

Whether it's someone close to you, a relationship, or something else important that's gone, grief brings waves of feeling that don't always make sense at the time. This guide introduces a way of understanding it that fits real life better than the idea of grief as a tidy set of steps.

Grief isn't a straight line

Older ideas suggested we move through fixed "stages" in order and come out the other side. In practice, grief rarely works that way. It tends to come and go — sometimes gently, sometimes without warning — rather than following a set order.

A gentle truth: there is no single right way to grieve, and no fixed order to move through it. Some days you'll feel the loss keenly; other days you'll get on with life and feel almost normal. Both are a healthy part of grieving.

The dual process model

Researchers Margaret Stroebe and Henk Schut (1999) studied how people actually cope with bereavement day to day. Rather than fixed stages, they found grieving involves two different kinds of coping — and that people naturally move back and forth between them.

Loss-oriented coping

Turning towards the loss and the feelings it brings.

- Feeling the pain, sadness, or anger
- Thinking about the person or what's gone
- Looking at photos, keepsakes, or messages
- Yearning, remembering, and missing them

Restoration-oriented coping

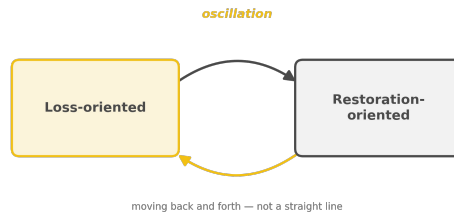
Turning towards the changes and demands the loss brings.

- Managing practical tasks, admin, or finances
- Adjusting to new routines and roles
- Doing new things or seeing people
- Taking a break from the grief for a while

Neither side is "better" than the other, and neither is avoidance. Both are needed — facing the loss helps you process it, and attending to life helps you keep going and slowly rebuild.

Moving between the two: oscillation

The heart of the model is oscillation — moving back and forth between facing the loss and stepping away from it, across a day, a week, or even minute to minute. You might cry over a photograph in the morning and be absorbed in a task by the afternoon. This isn't coping badly; it's how the mind paces something too large to face all at once.



Taking a break is not forgetting. Stepping away from grief — laughing, working, resting, enjoying a moment — isn't a betrayal of the person you've lost, and it doesn't mean you cared less. These pauses give you the strength to keep grieving; they're part of the process, not a detour from it.

Staying connected

Adjusting to life after a loss doesn't mean leaving the person behind. Many people find they keep a lasting bond — through memories, traditions, values carried forward, or simply talking to the person in their mind. Moving forward and staying connected aren't opposites; they can sit side by side.

What tends to help

- 1. Let both sides happen**
Don't force yourself into either mode. Trusting the oscillation — rather than fighting it — tends to work better than pushing yourself to "move on" or stopping yourself from feeling.
- 2. Start restoration small**
Choose one manageable thing that helps you meet daily life — a task, a routine, a bit of contact with someone. Small and deliberate beats waiting to feel ready for something bigger.
- 3. Notice the guilt, and question it**
Many people feel guilty catching themselves enjoying something, or when the grief lifts for a while. If that happens, ask: is there a kinder, truer thing I could tell myself right now?

How counselling can help

Grief can feel isolating. In a confidential space, we can explore your loss at your own pace — making room for the feelings, while gently supporting you to adjust to a changed life. You set the direction; I walk alongside you.

Take the next step, whenever you feel ready. Book a free 15-minute chat at www.jplcounselling.co.uk

If grief feels unbearable, or you're having thoughts of harming yourself or not wanting to be here, please reach out — you deserve support now, not later.

- Cruse Bereavement Support: 0808 808 1677 (bereavement helpline)
- Samaritans: 116 123, free, any time, day or night
- NHS 111: for urgent but non-emergency health advice
- 999: in an emergency, or if you're in immediate danger

This guide is a resource to support counselling and isn't a substitute for it.

Mapping Your Two Sides

Over the next few days, notice the moments that fall into each column below and jot a few down. The aim isn't balance on any single day — it's simply to notice your own movement between the two.

Loss-oriented (facing the loss)	Restoration-oriented (adjusting to life)
e.g. Looking at photos and letting the tears come.	e.g. Sorting out a practical task you'd been putting off.

Permission to pause: if you feel guilty catching yourself enjoying something, or when the grief lifts for a while, what do you tend to tell yourself? Is there a kinder, truer thing you could say instead?