

Personal Experiences with Death, Loss, and Grief

Find a quiet space where you can reflect on the following questions. Write as much as you can for each answer. Don't edit, just let it flow.

1. What is your earliest remembered, personal involvement with death or loss? (This might be the death of a person or a pet. It might also be a non-death loss such as your parents getting divorced, moving away from your friends, a serious illness, etc.)

2. As best as you can remember, how did the adults in your life behave or speak about the death or loss? (For example, did they talk about the loss and the person who died, or did they not talk about it at all? Was anything specific said to you as a child such as "It's ok to be sad" or "Don't be sad"? Were any pictures or personal belongings discarded right away or put out of sight? Or were pictures and memorials set out or created? Were there any rituals, such as a viewing, sitting shiva, funeral or memorial service?)

3. What was your personal experience of the loss? (In other words, did you feel prepared for what was happening or what was expected of you and others? How were your thoughts and emotions about the loss dealt with—by yourself as well as by others in your life?)

4. What do you think you learned about what grief and mourning—about what it is or how it "should" or "shouldn't" look? (This might include things such as what grief should or shouldn't feel like in your body or what feelings or thoughts are right or wrong to have. It can include ideas about who is allowed to grieve, who or what you can grieve over, or what are acceptable expressions and duration of grief.)

5. Reflecting on your responses above, how do you think your beliefs and behaviors around death, loss, grief, and mourning have been impacted as an adult? (In other words, what effect did your childhood experiences with loss have on any losses you have experienced as an adult?)

6. Considering how early experiences have influenced your adult experiences with loss and grief, what beliefs do you hold that are helpful in how you cope with death and loss? Are there any beliefs that you learned early in your life that you think might not benefit you in coping with loss in your life now?