

A compassionate companion for those sitting in grief circles. This book offers gentle guidance for facilitators and participants, helping create safe spaces where grief can be spoken, heard, and carried together.

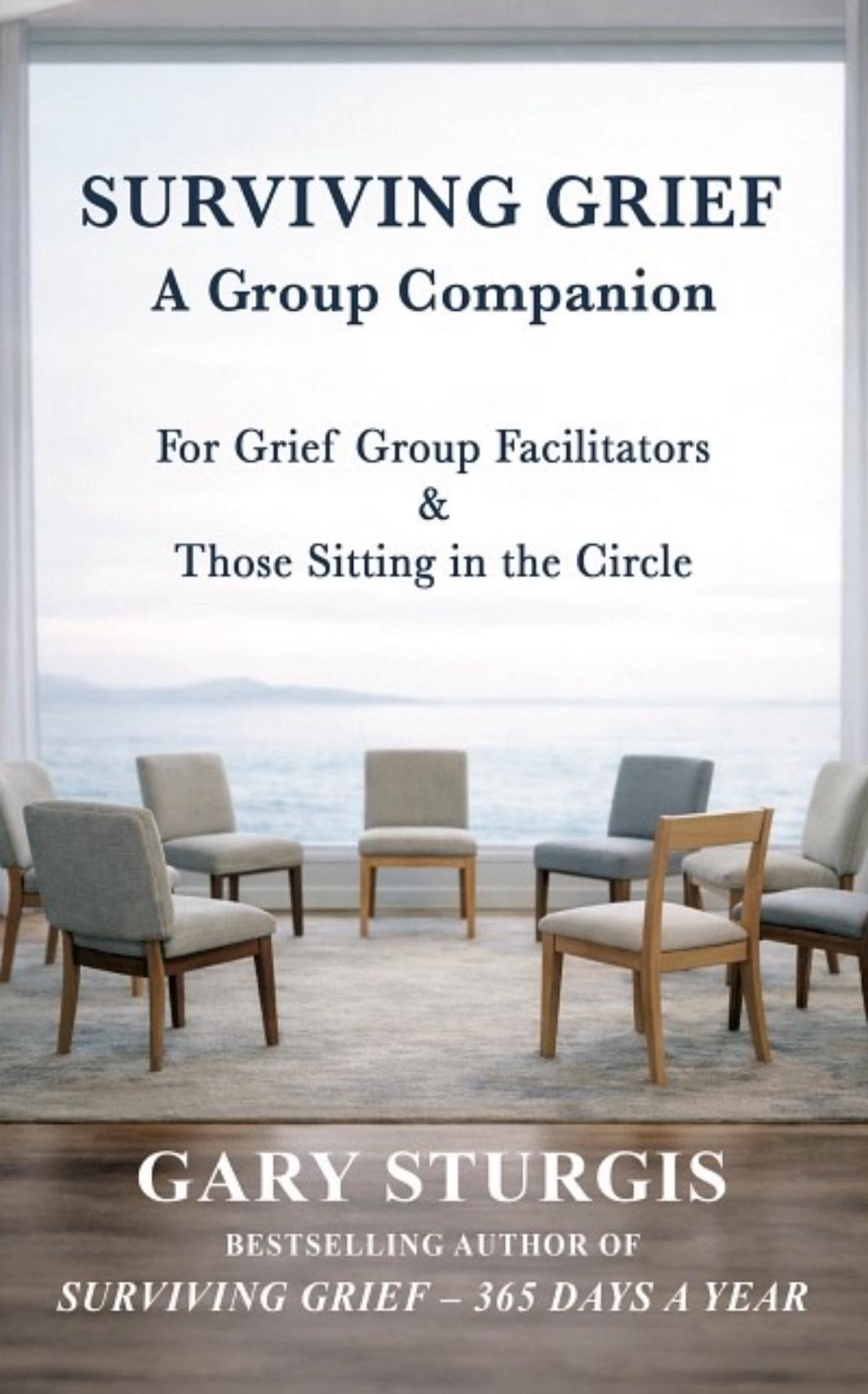
SURVIVING GRIEF:

**A Group Companion for Grief Group Facilitators & Those Sitting in the Circle
By Gary Sturgis**

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A circle of seven chairs is arranged in a room with a large window overlooking the ocean. The chairs are upholstered in various shades of grey and blue, with wooden frames. The window looks out onto a calm sea and distant mountains under a soft, overcast sky.

