Grief Without a Script

Understanding What Grief Is Doing Instead of Deciding Whether You're Doing It Right

Grief is not a performance. You do not have to cry a certain amount, feel sad every day, stop laughing, or suffer visibly enough to prove that someone mattered. Grief can follow death, divorce, estrangement, loss of health, or the end of a caregiving role. The work is not to manufacture the *right* emotion. It is to understand what is actually happening.

You do not have to hurt in a particular way to prove that the person mattered.

Applying the McInnis Method

REALITY	*What happened, and what is true now?* Separate what actually happened from the story about how you're supposed to be reacting to it.
THREAT	*What feels dangerous about this grief?* The fear may be: "I am forgetting them," "If I am okay, maybe I did not love them enough," or "If I let myself feel this, it won't stop."
PROTECTION	*What are you doing to stay steady?* Working more, staying busy, getting irritable, "handling it," caring for everyone else, avoiding reminders, or staying strong may all be protective responses.
FUNCTION	*What has that protection done for you?* It may have helped you survive caregiving, keep working, hold the family together, get through a funeral, or simply make it to the next day.
COST	*What is the protection costing you now?* Protection becomes costly when there is no room for your own experience: constant activity, isolation, or guilt whenever you laugh, rest, or enjoy your life.
CAPACITY	*What can you tolerate now, even a little?* A memory. Quiet. Letting someone see that you hurt. An unplanned afternoon. Or two truths at once: "I miss them" and "I am still alive."
ACTION	*What is one honest next step?* Do not force a breakthrough. Choose one small action that fits reality: talk, remember, rest, keep a meaningful routine, enjoy something, or make a little room for what you feel.

A Practical Check

Am I grieving the loss in front of me, or am I also fighting myself because my grief does not match the picture I expected?

When to reach out: Professional support may help when grief feels unmanageable, is seriously interfering with daily life, or you are concerned about your safety. In the U.S., call or text **988** for the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline.

mcinnismentalhealth.com | Dennard McInnis, LCSW-S, LCDC