

The SURVIVING GRIEF Workbook provides a roadmap for your grief while reminding you that there's no 'right' or 'wrong' way to grieve. It's filled with the heartfelt guidance you'll need to help guide you on your path to healing.

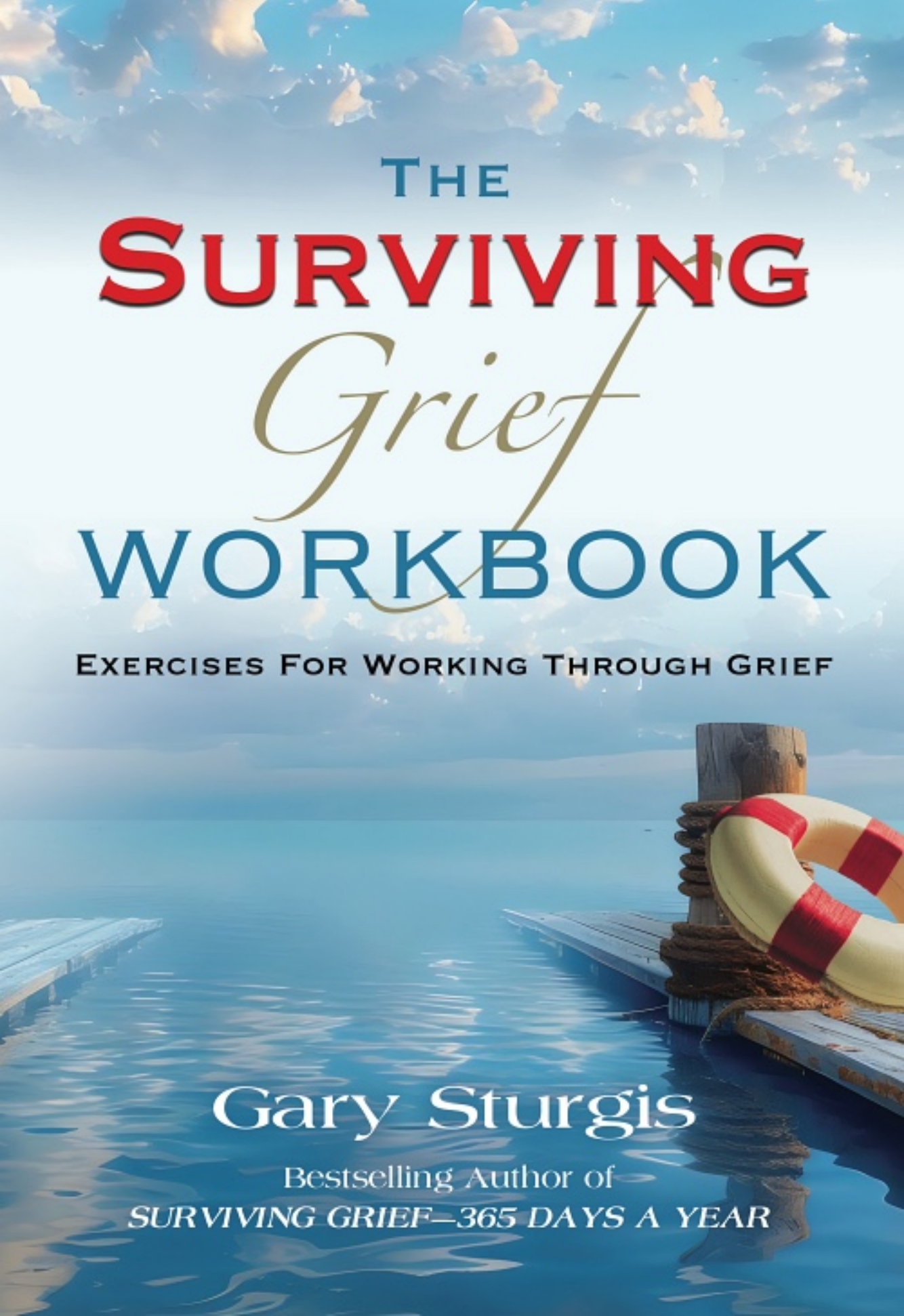
The SURVIVING GRIEF Workbook: Exercises For Working Through Grief

By Gary Sturgis

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THE
SURVIVING
Grief
WORKBOOK

EXERCISES FOR WORKING THROUGH GRIEF

Gary Sturgis

Bestselling Author of
SURVIVING GRIEF—365 DAYS A YEAR

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First Edition

Praise for

The SURVIVING GRIEF Workbook

“Gary Sturgis offers us a heartfelt and informative guide to help us work through the winding emotions of grief and loss. This workbook provides practical and valuable steps to take to do what Gary calls the ‘grief work’. He shows us that we can find clarity and meaning by openly working through all the feelings that come with loss.”