SURVIVING GRIEF

A Group Companion

**For Grief Group Facilitators
&
Those Sitting in the Circle**

GARY STURGIS

BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF

SURVIVING GRIEF – 365 DAYS A YEAR

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SURVIVING: Finding Your Way from Grief to Healing

GRIEF: Hope in the Aftermath

SURVIVING GRIEF: 365 DAYS A YEAR

*The SURVIVING GRIEF Workbook: Exercises for Working
Through Grief*

*WHAT FEEDS YOUR SOUL?: Finding Light in the Shadow of
Grief*

SURVIVING GRIEF During the Holidays

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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Preface

This companion was born out of the circle.

For more than twelve years, I've had the privilege of facilitating grief groups, listening to stories shaped by love and loss, sitting beside people in moments when words felt insufficient, and witnessing the quiet strength that shows up when grief is allowed to exist without being rushed.

Long before I was a facilitator...I was grieving.

The path that led me here didn't begin with training or credentials. It began with my own loss, one that changed how I understood love, time, and what it means to survive. Like many who enter the world of grief support, I didn't choose this work so much as it found me.

Over time, I began to write, not to offer answers, but to make sense of what it means to live alongside grief. That journey eventually led to my bestselling book ***SURVIVING GRIEF: 365 Days A Year***, which has found its way into the hands of people who, like me, were simply looking for something steady to hold onto. What I learned from readers was the same lesson I learned in the circle: grief doesn't need fixing, it needs space, permission, and compassion.

This Support Group Companion was created for those who hold that space.

It's not a manual with rigid instructions or a checklist for healing. It's a support for facilitators and those who are sitting

in the circle with others in their hardest moments. It's for those who understand that presence matters more than perfect words, and for anyone who knows that the work of grief is both tender and demanding.

Use this companion in the way that best serves your group. Adapt it. Set it aside when needed. Trust your instincts and your experience. And remember that the circle itself, the listening, the shared silence, the stories spoken and unspoken, is often where the deepest healing begins.

This work isn't easy, but it's meaningful. And it matters.

A Letter to Facilitators

If you're holding this book, it likely means you've chosen to sit with grief. Not to fix it, explain it, or rush it away, but to make room for it.

Grief group facilitation isn't about having the right words. It's about creating a space where words are optional, and silence is allowed.

Where tears don't need to be justified, and where stories can be told without being corrected.

The people who sit in your circle aren't broken.

They're carrying love that has nowhere else to go.

There will be meetings that feel heavy, times when no one speaks, and moments when you leave wondering if anything helped at all.

Trust me...it did.

Because showing up and listening really matters. And holding steady when things feel uncertain matters too. Because you don't need to rescue anyone, lead them toward closure, or make them move forward.

Your role is so much simpler and way more meaningful.

You hold the container, protect the space, and remind each person, through your presence, that they're not alone.

Gary Sturgis

This companion was written to support you as you support others.

Use what serves you.
Leave what doesn't.
And trust yourself.

And remember...even facilitators need care, compassion, and permission to be human.

Thank you for sitting in the circle.

Gary

If You're Attending a Grief Group

If you're holding this book because you're attending a grief support group, I want you to know something right away...this book is for you, too.

You don't need to be leading a group to recognize yourself in these pages. Many people sitting in grief circles quietly wonder about the same things facilitators do.

Why does silence feel so uncomfortable sometimes?

Why do some people talk a lot while others can't find words at all?

Why does my grief feel different here or harder to name?

None of those questions means you're doing anything wrong.

Grief groups can be deeply helpful, and they can also feel confusing, awkward, or emotionally intense. This book isn't meant to tell you how you *should* grieve or how you *should* participate. It's meant to help you understand what may be happening in the room and to reassure you that your experience is valid.

You're allowed to listen without speaking.

You're allowed to use your own words for your grief.

You're allowed to feel connected one moment and distant the next.

If something in these pages helps you feel less alone, less unsure, or less self-critical about how you're showing up, then it's doing exactly what it was written to do.

Gary Sturgis

Grief doesn't come with instructions. Neither do grief groups.

