

MENTAL HEALTH WORKSHEET SERIES
VOLUME 12



Honoring Our Grief

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While it can be used as a tool to supplement an existing therapeutic relationship with a licensed mental health professional (LMHC, LCSW, LMFT, LPC, or a Licensed Psychologist), this resource should NOT be used as a substitute for therapy.

If you find that this resource brings up feelings and thoughts that are challenging to deal with on your own or with a trusted person, I encourage you to seek therapy to continue your healing journey.

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Introduction

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So many of us, as Black women, are carrying grief that has never been fully witnessed, let alone processed. Not because we don't feel it. Not because we aren't strong enough to face it. But because somewhere along the way, the message got planted that we “don't have time for this.” We tell ourselves, and others, “Be strong, keep moving.” We hold everyone else together. But carrying is not the same as healing, and none of us were ever meant to grieve by ourselves.

This guide is not about “fixing” your grief or giving you a timeline for getting over it. It is about giving you space—maybe for the first time—to look at it, name it, and remember that you were always worthy of being held.

Our grief has been defined, pathologized, and policed by everyone except us. In communities across cultures and throughout history, grief was never meant to be a private, individual experience. Mourning was communal, and was held by the whole village. It was how a people reaffirmed their love and their bonds after loss.

For Black women in America, that was taken. During enslavement, public mourning was forbidden. Families were separated with no ceremony. Grief had nowhere to go but inward. It was carried in the body, coded into spirituals and passed from mother to daughter through nervous systems and survival strategies across generations. After enslavement, the suppression continued through the expectation to be strong, and through systems that were never built with Black women's grief in mind.

Soulfull Note to Self:

The confusion guilt you feel about whether you're allowed to grieve likely did not start with you.

It started long before you, in generations past. And understanding that is where the reclamation begins.

You are not too sensitive. You are not broken. You are human — and you are holding more than anyone ever fully acknowledged. Move at your own pace. There is no rush to your healing.

TYPES OF GRIEF

When we grieve, we are rarely grieving just one thing. We are often carrying what a grief stack — layers of loss that live on top of each other, some from our own lifetime and some inherited from the women who came before us.

The layers might include:

Personal loss — deaths, relationships, diagnoses, dreams that didn't come true, versions of yourself you had to leave behind.

Communal grief — racial trauma, community violence, the grief of watching your people suffer without respite or relief.

Matrilineal grief — your mother's unspoken pain, your grandmother's survival strategies that became your emotional inheritance.

Ancestral grief — the compressed, unwitnessed mourning of ancestors who were weren't seen as human.

Ambiguous loss — the losses without death certificates: safety, identity, belonging, possibility.

Reflection Prompt

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What layers of grief are you carrying right now — named and unnamed? What loss have you been minimizing because it didn't feel "big enough" to grieve?

Reflection Prompt

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Where in your life has the Strong Black Woman archetype protected you? Where has it cost you? When was the last time someone asked if you were okay — and you told them the truth?

This image shows a full page of white paper with horizontal orange dashed lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page, providing a guide for handwriting practice. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the page.

Our grief traditions have often been mocked, and deemed “too much.” But they are not too much. They are not primitive, dramatic, or unhealthy.

- The homegoing — where a life is celebrated fully, loudly, and with the whole community present.
- The open casket that says: witness this. Do not look away.
- The wailing that the body cannot contain because some grief is simply too large for silence.
- The repast where food and laughter and tears exist in the same room because that is what love looks like after loss.
- The talking to Big Mama like she can still hear you — because she can.
- The keeping of ancestors present, not as a refusal to heal, but as a different and richer understanding of what healing means.

These practices survived everything. They survived enslavement, Jim Crow, assimilation pressure, and clinical pathologizing. They survived because they work. Because communal, extended, embodied, spiritually grounded grief heals.

Activity: Reclaiming What's Ours

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Think about the grief traditions you witnessed growing up — in your family, your church, your community.

Write down one tradition that felt healing or sacred to you, even if you haven't practiced it in a long time.

Now write: what would it mean to return to it? What would it give you that you've been missing?

**A pact. A practice. A reclamation.
To make with each other — and with ourselves.**

- **LET** Give yourself unconditional permission. No timeline. No hierarchy of losses. No "I should be over this by now."
- **HOLD** Allow yourself to be held — and commit to holding others. Not fixing. Not rushing. Not looking away. Just staying. Witnessing. Being present without an agenda for how the grief should go.
- **HOWEVER** However your grief comes — it belongs. Wailing or silence. Laughter or collapse. Anger or numbness. Talking to the deceased or writing letters to them. It belongs.
- **WHENEVER** Grief is not linear. It resurfaces. It compounds. It arrives decades later when something cracks the door open. The whenever says: whenever you need to grieve, the space is still here.

Reflection Prompt

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What would it mean for you personally to “let and be held?”
What would you need to feel safe enough to actually let your grief
be witnessed? Is there someone in your life who you could make
this covenant with?

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Guided Writing Activity: A Letter to Your Grief

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Dear Grief,

I have been carrying you since:

What I never said out loud about you is:

The people and things I am grieving are:

Guided Writing Activity: A Letter to Your Grief

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What I need most right now is

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What I want you to know is that I am human. And I am allowed to feel you. And I am done apologizing for how long you've stayed.

I am ready to:

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With love,

[YOUR NAME]

Affirmations for the Grieving Black Woman

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Read these slowly. Return to them as often as you may need to.

My grief is not a burden.

I do not owe anyone a timeline for my healing.

I come from women who carried the uncarriable. I am healing for all of us.

My expressiveness is not too much. It is a tradition. It is a survival. It is mine.

I am allowed to be held. Even me. Especially me.

Strength was never meant to mean I grieve alone.

My ancestors grieved in whispers and spirituals so that one day I could grieve out loud. I honor them by feeling this fully.

Rest and grief are not weaknesses. They are the most human things I can do.

I trust my own process. My body knows how to do this.

The sisterhood has me. And when it is my turn to hold — I will show up the same way.

I was always worthy of being held. I still am. I always will be.

notes

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About THE CREATOR

I'm a Midwestern girl raised in a home adorned in Black art, music, literature, and culture. From Faith Ringgold on the walls, to Toni Morrison on the shelves, and old-school R&B spinning through the house, my upbringing instilled a deep pride in my heritage, and a love for storytelling, creativity, and community that still guides me today.



My academic path took a few turns—Nursing, and then Psychology at Fisk University, a master's in Sociology, and ultimately a second master's in Counselor Education—each step clarifying my calling to become a therapist. Through personal experiences, faith, and growth, I felt led toward soul-centered, culturally grounded mental health work.

When I'm not in session, I'm creating, coloring, crocheting, listening to music, podcasts or audiobooks, or watching historical and sociocultural documentaries and classic Black sitcoms. I'm a proud member of Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc., a wife to my best friend, a mama to one radiant daughter, a dog mom, and a caregiver in the sandwich generation—held up by strong women, deep friendships, and a whole lot of love.