for today, which is the breath.** Maybe noticing the rise and fall of the belly. The rib cage expanding and contracting. Or the sensations of the breath moving in the nose, mouth, or throat. Noticing if focusing on the breath brings you any comfort or ease right now. You might also want to experiment with placing your own hand on your chest or cheek or belly. Or

compassion. Feel this light expanding and filling your whole body with peace and ease.

7. **Now, if it feels manageable, bring your awareness to the person or thing that you are grieving for.** That could be a loved one who passed away. A relationship that ended. A beloved pet that has died. A job that you lost. Or anything else that caused you pain. Whatever it is, hold it gently in your mind and heart. Notice what emotions arise. It could be sadness, anger, guilt, fear, loneliness, or anything else.
8. **Whatever you feel, know that it's okay to feel it.** Do not judge or resist or avoid your feelings. If you can just let them be, maybe saying to yourself, "It's okay. Let me feel this. It's already here. Let me feel it."
9. **Now as you do this, you may also notice some thoughts or memories** related to your loss. They could be positive or negative. Happy or sad. Pleasant or unpleasant. Whatever they are, know that they are also okay. And if you can, just let them be, maybe imagining you're lying on a riverbank and the thoughts are the sticks and leaves floating by, watching them as they come and go. And as you continue to breathe naturally, or focusing on your hands or feet, or anchored in your seat or wherever you feel stability right now, you may also notice sensations or impulses in your body related to your grief. This could be tightness, heaviness, numbness, restlessness, or something different.
10. **Whatever these sensations are, know that these sensations are also okay.** If you can, just let them be. As you practice in this way, you're allowing yourself to experience your grief as fully and freely as you're able. Noticing, is your jaw tight? The belly. The sphincter. You're simply trying to be with it as it is.
11. **Now bring your attention back to wherever you placed your hand** on your body and feel this warm and soothing contact. And seeing if you can expand this feeling of comfort or care or stability to include the entire body.
12. **Please send yourself some love and compassion.** Maybe saying to yourself, "I love you. I'm here for you. I'm sorry for your loss. I understand your pain. I support your well-being." Now think of the person or thing that you're grieving for, and perhaps send them some love and gratitude, saying to them, "I love you. I thank you. I honor you. I remember you." And maybe even, "I release you."
13. **Taking a moment to feel the connection and compassion** between you and all beings who are grieving. Know that you are not alone in your grief.

Know that you've done something good for yourself and others by being with your grief in this way. You are not alone. Please love yourself and meet everything that comes your way with kindness. Thank you for joining me in this meditation on coping with grief. May it bring light to the journey.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Elaine Smookler

Elaine Smookler has been a mindful practitioner for over 20 years and is on the faculty at The Centre for Mindfulness Studies in Toronto. She is a Registered Psychotherapist and teaches