I hope that this book offers you a little steadiness as you find your own way, at your own pace, among others who are also learning how to carry what has changed them.

And you don't have to have it all figured out to belong here.

*“You don’t have to know what to say. You just
have to be willing to stay.”*

PART 1

Entering the Room

Chapter 1

This Is Not About You Getting It Right

If you're facilitating a grief support group, chances are you're worried about doing it wrong.

You may wonder:

What if I say the wrong thing?

What if someone breaks down and I don't know what to do?

What if the group is quiet and no one talks?

Let me start by taking some pressure off you.

This isn't about you getting it right.

Grief doesn't require perfect words, thoughtful explanations, or well-timed insights. In fact, many people who come to grief groups have already been hurt by others trying too hard to say the *right* thing.

What they're really looking for isn't guidance.

It's safety.

Most people arrive at a grief group already guarded. They've learned, sometimes painfully, that not everyone knows how to sit with grief. They may have been rushed, corrected, judged, minimized, or told they should be *doing better by now*.

So before anything meaningful can happen in the room, one thing has to be established:

This is a place where nothing needs to be fixed.

Your role as a facilitator isn't to lead people *out* of their grief. It's to walk beside them while they sit *in* it. Sometimes that means words. Often it means silence.

You don't need to interpret what someone shares.

You don't need to offer advice.

You don't need to connect dots or find silver linings.

Grief isn't a puzzle to be solved.

One of the most helpful things you can model is comfort without knowing. When someone shares something painful, a simple response like "*Thank you for sharing that*" or "*I'm really glad you said that out loud*" is often enough.

Resist the urge to make it better.

Many facilitators believe that if someone leaves still grieving, they've failed. But that's not how grief works. People don't come to groups to stop grieving; they come to grieve *with others*.

If someone cries, that doesn't mean the group is unsafe.

If the room is quiet, that doesn't mean it's broken.

If emotions feel heavy, that doesn't mean you've lost control.

Often, it means the group feels safe enough to be honest.

You'll likely encounter moments where someone says something raw, messy, or uncomfortable. When that happens,

grounding yourself is more important than responding quickly. Take a breath. Stay present. Let the room hold what was said. Your calm is contagious.

Remember, you're not responsible for how each person heals. You're responsible for creating a space where healing *can* happen, on each person's own terms.

If you do that, you're already doing more than enough.

Grief doesn't need to be led.

It needs to be allowed.

And if you leave the room wondering whether you helped at all, that's often a sign that you did.

Chapter 2

What People Are Really Bringing into the Room

When people walk into a grief support group, they aren't just bringing their loss with them.

They're bringing everything that has happened *since* the loss.

The looks they've received in grocery stores.

The comments that landed wrong.

The conversations that stopped too quickly.

The friends who disappeared.

The well-meaning advice that felt anything but helpful.

By the time someone shows up to a group, grief has usually already taught them to be cautious.

Many people enter the room asking themselves questions they may not even be aware of:

Will I be judged here?

Will I be told I'm grieving wrong?

Will I be expected to share before I'm ready?

Will my loss be compared to someone else's?

Underneath those questions is something quieter and more fragile:

Is it safe to be myself here?

People often arrive holding back tears, not because they don't want to cry, but because they've learned that crying makes others uncomfortable. Some have been told they're *strong*. Others have been told they're *stuck*. Many have learned to edit themselves to make grief more acceptable to the outside world.

So what they bring into the room isn't just sadness.

They bring fear of being misunderstood.

They bring exhaustion from explaining themselves.

They bring shame for still hurting.

They bring guilt for moments when they don't hurt.

They may also bring anger, sometimes toward the person they lost, sometimes toward the system, sometimes toward themselves. And often, they bring it quietly, unsure if anger is allowed in grief.

Some bring stories they've never said out loud before.

Others bring stories they've been told not to tell.

And many bring silence, not because they have nothing to say, but because they're still deciding whether this is a place where words are welcome.

It's important to understand that when someone doesn't speak, it doesn't mean they're disengaged. It often means they're listening carefully, watching to see how others are treated.

I always say, "*We have two ears and one mouth for a reason.*"

What they're doing is paying attention to how you respond when someone cries, noticing whether language is corrected or

honored, and watching to see if painful truths are met with presence or redirected too quickly.
Remember...safety is built slowly.