–Brendan Blanchard, PhD, Clinical Psychologist

“*The SURVIVING GRIEF Workbook* is a valuable companion on the road to healing after a significant loss. It provides gentle guidance through the maze of grief and leads us to a place we never imagined arriving at: a place where life once again has meaning and purpose. Reading Gary’s thoughts on grief and loss and doing the exercises gently guides us back to the possibility of healing in the aftermath of loss.”

–Trish Nelson, RN Palliative Care – Hospice

“In this deeply heartfelt and affirming workbook, Gary Sturgis gives us the opportunity to work through our own personal grief and at our own pace. Much like his previous bestselling book, *SURVIVING GRIEF – 365 DAYS A YEAR*, Gary reminds us that grief is best processed in small increments. The exercises are easy to handle and provide a roadmap for navigating our grief, reminding us that there is no ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ way to grieve.”

–Leslie Armando, BCC-PCHAC

“Gary Sturgis has a way of making his words find their way to our broken hearts. *The SURVIVING GRIEF Workbook* is like feeling his hand placed gently on your shoulder while he whispers in your ear the things you need to hear to comfort you. He offers the wisdom he’s gained through his own loss and grief journey to help us reinvest in life after loss. Gary has walked the road of grief, and he shares with us what he did to find healing and purpose on the journey.

–Dan Hastings, Grief Specialist

Also by Gary Sturgis

SURVIVING: Finding Your Way from Grief to Healing

GRIEF: Hope in the Aftermath

SURVIVING GRIEF: 365 DAYS A YEAR

DISCLAIMER

This book is intended to provide general information and support for individuals experiencing loss and bereavement. It is not a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. The exercises and information contained within are meant to be used as self-help tools and should not be considered as therapy or counseling.

This book details the author's personal experiences with and opinions about grief and loss. The author is not a healthcare provider.

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This book provides content related to topics physical and/or mental health issues. As such, use of this book implies your acceptance of this disclaimer.

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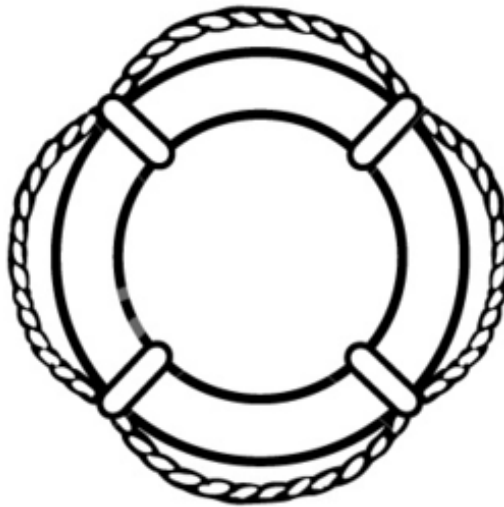
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PART I

EXPLORING WHAT'S LOST

"When someone we love passes away, we don't just lose a person; we lose a piece of ourselves, a chapter in our story, and a thread in the tapestry of our memories. Exploring what's lost helps us find what remains, love, lessons, and the enduring presence of their spirit in our lives."

—Gary Sturgis — *Surviving Grief*



The Landscape Of Loss: Exploring What's Lost

Grief is a complex and deeply personal journey that we all navigate at some point in our lives. It's a landscape of loss, filled with hidden valleys, steep cliffs, and unexpected turns. As we traverse this terrain, we often find ourselves grappling with the multifaceted nature of what we've lost.

There are some of the less obvious aspects of loss that accompany grief that many people don't think about until they're faced with a significant loss.

When we lose someone or something significant, our sense of certainty about the world crumbles. The future we had imagined suddenly becomes a blank canvas, devoid of the familiar brushstrokes we had come to expect. This loss of certainty can be profoundly disorienting, leaving us feeling adrift in a world that no longer makes sense.

Our relationships and roles often form a significant part of our identity. When we lose someone close to us, we may also lose a part of ourselves. If we lost a spouse, we may struggle with no longer being a partner, or if we're a parent, we may feel lost without our child to care for, and the loss of a parent or sibling may make us feel like the roots of our life have been ripped out. This loss of identity can trigger a deep existential crisis, forcing us to redefine who we are in the absence of what we've lost.

With each person in our lives, we create a unique tapestry of shared experiences, inside jokes, and mutual understanding. When that person is gone, we lose not only their presence but also the living repository of our shared history. This loss can feel like watching parts of our own story fade away, leaving us with the bittersweet task of becoming the sole keeper of those memories.

