



*Close your eyes,
Take a breath,
Inhale calm,
Exhale stress.*

Mindfulness@porthcawlu3a.org

"Grieving shows you that you're braver than you believe, stronger than you seem and smarter than you think" Anon.

YMCA, first and third
Tuesday, 1.30 – 3.30 pm

Mindfulness for Grief and Loss

Grief is different for everyone, and it can change over time.
Mindfulness can support us in healing and self-discovery after loss and change.

Grief is most often described as the pain of losing a loved one, but it's also our natural response to big life changes, like getting or losing a job, ending a relationship, moving house, especially if it includes moving to a different area of the country. It involves stages like denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. And I think it's safe to say that by the time we get to our stage of life, we've all experienced it in some shape or form.

Our minds, brains, and bodies all get involved in the grieving process, reacting to and helping us recover from the initial sinking feeling that punches us in our guts and can sometimes change us forever. While the emotions that arise during this time are the most talked about symptoms of grief, we may also feel physical symptoms like nausea, fatigue, insomnia, lack of appetite, being unable to sit still or concentrate and many more. It can feel all-encompassing. Our bodies as well as our minds are trying to figure out how to cope with something that's wreaked havoc on our usual comforts, ways of doing things, and sources of meaning and connection.

Research tells us that grieving is actually tied to our deep, ancient need for connection. Back in the day, sticking together in groups was a survival tactic, so when we lose a connection, it's like an alarm goes off in our system.

Everyone's grief journey is unique, and there's no rulebook or timeline. No right or wrong way to grieve, just your way. We're all just trying to navigate our own path through a big, messy maze of emotions. So, whether you're dealing with the loss of a person, a loved pet, a divorce, or something else entirely, it's okay to ride the waves of grief, however and whenever they come. Even physical changes to our body, things we could easily do, but can't any longer, is, in its own way, a form of grieving, things change, and we need to allow ourselves time to accept and adjust.

Personally, I found the grief of being permanently parted from my dearly cherished and loved ones is overwhelming. It is the realisation that you will never, ever, see, hear, touch or smell a loved-one again. I believe it is the most painful emotion that any human can ever experience. For me it is far worse than physical pain, we can learn pain management systems, it's infinitely worse than splitting up from a lover or the person we thought we'd share the rest of our lives with, or losing your job, house, and money. All of those things can be 'got over'. They are replaceable. But grief entails the absolute loss of someone who is unique and irreplaceable so that the very idea of getting over it is for me a total fallacy. I simply can't.

We sometimes think we can suppress it though, and might be successful, for a while at least, but this can have devastating long-term consequences because if you suppress one emotion then you end up suppressing all of them, which will leave you cut off from all that is good about life.

For me emotions are part of living, to suppress them is to live a half-life, I've often been told by many people, that I need to grow a thick skin and better control my emotions. To try to overly control or suppress my emotions, is to lose the connection between my heart, head, soul, and body. If others are uncomfortable with me showing my emotions, it's their issue not mine. There are places that we have to control our emotions, such as in the workplace, but to me, those days are long gone, and I no longer feel the need to conform to societies limitations.

I use as many tools in my mindfulness toolbox as I need to help me navigate my way through everything life throws at me. I'm Grateful to have had the privilege of loving the people I've been parted from, I Accept that my way of life changed totally, and each loss was a crossroads in my life.

Loss is an inevitable part of living and loving and ultimately, it's a price that I've accepted and for which I'm very sadly willing to pay for being able to have experienced the ups and downs of this book of 'my Life' and to carry on writing new chapters. I count my blessings each day for what I've had and what I continue to have, my lost loves live on in my memories, such as when a song comes on the radio, the scent of a flower, a photo that appears on my computer screen when it goes into saver mode. I talk to them every day, tell them my joys and worries, ask their advice when I've got a problem, and often in that magical twilight place between sleep and awakening, I hear their replies! I've been blessed with new loves to join them, and the circle of my life continues. As it does with each of us.

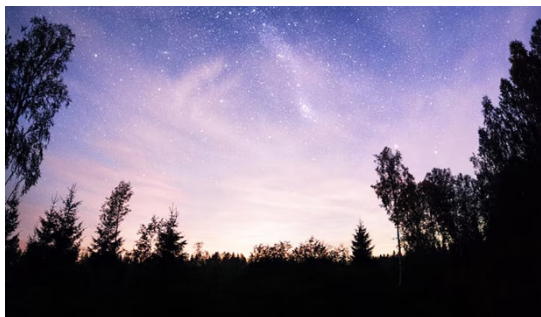
Mindfulness teaches us that we can't control what life throws at us, but we have choices, we can treat ourselves kindly, re open our hearts and we can find a new way of living which will be different, but it can be just as fulfilling... we just have to accept, count our blessings and trust the universe and our intuition to guide us.

Mark Williams and Danny Penman, tell us how we can Grieve with Mindfulness in Frantic World, I've adapted these points.

Grieving mindfully means being aware of and accepting our emotions without judgment. It involves navigating the complex journey of grief with self-compassion and purposeful awareness. Try this:

1. **Accept your feelings:** Allow yourself to feel what you feel at any given moment, with a sense of self-compassion, and without judgment.
2. **Express your feelings:** Just as important as accepting your feelings is expressing them in a way that is helpful to you. Keeping a diary or Journal, talking about your experience, scrapbooking, walking in nature or dancing, for example, are helpful ways to process grief instead of allowing the feelings to stay stuck.
3. **Reach out:** During this time, it is important to reach out in multiple ways. Reach out for guidance from a spiritual counsellor or a psychologist. Reach out to share stories of your loved one with others and offer support to other grievers. Find a balance between sitting with yourself and being with others, but ultimately, reach out—don't isolate.
4. **Continue to take care of yourself and others:** Living life while grieving often feels like scaling a mountain. Grieving takes energy and can often feel draining. As much as possible during this tough time, continue to eat well, exercise, and maintain wellness practices. This is the time to connect to your mindfulness parachute, it's why we weave it in the first place, fully dip into and embrace your inner strength. Ask others that you empathise with to lend you some of their strength, we'll all happily share our parachute with you.
5. **Celebrate your loved one's life:** It is important through the grief process to keep the memory of your loved one alive in some way that both inspires growth and reflects and honours your unique relationship and the uniqueness of the loved one you have been parted from. This can include donating to a charity that they loved and embraced, meditating or praying in their honour, alone or if you feel comfortable, invite your tribe to join you. Me and my family plant trees, between us we've planted a forest to our lost loves by now.

This is from a book by Patience Strong, *Thoughts for Every Day*. A unique collection of inspirational verse and prose to touch the heart. Page 163 – March 30th.



Follow your star, the star of fate that leads you to you know not where. Follow the secret trail of faith, made bold by hope and prayer.

Follow the music of your dreams beyond the last ascent.

Fear not the hazards of the way for God is provident.

Jaci Russell. Porthcawl u3a.

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