Some participants will test the waters by sharing something small before risking something bigger. Others may speak openly from the beginning. Neither approach is right or wrong. Both are ways of protecting a heart that has already been wounded.

You may also notice that people bring different expectations into the room.

Some are hoping for guidance.
Some are hoping for relief.
Some are just hoping not to feel so alone for an hour.

A few may arrive convinced that nothing will help, but they came anyway. That matters more than you might think.

As a facilitator, you don't need to untangle everything people bring with them. You don't need to name it all or address it directly. What matters most is that you don't add to the weight they're already carrying.

The way you listen matters.
The pace you keep matters.
The way you allow emotion to exist without rushing matters.

When people sense they won't be judged, corrected, or managed, something begins to soften.

Not all at once...but enough.

And sometimes the greatest gift you give the group isn't insight or direction.

It's a relief.

Relief that they don't have to perform.

Relief that they don't have to explain.

Relief that, for this small period of time, they can simply arrive as they are.

That's what people are really bringing into the room.

And when it's handled with care, that's enough.

Chapter 3

Setting the Tone Without Rules

Most grief groups begin with rules.

No interrupting.

No advice-giving.

No fixing.

Share if you want...but don't take too long.

Rules are usually created with good intentions. They're meant to protect the group. But grief doesn't always respond well to structure, especially when structure feels like control.

What people in grief need most aren't rules. It's reassurance.

They need to know they won't be corrected.

They need to know they won't be rushed.

They need to know they won't be judged for how they speak, what they believe, or how they feel.

That sense of safety doesn't come from a list. It comes from tone.

Tone is established in the first few minutes, often before anyone shares a single word. It's in how you welcome people, how you speak, how you allow the room to settle.

A calm, unhurried beginning tells the group something important: *nothing bad is about to happen here.*

Instead of rules, it can be more helpful to offer simple understandings, shared intentions rather than expectations.

For example:

- This is a place where everyone's grief is respected.
- You're welcome to share or not share.
- There's no right language for grief: use the words that feel true to you.
- Silence is okay here.

These aren't rules to follow: they are permissions being granted.

One of the most important permissions you can give is the freedom to use personal language. People often come to groups after being told their words are wrong, too dramatic, too negative, too intense. When someone says, *grief attack*, *breakdown*, or *spiral*, what they're really saying is, *this is how it feels in my body*.

Correcting that language, even gently, can shut someone down faster than anything else. When people feel ownership over their words, they feel ownership over their experience.

Another quiet way tone is set is through what you *don't* do.

You don't fill every moment of silence.

You don't redirect emotion too quickly.

You don't rush the group toward hope.

Grief doesn't move in straight lines, and groups don't either. Some sessions will feel heavy. Others may surprise you with

moments of laughter. Neither means the group is working better or worse. Both belong.

It's also important to model how difference is handled. People will arrive with different beliefs, different losses, and different timelines. You don't need to unify those differences; you just need to make room for them.

When someone shares something you don't personally relate to, your response matters. A simple acknowledgment like "*Thank you for sharing that*" communicates respect without comparison.

If someone speaks from a place of faith, you don't need to echo it.

If someone speaks from a place of anger, you don't need to soften it.

Your role isn't to align the group ... it's to hold it.

Tone is reinforced every time you show that emotion doesn't scare you. That tears don't derail the group. That anger won't be corrected. That quiet won't be interrogated.

Over time, people begin to trust the room, not because they were told to, but because they experienced it.

And when that happens, something important shifts.

People stop performing grief the way they think it should look
They stop editing themselves.

They begin to breathe a little easier.

Gary Sturgis

That's when a real connection becomes possible.

Not because the rules were clear...but because the space was kind.