Grief often involves mourning not just what was, but what could have been. We grieve for the conversations we'll never have, the milestones we'll never share, and the dreams that will remain unfulfilled. This loss of potential futures can be particularly painful as it forces us to confront the finality of our loss and adjust our vision of the future.

Profound loss can shatter our illusions about the world, forcing us to confront the fragility of life and the inevitability of change. This loss of innocence can be both painful and transformative, leading to a deeper, more insightful understanding of life, but also robbing us of the comfort of innocence.

Grief has its own timeline, often consuming our thoughts and energy for far longer than we expect. In this process, we may feel like we're losing precious time, stuck in a limbo

between our past and our future. This sense of lost time can add another layer of grief to our experience.

As we navigate this complex terrain of grief, we can acknowledge these less visible losses to help us better understand and process our experience. It's important to remember that grief isn't just about what we've lost but also about how we grow and change in response to that loss. In time, we may find that our journey through grief, while painful, has also given us new depths of compassion, resilience, and understanding.

Where Are You On Your Grief Journey?

You've probably heard of the five stages of grief, introduced by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, which have been used as a framework for understanding the emotional journey people often experience after a loss. These stages are denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. While they're commonly depicted in a linear progression, Kübler-Ross emphasized that they can occur in any order and may be revisited multiple times.

These stages are also not a one-size-fits-all model but rather a guide to help navigate the complex emotions associated with grief, because grief is never linear. We may experience some of them but maybe not all of them. It depends on our own unique experience and the relationship we had with the person who died. In reality, our emotions are usually scattered all over the place like a tangled ball of yarn.

I based my book, *SURVIVING – Finding Your Way from Grief to Healing* on the principles of psychologist J. William Worden's Four Tasks of Mourning outlined in his book *Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy: A Handbook for the Mental Health Practitioner* (1995) These tasks provided a helpful framework for me to understand and navigate my grieving process. These tasks aren't linear stages either, but rather aspects of mourning that people may move between as they heal.

The first task involves coming to terms with the fact that the person has died and won't be returning. This may seem obvious, but the mind often struggles to fully grasp this reality. Attending funerals, visiting burial sites, or simply saying the words "he/she died" out loud can help make the loss more concrete.

Allowing yourself to feel and express the pain of loss is crucial for healing. This task involves experiencing the range of emotions that come with grief, including sadness, anger, guilt, and anxiety. While it may be tempting to avoid these difficult feelings, working through them is essential for long-term healing.

This task involves adapting to the many ways life has changed without your loved one. It may include taking on new responsibilities, learning new skills, or redefining your sense of identity. This adjustment happens on external, internal, and spiritual levels as you navigate your new reality.

The final task is about finding ways to maintain a connection with your loved one while also moving forward with your life. This doesn't mean forgetting the person but rather finding a new place for them in your emotional life. It involves gradually reinvesting in relationships and activities while still honoring your loved one's memory.

Exercises For Working Through Grief

I've used this theory as a framework to help you navigate your way through this workbook. I believe it's important to understand where you are on your grief journey and what task you may need to be working on to help you heal.

Remember, these tasks may be revisited multiple times as you heal. Be patient with yourself and don't hesitate to seek support from friends, family, or professionals as you work through them.

Working Through The Four Tasks Of Mourning

In this exercise, you'll explore Worden's four tasks of mourning model. It will help you to identify where you are on your own personal grief journey.

Task 1: Accept The Reality Of The Loss

Work toward acknowledging that the loss is real. Consider talking and writing about the emotional pain and how it feels to miss the person. Ask yourself:

What have I done to accept the loss of my loved one?

How can I express my feelings about the loss?

Task 2 - Experience The Pain Of The Loss

Aim to experience the pain of your loss fully. Lean into the experience by asking yourself these questions:

What feelings are coming up for me in my grief?

Is there anything that holds me back from allowing my feelings to be present? If so, what?

Task 3 - Adjust To The New Environment Without Your Person

This task is about coping with the loss through problem-solving. Ask yourself:

How has my role changed? What new tasks are mine?

How has my view of the world been affected?

Task 4 - Reinvest In The New Reality While Remembering Your Loved One

The primary goal of this task is to find a way to memorialize your loved one in a way that will not stop you from going on with your life. Ask yourself:

How can I keep my loved one with me and still go on?

What do I want for myself now?

Having answered all the questions, pause and reflect on your answers. Think about what task you're in and how you can move forward to the next one.

