

EARLY STAGES OF GRIEF GUIDE

A COMPASSIONATE GUIDE TO
NAVIGATING THE EARLY STAGES
OF GRIEF AS YOU FIND YOUR
WAY THROUGH LOSS.

KAY BAYLY

ARE YOU LOOKING AFTER YOURSELF?

When life throws you a major curveball—a big change like the loss of a loved one, a breakup, or any unexpected upheaval—it's common to feel like you're running on empty. You might want to lie in bed and eat chocolate while scrolling through reels. You have a strong desire to block out the world and do nothing. This is a big clue that says your bucket is empty.

SMALL STEPS TO TAKE TODAY

All the following ideas are great, and you can add them to your day as you feel up to it. But I want you to start with this daily list – **today**.

THIS IS THE "TO DO" LIST THAT YOU NEED TO MAKE SURE YOU DO EVERY SINGLE DAY.

STEP ONE:

First thing in the morning listen to a short (like 10 mins) meditation. I love doing this first thing, before I even get out of bed. I use the guided meditations on the app called Insight Timer. This app is free to download and there are 100's of free guided meditations on there. So, find one you like and help your day start with peace.

STEP TWO:

Next, I really like to pray. I enjoy being grateful and appreciative of all the beauty around us. If you are finding it hard to find things to be grateful for, choose really tiny ideas that might sound too simple, but this is not a complicated step.

Just say thank you God for – your children and grandchildren and your step puppy grandchildren. Thankful that the sun is shining or that it is raining, and the gardens are enjoying the rain. There are always things to be thankful for, even when it is hard to find it.

*"missing
someone is
sadness,
wrapped in the
blessing of
having known
them."*

-ANON

SMALL STEPS TO TAKE EACH DAY

STEP THREE:

Read something good for ½ hour. It can be the Scriptures, but it can be some of the other inspiring authors. My favourite is Wayne Dyer. – an oldie, but a goodie. My current favourite is Robert Holden.

STEP FOUR:

It doesn't have to be first thing in the day, but each and every day you need to go outside. If the weather and all other aspects are safe, then I would suggest a walk outside. It solves a number of problems like resetting your daily clock, getting some Vitamin D and moving your body.

STEP FIVE:

Interact with a living person each and every day. It can be the person at the grocery shop who has no idea who you are, or a friend on the phone. But everyday talk with a 'real' person.

STEP SIX:

*"talk to
yourself like
someone
you would
love."*

- Go to bed at a decent time.
- Wake up 8 hours later.
- Get dressed.
- Shower each day.

I know these sound very simple, but I know how hard they are to do when you are in the early phases of grief, but I promise they will get easier and they make a big difference

“

"IN THE EARLY STAGES OF GRIEF, IT FEELS LIKE THE WORLD SHOULD STOP. BUT SLOWLY, WE LEARN TO CARRY THE WEIGHT OF OUR LOSS, AND THE WORLD KEEPS TURNING."

- UNKNOWN

FILLING UP YOUR BUCKET WHEN LIFE HAS EMPTIED IT

FILLING UP YOUR BUCKET WHEN LIFE HAS EMPTIED IT:

You wake up one day and realize your "bucket" (the one that holds all your emotional energy) has a gaping hole in the bottom, and everything's just... drained out. Nothing left but echoes and a few dust bunnies.

So, what do you do when your emotional reservoir feels dry as a desert? The trick is to slowly start filling it back up. Let's dive into this whole "filling up your bucket" idea and how it can help when life knocks you flat.

WHAT IS THE BUCKET?:

Imagine your emotional well-being as a bucket. When it's full, you feel energized, positive, and ready to handle whatever life tosses your way. But when life hits hard, that bucket starts to drain, and before you know it, you're running on fumes.

The bucket is symbolic of your capacity to cope, love, laugh, and just generally feel like yourself.

Now, when you're in the midst of grief, loss, or a major life change, it's normal for your bucket to feel like it's been tipped over entirely. It's also totally okay to feel like you don't even know where to start in getting it filled up again, you don't have the energy to try and you are not even sure you want to.

But trust me, it's possible! **You just need some small, mindful steps to refill that bucket drop by drop.**

WHY DOES YOUR BUCKET GET EMPTY?

Life is full of things that can take a big scoop out of your emotional bucket. Major life changes like divorce, losing a loved one, or big career shifts drain it faster than we can refill it.

Stress, anxiety, sadness, and overwhelm are like holes in the bucket that keep depleting your energy.

It can feel overwhelming to know where to even start. Life is feeling so hard and honestly staying in bed seems like a way easier option.

But I am here to suggest some very easy, and small things you can do to start.



SMALL STEPS FOR FILLING AN EMPTY BUCKET

STEP 1: ACKNOWLEDGE THE EMPTINESS (WITHOUT JUDGMENT)

First things first—acknowledge that your bucket is empty, or at least pretty close to it. There's no use pretending it's overflowing with rainbows and sunshine when you feel like you've got nothing left to give. And that's totally fine. We all hit that point at some time in life.

The important thing is not to beat yourself up about it. Your bucket is supposed to be low right now; you've just been through something major! Relax and don't start beating yourself up. Big changes in life mess with your whole system.