*“Your role is not to explain the words,
it’s to make room for them to land.”*

KEEP IN TOUCH WITH GARY

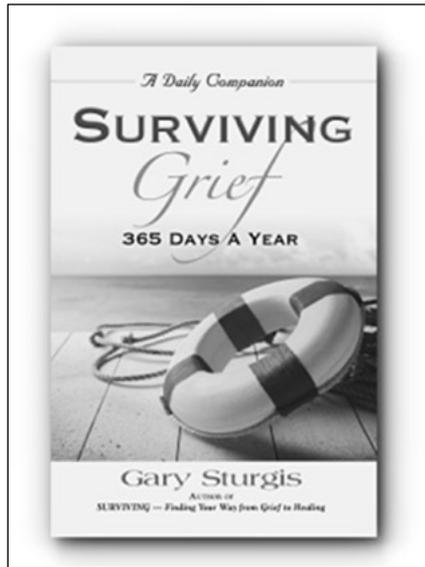
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or

Follow Gary Sturgis on Facebook at SURVIVING GRIEF:
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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

SURVIVING GRIEF: 365 Days a Year



In this international bestselling book, Gary Sturgis offers gentle companionship for one of life's most difficult journeys. Through short, heartfelt daily reflections, he provides reassurance, understanding, and steady support for the days when grief feels overwhelming, confusing, or unbearably heavy.

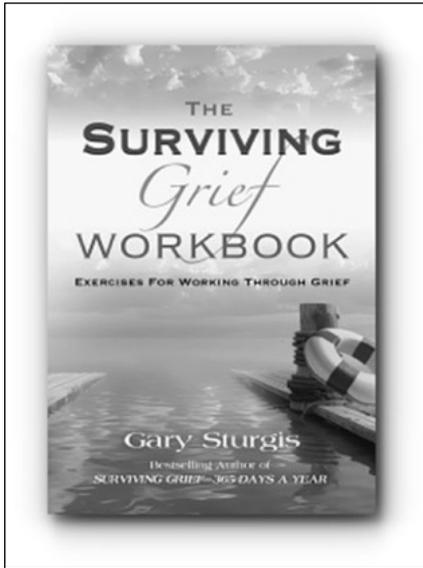
Written from both personal experience and years of working with grieverers, these reflections don't try to fix grief or rush healing.

Whether your loss is recent or long ago, this book meets you where you are and walks beside you, one day at a time.

Gary Sturgis

The SURVIVING GRIEF Workbook

Exercises For Working Through Grief



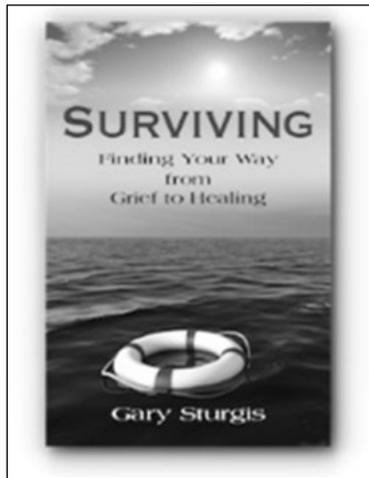
Created as a companion to Gary Sturgis's bestselling book ***SURVIVING GRIEF – 365 Days A Year***, this workbook offers a gentle, personal space for reflection, expression, and healing.

Through thoughtful prompts and guided exercises, you'll be encouraged to explore your grief in your own way and at your own pace.

With compassion and understanding, Gary helps you move through the hurt, make sense of your experience, and gradually learn how to live with more love than pain.

SURVIVING

Finding Your Way from Grief to Healing



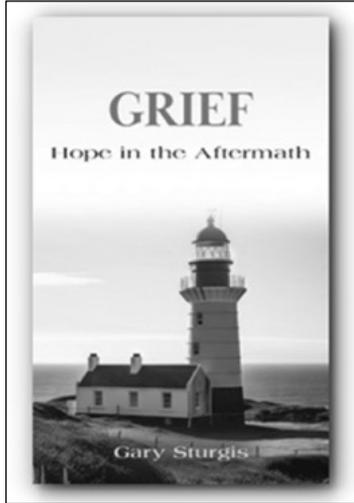
The book that began it all.

In this deeply personal and autobiographical work, Gary Sturgis shares his own journey through devastating loss and the long, complicated path that followed. With honesty, warmth, and compassion, he invites readers into the realities of grief, the confusion, the pain, the unexpected turns, while offering steady reassurance that healing is possible, even when it feels unimaginable.

Gary gently weaves together lived wisdom and practical insight. The result is a book that doesn't preach or prescribe but walks beside the reader with understanding and hope.

