



PRACTICAL GRIEF TOOLS FOR WHEN EVERYTHING FEELS LIKE TOO MUCH

In early grief, your nervous system is under siege.

Your body reacts before your mind can make sense of what's happened. You might feel panicky, detached, foggy, shaky, nauseous, exhausted, or like you're not quite "here." Many people worry they're losing control or "going crazy."

You're not.

These reactions are common in grief - especially in the first weeks, months and years after a loss. Grounding techniques don't take the pain away, but they can help you stay present, reduce overwhelm, and get through the moment without being completely swept under.

Below are simple, practical grounding tools, matched to common grief symptoms, with clear instructions and the reason they help.

You don't need to try them all. Pick one. Use it when you need it. Leave the rest.

WHEN YOUR CHEST FEELS TIGHT OR PANIC RISES

What it feels like:

Racing heart, shortness of breath, tight chest, feeling like something terrible is about to happen.

Slow, counted breathing

- Breathe in slowly through your nose for 4 seconds
- Hold gently for 2 seconds
- Breathe out through your mouth for 6 seconds
- Repeat for 1-3 minutes

If counting feels hard, place one hand on your chest and one on your belly and simply slow the exhale.

Why this helps:

Longer exhales signal safety to the nervous system. This activates the body's calming response and helps reduce panic, even when the grief itself remains.

WHEN YOUR MIND WON'T STOP RACING

What it feels like:

Looping thoughts, "what ifs," replaying events, inability to focus or settle.

NAME 5-4-3-2-1 GROUNDING

Name, out loud or silently:

- 5 things you can see
- 4 things you can feel
- 3 things you can hear
- 2 things you can smell
- 1 thing you can taste

There's no right or wrong. Go slowly.

Why this helps:

Grief pulls the mind into the past and future. This exercise anchors you in the present moment and gently interrupts mental spirals.

WHEN YOU FEEL NUMB, UNREAL, OR DISCONNECTED

What it feels like:

Feeling like "in a dream," spaced out, robotic, or detached from your body.

TEMPERATURE GROUNDING

- Hold something cold (an ice cube, cold drink, chilled spoon)
- Or splash cool water on your face
- Or step outside and notice the temperature on your skin

Stay with the sensation for 30–60 seconds.

Why this helps:

Grief pulls the mind into the past and future. This exercise anchors you in the present moment and gently interrupts mental spirals.

WHEN EMOTIONS SURGE SUDDENLY AND INTENSELY

What it feels like:

Crying spells, waves of sadness, anger, or despair that feel overwhelming.

EMOTION CONTAINMENT

- Imagine a container (box, jar, safe place)
- Gently place the feeling inside it
- Tell yourself: *"I'm not getting rid of this. I'm setting it aside for now."*
- Choose a time later to come back to it, if you want

Why this helps:

Grief needs space - but not all at once. Containment allows you to function without suppressing or dismissing what you're feeling.

WHEN YOUR BODY FEELS RESTLESS OR AGITATED

What it feels like:

Shaking, pacing, tension, inability to sit still.

GROUNDING THROUGH MOVEMENT

- Press your feet firmly into the floor
- Push your hands together or against a wall
- Take a slow walk and name what you pass
- Stretch or sway gently

Focus on what your body is doing, not how it looks.

Why this helps:

Grief energy lives in the body. Gentle movement helps release stored tension and brings a sense of physical stability.

WHEN EVERYTHING FEELS UNREAL OR UNSAFE

What it feels like:

Fear, disorientation, sense that the world has changed beyond recognition.

ORIENTATION STATEMENTS

Say (out loud if possible):

- My name is ____
- I am in ____ (location)
- Today is ____
- Right now, I am safe

Repeat slowly.

Why this helps:

Trauma and shock can distort time and safety. Orientation reminds the nervous system where you are now.

WHEN YOU'RE EXHAUSTED BUT CAN'T REST

What it feels like:

Bone-deep tiredness, but difficulty sleeping or switching off.

BODY-BASED REST

Lie down or sit comfortably

- Place one hand on your chest, one on your belly
- Let your body be heavy
- No need to sleep - just rest

Even 5 minutes counts.

Why this helps:

Grief is physically demanding. Rest without pressure allows the body to recover without adding expectations.