Grief Walking

Idea In Short

When a group has experienced loss or a difficult transition, create an optional space for people to share and receive support. Grief Walking invites participants to reflect privately, then allows those who choose to share to be accompanied by colleagues who listen without trying to fix anything. Make clear that the practice is not therapy and no one must disclose a story. Provide a private recovery space, explain confidentiality and available support, and let people step out or pass. Use the structure only when the group can hold the conversation with care. Close gently and identify any support needs that require a separate, appropriate response.

Loss can affect a team after a colleague dies, a community faces displacement, or a major transition changes what people expected from their work. In such moments, groups may want to support one another but worry that they will say the wrong thing or try to fix what cannot be fixed. Grief Walking creates a structured, optional space for sharing and quiet companionship. Participants reflect privately, and a small number may choose to read what they wrote while others walk alongside them with empathy. The practice reflects the Liberating Structures principle “Build Trust as You Go.” It is explicitly not therapy, diagnosis, or a solution to loss.

Offer choice before sharing

The host explains the process and gives participants open-ended sentence prompts to complete privately. The prompts invite people to acknowledge what is true, what is hard, what they remember, and what may be possible now. Participants choose whether to share their writing. The structure should never require everyone to tell a personal story. A participant can remain private, accompany someone else, take a break, or leave the room.

This choice is central to the practice. Loss is personal, and people may be at different stages or have different relationships to the event. A facilitator should not frame non-

participation as avoidance or lack of care. The invitation is to create a space where sharing is possible, not to compel disclosure. Before the session, leaders should consider whether the group has the trust and support needed to hold the conversation.

Accompany without fixing

Those who choose to share read their reflections, and others can walk alongside them as accompanists. The role is to listen and offer presence. Participants should not rush to provide advice, reassurance, explanations, or a lesson about resilience. A person who has experienced loss may need recognition more than a solution. The facilitator can remind the group that silence is acceptable and that support does not require a clever response.

The exercise can be emotionally demanding for both speakers and listeners. A recovery room or quiet space gives people a place to pause. If a participant becomes distressed, the host can offer a choice about stopping, stepping out, or contacting support. Facilitators should know what support pathways are available before the session begins. If a serious concern arises, follow appropriate organizational protocols rather than trying to manage it through the group exercise.

Set clear boundaries

The host should explain confidentiality and any limits before participants write. Personal reflections remain private unless the writer chooses to share them. The group should not repeat another person’s story outside the session without permission. Facilitators should also be clear that confidentiality may have limits if someone raises an immediate safety concern, and they should know how to respond in that situation.

Grief Walking is most appropriate when participants have a genuine reason to gather and the organization can provide a respectful setting. It may not fit a group with unresolved harm, a power imbalance that makes sharing unsafe, or no pathway for participants who need further support. The host should not promise that the practice will heal or resolve grief. It offers social support and recognition within a defined session.

Prepare the setting and close gently

The source design recommends at least twelve participants and about 35 minutes per cycle.

It uses separate stations or breakout spaces, a private recovery space where possible, writing materials, and open sentence prompts. Participants first write privately; one or two people who feel comfortable may share. Others accompany them. The group can repeat the cycle if more people choose to share, while respecting the time and emotional capacity of the room.

The close should not force a summary or ask each person to state what they learned. The host can thank participants for their care, remind them of available support, and allow time for a quiet transition. A short check-in later can ask whether people need anything further, without demanding an account of their feelings. If participants have asked for practical support, assign someone to follow up and do so privately.

Research on grief support emphasizes the value of social connection and choice, while guidance from the American Psychological Association discusses ways to support people after loss. The National Health Service also provides information about grief and bereavement. 1, 2, 3

Hold space without claiming to heal

Grief Walking is useful when a group wants to acknowledge loss and offer support through presence. Its structure can help people share without being interrupted by advice. The facilitator’s care appears in the boundaries: participation is optional, private reflection is respected, and no one is asked to fix the experience. If the group cannot maintain those conditions, use another form of support. Grief does not follow a schedule, and one session cannot define what a person should feel or do next.

The practice can help a group remain connected during a difficult transition. It gives participants a way to listen, accompany, and care for one another without pretending that words will erase what happened. That is enough: a protected moment, a choice to share or not, and a clear path to additional support when someone wants it.

- 1Grief: Coping with the loss of your loved one
- 2Bereavement and grief
- 3Grief

Summary

Grief Walking offers a structured way for people to accompany one another through loss or transition. Its value is in the presence and care participants offer, not in advice or a promise to heal. The facilitator must protect choice, privacy, and the right to pass, and should make clear that the practice is not therapy. A recovery room and clear follow-up options can help participants care for themselves after sharing or listening. The group should close without demanding a lesson or action from every story. Sometimes the most useful response is to remain present, acknowledge the loss, and let the person decide what support they want.