Gary Sturgis

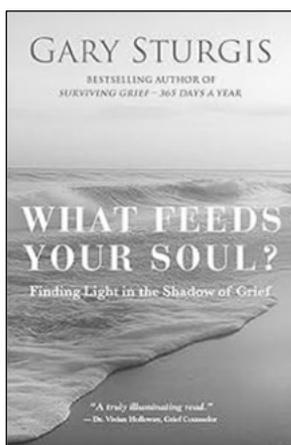
GRIEF
Hope in the Aftermath



In this thoughtful and deeply reflective book, Gary Sturgis explores the complicated landscape of loss, love, and the enduring impact of grief. Through his own insights and the shared experiences of those he has walked beside, he gently examines the questions, struggles, and quiet truths that often follow profound loss.

With compassion and clarity, Gary helps readers place the realities of life and death into a more humane and livable perspective. He doesn't promise the disappearance of grief or the full acceptance of loss. Instead, he offers something far more honest and comforting, the possibility of hope, even in the aftermath.

WHAT FEEDS YOUR SOUL? Finding Light in the Shadow of Grief



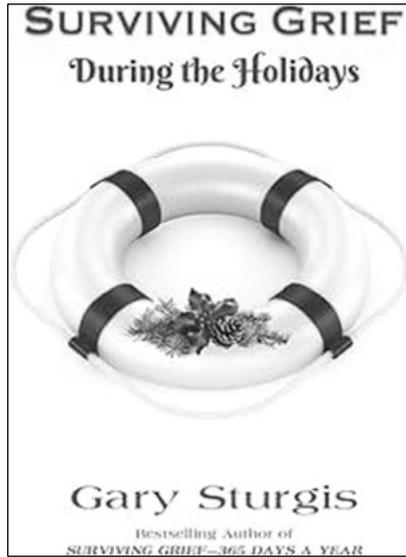
Grief reshapes the landscape of life, often leaving us searching for steadiness in a world that feels permanently changed. This book speaks to that quieter season of loss, when the question is no longer how to survive, but how to live.

With gentle reflections and compassionate insight, Gary Sturgis invites readers to explore what nourishes and sustains them now, offering reassurance, meaning, and hope without ever rushing the healing process.

Written from lived experience and years of supporting others in grief, this book is a comforting companion for anyone learning to carry loss while slowly allowing light to return.

Gary Sturgis

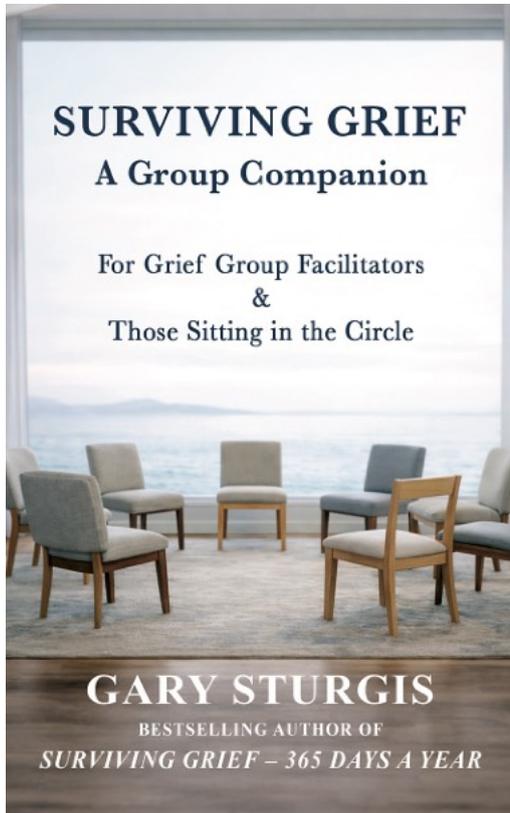
SURVIVING GRIEF During the Holidays



The holidays can be some of the most emotionally complex days of the year for those who are grieving.

Gary Sturgis offers comfort and understanding for this tender season.

Whether it's your first holiday after loss or one of many, this book serves as a steady reminder that healing does not mean forgetting; it means learning how to carry love and grief together.



A compassionate companion for those sitting in grief circles. This book offers gentle guidance for facilitators and participants, helping create safe spaces where grief can be spoken, heard, and carried together.

SURVIVING GRIEF:

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By Gary Sturgis**

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