You will be feeling extra tired, not finding joy in life and everything feels so hard.

And that is OK!

STEP 2: START WITH THE SMALLEST DROPS

When your bucket is bone dry, it's easy to feel like you need a waterfall to fill it back up.

But here's the trick: start with the smallest drops. Little things can add up. Maybe it's enjoying a cup of tea in peace, watching your favourite show, or taking a five-minute walk outside. You don't have to do big, life-altering things right now—just find tiny moments that bring you even the slightest bit of *joy or peace*.

And remember, it's okay if that first drop doesn't feel like much. You're not aiming to refill your bucket overnight. Think of it like slowly turning on a tap. At first, it's just a trickle, but give it time, and the bucket will begin to fill.

SMALL STEPS FOR FILLING AN EMPTY BUCKET

STEP 3: CREATE SPACE FOR YOURSELF (LITERALLY AND FIGURATIVELY)

Your bucket can't fill up if you're constantly being bombarded by noise, stress, or demands from others. Sometimes, you need to create space for yourself—both in your schedule and in your mind. Maybe that means setting boundaries, saying “no” to things that drain you, or simply taking some time alone to process.

Creating space might also be literal—maybe it's cleaning up a small corner of your home to give yourself a sense of peace and control. When your outer world is a bit more organized, sometimes your inner world follows suit. I have always started cleaning out things when I am so overwhelmed I don't know where to start in solving the life problems. Figuring out what T-shirts I need to throw out is so much easier than all the other hard problems.

STEP 4: FILL IT WITH GOOD STUFF

Now comes the fun part: finding what actually fills up your bucket. Think about what makes you feel better—not just what makes you feel “less bad.” This might take some trial and error, especially if you're not feeling like yourself yet. Some ideas might include:

- Spending time with people who lift you up (not the ones who drain you).
- Doing something creative, even if it's just doodling on a notepad.
- Listening to music that makes you feel a little more alive.
- Getting outside—nature can be an incredible source of replenishment.
- Treating yourself to small indulgences like a cozy blanket or a special cup of relaxing tea in a special cup.

DON'T LET FOOD FILL THE HOLE



But be careful to not use food to fill the hole that has been left inside you. Most of our overeating comes from a desire to feel loved and we mistakenly think that food loves us. Food is not love and never will be.

So, before you reach for another Tim Tam check what need you are filling. A small treat once per day is fine, but not the never-ending packet. Make sure that most things you eat are taking you closer to giving your body the nutrition it needs.

The key here is to focus on what truly brings you comfort or joy, not what you think you should be doing to feel better. Sometimes, it's the little, seemingly insignificant things that start making a difference.





"GRIEF IS LIKE THE OCEAN; IT COMES IN WAVES, EBBING AND FLOWING. SOMETIMES THE WATER IS CALM, AND SOMETIMES IT IS OVERWHELMING. ALL WE CAN DO IS LEARN TO SWIM."

- VICKI HARRISON

SMALL STEPS FOR FILLING AN EMPTY BUCKET

STEP 5: AVOID THE BUCKET-DRAINERS

While you're working to fill your bucket, it's a good idea to identify what's draining it and see if you can limit those things for a bit. This might mean distancing yourself from negative influences—whether that's people or situations.

And stay well away from the news (we all know that can take a toll!). Even when I am feeling strong and happy I don't listen to the news. Most of the things you hear will be negative and even horrifying and you knowing about it will not change the situation. It is outside of our circle of influence. If it is something that is very important for you to know someone will tell you.

If you can, avoid the things that poke new holes in your bucket while you're trying to refill it. You can always face those things later when you're feeling stronger.

STEP 6: CELEBRATE THE TINY WINS

Each drop you add to your bucket counts. Don't discount the small wins! Maybe today you made it out of bed a little earlier than yesterday, or you took a moment to enjoy your coffee without rushing. These little victories are all adding up, so give yourself some credit. Grief and big life changes are exhausting, and even the tiniest step forward is still progress.



SMALL STEPS FOR FILLING AN EMPTY BUCKET

STEP 7: KNOW THAT IT'S OKAY TO FEEL EMPTY SOMETIMES

There will be days when your bucket feels more empty than others, and that's perfectly normal. Healing and recovery aren't linear—they're more like a rollercoaster. One day, you might feel like you're making progress, and the next day, it's back to square one. On those harder days, remind yourself that it's okay to pause, rest, and start again tomorrow.

STEP 8: LET TIME HELP (EVEN THOUGH IT'S ANNOYING)

Here's the part no one wants to hear: time really does help. As cliché as it sounds, the passage of time allows your bucket to fill a little more naturally. The sharpness of the pain will dull over time, and you'll find yourself refilling without even realizing it.

So, while it might feel like you're stuck in the thick of it now, trust that time is quietly working in the background to help you heal.

CONCLUSION: FILLING YOUR BUCKET IS A LIFELONG PRACTICE

Your bucket won't stay full all the time—that's just life. But once you start recognizing when it's running low and know how to refill it, you'll find it easier to navigate life's ups and downs. Be patient with yourself, lean on the small moments, and let each drop add up. Before you know it, your bucket will start to feel just a little bit fuller.



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