

G.R.A.C.E. for Grief

A tool for grief work and remedy for overwhelm

G

Gather and **Ground** your attention. Find some neutral object to bring you back to embodiment: feet on the floor, body in the chair, breath in the body, the air on your skin etc. Experiment to see which is your most reliable grounding object, but make sure it has to do with the embodied experience in the present moment. You want to make this as tactile as you can, getting out of the fog and swirl in the head and down into the body.

R

Recall Our Deepest Intention. Since GRACE was designed initially for compassionate care, a representation of deepest intention might be “to serve and relieve suffering”. So in this application we could say that our deepest intention is to *feel our grief and relieve the suffering of this grief*.

A

Attune to your entire field of being. How is the body? What thoughts are racing through the mind? What emotions are coming up? Where are these emotions being experienced in the body and how? Can you re-gather and re-ground yourself in the midst of this and just observe until a relative state of calm returns? Just becoming aware that we have three basic ‘fields’ or ‘streams’ of experience can become a helpful tool. We are most usually stuck in our thoughts and disconnected from our emotions and the body. This is a real disadvantage when it comes to grief.

C

Consider what will best serve you right now? Do you need to stay with your grounded attention and intention to ride out a storm of emotion? Do you need to go for a walk? Do you need to attend to the grief pain around your heart and give yourself permission to weep? Do you need to write a letter to the dead person, or to the hospital staff you are angry with, or grateful for? We need radical honesty with ourselves at this point. We are conditioned to respond to all pain, including the pain of grief, by pulling back and denying. If denial and refusal to feel become the sole coping strategies, our grief can be prolonged indefinitely.

E

Engage. What needs to be done will eventually be evident from your grounded and attuned consideration. Do whatever the moment calls for. It might be appropriate to dive deeper into your grief, or this may be a time that you legitimately need a break. Feeling your grief will not kill you, but not feeling your grief is guaranteed to make you ill in some form if it is denied for too long. Your choice of engagement might be a ritual of some kind: lighting a candle in front of

a picture while holding an object reminding you of the dead person. The needs of the moment might simply ask you to stay with embodied grounding and observe the thoughts, emotions and sensations sweeping through the body. And when the timing feels right to stop and get on with other things, the importance of ritual is affirmed through **Ending** this particular piece of grief work.

The G.R.A.C.E. reflective practice was originally developed by Roshi Joan Halifax of the Upaya Zen Center in Santa Fe, New Mexico. The practice has universal applications, but was initially intended as a tool for caregivers, healers, therapists and medical personnel to stay grounded, embodied and compassionately engaged with others. This helps to ensure the best compassionate care of both self and other, while also being a buffer to professional burn-out. Since grief is so much a part of the caring professions, it occurred to me that the model has applications for the bereaved as well.

G-A-T-E CHAPLAINCY

(Grief Awareness & Transformative Engagement)

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