



Balance In Grief

B.I.G. Tip Sheet



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Mindfulness & Grief: A Tip Sheet for Navigating Loss with Presence

I used to believe that mindfulness and meditation were nothing more than nonsense — something for overly sensitive spiritual types, and certainly not for me. Without ever truly trying or understanding their benefits, I made a snap judgment: *I couldn't do it, and I didn't have time anyway.*

It took a desperate season of life before I became willing to try anything — and I mean **anything** — just to feel better, including meditation and mindful practices. And you know what? **It changed my life.**

Looking back, I can see that had I been open to the benefits of these simple techniques earlier, I could have saved myself years of mental, emotional, and even physical suffering — much of which I unknowingly created by resisting the very tools that promote peace of mind.

Between the ages of 11 and 30, I lost twelve family members and two friends. Loss became my normal. “Everybody dies,” I would say casually.

Then came even more loss. At age 40, in a single year, I lost a job I loved, was betrayed by my husband of 22 years, filed for divorce, and in doing so, lost the only remaining “family” I had — his. My own was already gone. I was forced to flee my home. He relentlessly contacted my friends to find out where I was, so I cut ties with them too. It was just me, my three teenagers, and a new job in hospice care — which, at the time, I barely even understood.

The years that followed are still a bit of a blur. I was a mess.

Working for hospice felt natural — I had an intuitive understanding of grief and dying. I was hired as the Spiritual Care Coordinator, but within three months, I became the Bereavement Counselor. I knew how to connect with the grieving, because I was grieving too. But the emotional toll was heavy. I cried on the way to work, on the way home, and sometimes between visits with clients. Something had to change.

Medication was suggested to me, but I resisted. My symptoms didn't feel like a disorder — they felt like a normal, if excruciating, response to deep grief. I didn't want to medicate what I believed was *normal*. I needed another way.

So I challenged my beliefs and allowed myself to think differently. That's when I found **Mindfulness and Meditation** — the two practices that transformed how I approach life, love, relationships, grief, death, and even physical healing.

If you're reading this now because grief has overwhelmed you, and you're longing for some kind of relief — even for a moment — I want to say this:

I commend your courage.

You're taking the brave step of caring for yourself.
Let me show you how **Mindfulness** can help.

What Is Mindfulness?

Mindfulness is the practice of intentionally paying attention to what's happening **right now**, with acceptance and without judgment.

It's not about avoiding pain or forcing positivity — it's about becoming aware of your inner experience and the world around you so you can respond rather than react.

How Mindfulness Supports the Grieving Heart

1. Grounds You in the Present Moment

Grief often pulls you into the past (what was) or future (what will never be). Mindfulness helps you anchor in *what is*, even if just for a breath. This reduces emotional overwhelm and fosters resilience.

Try: Touch something textured (a leaf, your shirt) and silently name 3 things you can see, hear, and feel.

2. Helps You Recognize That You Are Safe Right Now

Grief activates the nervous system in ways similar to trauma. But mindfulness gently reminds you that *not all moments are traumatic*. You can train your body to recognize moments of safety.

Try: Say to yourself: “This moment is hard, but I am safe right now.” Then take 3 deep, slow breaths.

3. Promotes Healing of Physical Symptoms

Grief doesn't just hurt emotionally — it hurts physically. Common symptoms include fatigue, body aches, sleep disruption, and tightness in the chest or stomach. Mindfulness helps regulate the **nervous system** and promote healing:

- **Lowers cortisol**, easing inflammation and tension
- **Improves heart rate variability**, calming the body's stress response
- **Enhances immune function**, supporting overall health

Supports sleep, which is critical for physical and emotional repair

Try this grounding tool:

Place one hand on your chest and one on your belly. Breathe deeply. Feel your hands rise and fall with each breath. Do this for 2 minutes to ease the body.

4. Opens Space for Joy and Meaning

Grief doesn't mean you can't also laugh, feel love, or experience beauty. Mindfulness teaches you to be present to the **good that still exists**, without guilt.

Try: Notice one beautiful or comforting thing today — the sun on your face, a kind text, a warm drink.

5. Gratitude Changes the Brain

Even small gratitude practices help balance the emotional weight of grief. They **activate the brain’s reward system** and shift attention away from constant distress.

Try: Each night, write down 3 things you’re grateful for. Include small things — warm socks, a pet’s affection, a moment of quiet.

6. Reduces Emotional Reactivity

Mindfulness creates space between stimulus and response. Instead of being swept away by intense emotion, you learn to observe it with gentleness and stay anchored in yourself.

Try: When a wave of grief hits, silently name the feeling (“sadness,” “guilt,” “yearning”). Naming it can reduce its intensity.

What the Research Shows

- A **2022 meta-analysis** found that mindfulness significantly reduces symptoms of grief, including anxiety, rumination, and emotional numbness.
 - Mindfulness increases **gray matter density** in brain areas related to compassion and emotional regulation.
 - Practicing gratitude for just **2 weeks** measurably increases serotonin and dopamine levels (University of California, Berkeley).
 - **Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR)** programs have been shown to lower blood pressure, improve sleep, and reduce inflammatory markers — all of which benefit those in grief.
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Ways to Practice Mindfulness in Daily Life (Beyond Meditation)

Practice	How to Do It	When to Use It
Mindful Breathing	Focus on 3 deep, slow breaths, notice	In moments of stress or overwhelm
Gratitude Journaling	List 3 things you’re thankful for —	Evening or when feeling low
Mindful Walking	Walk slowly, feeling each step and noticing your surroundings.	Outdoors or anytime you feel disconnected
Body Check-In	Scan your body from head to toe,	Before bed or upon waking
Name 5 Things	Pause and name 5 things you can	When emotions spike
Loving-Kindness Phrase	Say: “May I be kind to myself. May	When guilt or judgment arises



Final Thought

Mindfulness doesn't ask you to "get over" your grief. It simply invites you to **be with your experience** just as it is — with presence, curiosity, and compassion.

There is no right way to grieve. But you can learn to walk with your grief in a way that supports healing — not only of the heart and mind, but also of the body and spirit.

I hope you were encouraged today. Please reach out to me if I can help. BalanceInGrief.com

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