Having A Structured Plan

After my loss, it felt like my life was spiraling out of control. I couldn't focus on anything through the heavy fog of my grief. That's why I now believe that a good starting point for working through our grief is to have a plan.

Having a “Grief Plan” provides stability and normalcy, and creating a structured plan can help restore a sense of routine and predictability during a chaotic and emotionally turbulent time. This can be grounding and comforting when so much of our future seems uncertain.

A well-designed grief plan incorporates self-care activities, ensuring that our physical, emotional, and mental health needs are prioritized even when our grief feels overwhelming. I believe that breaking down tasks into manageable parts through a structured plan can make it easier to focus on necessary responsibilities without feeling overwhelmed.

It's important that our plan includes dedicated time and space for processing our emotions, allowing for a healthy expression of our feelings in a safe environment. Structured approaches to grief can also help build resilience and develop effective coping strategies for dealing with our loss.

You're probably already all too familiar with the fact that during times of grief, making decisions can be challenging. A structured plan can offer guidance and clarity in navigating important choices. It also prevents us from isolating ourselves by incorporating social connections and support systems into the plan, which helps maintain important relationships and reduces our feelings of loneliness.

A grief plan can assist us in integrating memories of our loved one and finding meaning in our loss, providing a foundation for healing. Having a good self-care plan ensures that our basic needs are met, creating a foundation upon which further emotional processing and healing can occur.

It's important to remember that nothing in your grief plan needs to be set in stone, because we all know how quickly our moods, wants, and emotions can change! An effective grief plan is one that remains adaptable to our changing needs throughout the grieving process.

By implementing a structured plan for grieving, we can navigate the complex emotions and challenges of our loss more effectively, ultimately supporting our journey towards healing and adaptation to this new reality we've been tossed into.

My Grief Plan

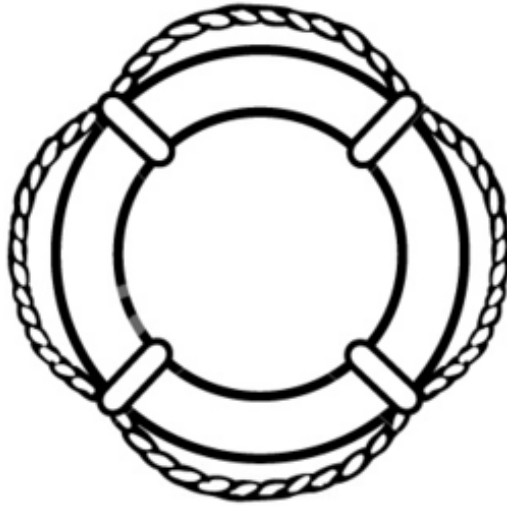
Creating a structured grief plan can be a helpful tool for navigating the complex emotions and challenges that come with loss. Use this worksheet to identify helpful ways of coping with your feelings of grief and loss.

When I feel sad, I can do these things to cope:

I can talk to these people to help me feel better:

I can think these thoughts:

How I plan to take care of myself:



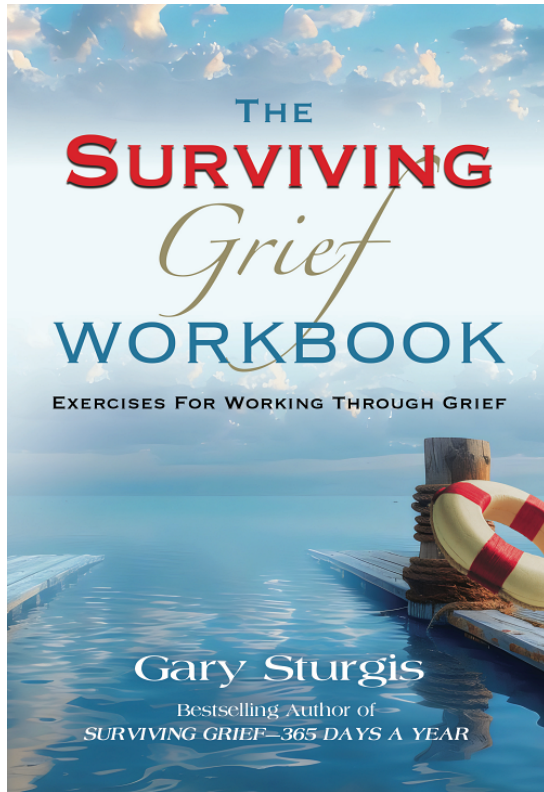
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or

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If you have any comments, questions, or would like to share your own experiences with grief and healing, email Gary directly at:
gary@sgrief.com



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