



# The Journey of Grief

We set out on a journey, bound and determined to conquer something that has been weighing on us. Our bag is packed and strapped to our back. We have double and triple checked our lists to ensure that we have everything we need. We feel prepared, if a bit hesitant that there is something missing - That's it - our person isn't next to us, ready to walk alongside of us as we figure this out. Take a deep breath. It's not about bravery or strength, it's about summoning the courage to take the first step, and every step after that.

Some days we are able to navigate our own unique trail with ease and clarity, noting mile markers as we pass them, and taking breaks to refuel and rest. On these days, take a moment to celebrate small bits of progress and the courage that has been your companion. Other days we may need to wade through mud, crying in exhaustion, feeling as though we are constantly having to climb up a mountain. We may be dirty, hungry, tired, and afraid we won't be able to go on. On these days, take time to care for yourself in ways that help to bring feelings of compassion, safety, and mindfulness within yourself. You may not be able to celebrate on these hard days, but never forget to note the courage it took to put one foot in front of the other. This is no small feat. Don't look at how far you went, or judge that it shouldn't have been this hard. This journey IS hard - even on the easier days.

That bag you are carrying is filled with bits of grief that can feel like rocks. Maybe they start the size of boulders, making your body, mind, and heart continually ask for breaks. Take those breaks. Release the bag from your shoulders and take a moment to rest without the continual weight of your thoughts, feelings, and reminder of loss. You are not weak for taking a break, you are human. The more you journey and the more you care for yourself throughout the journey, the smaller these rocks will become. Who knows, some days those rocks may simply be small pebbles that can be kept in your pocket as a gentle reminder of your grief.

Please don't forget to also pack tools you will need for your journey. You'll need to remember basics like food, water, and things to help you survive. Also pack things that bring you comfort, bits of joy, and items that help to foster your courage - you will be using it daily. The great news is that these coping skills and outlets weigh almost nothing, so pack as many as you can and know you will find some along your path to keep adding as you wander.

You may begin this journey alone. Taking the first step forward on your path can feel daunting and uncertain, but as you continue on your path, you may find that other's paths may connect with yours at different spots. Honor these connections without comparison. Enjoy the comradery on this journey. Take time to share and listen to stories of each other's journeys, and support each other how you can. We can learn so much from each other. We may not always be walking close paths, but there are connections that feed our souls and offer the gentle reminder that we are not doing this alone.

Honor your journey. Walk your own path. Take care of yourself. Allow yourself to scream, cry, laugh, or whatever else comes out along the way. There is no right or wrong way to do this, so figure it out as you go and make sure you are being authentic to your unique experience. This path is yours alone. You may not know every step by heart - none of us do as we are all new here, but you are the only one holding the compass to help you learn where to go. Everyone will have directions for you. Take some of their thoughts if they feel helpful, but always know that your inner compass will be more of a true north than anyone living on the outskirts of your journey. I know this is hard, but I also know that you can do it, with time, patience, and a heart full of love.