

# GOOD GRIEF NETWORK STEP PROGRAM RECOMMENDATIONS

Welcome to the Good Grief Network's 10-Step Program to help build psychosocial resilience and community. Thank you for your willingness to organize a Step Program in your community. We have a number of recommendations for facilitation that might make the process a bit easier.

- Each step has been researched and formed using an interdisciplinary approach. The creators are not mental health experts, and you don't have to be either. Some people may need a therapist in addition to working the 10-Steps.
- Meet weekly for 1 ½ -2 hours each time. Any less than that doesn't allow sufficient time for everyone to share.
- Make time for a check in and check out each meeting. Have each person introduce themselves by their first name and use an ice-breaker for them to share. (Ex: Introduce yourself with your first name and one word of what you're bringing to the circle today.)
- Sit in a circle.
- Meet at the same location each week (or at least minimize the number of places you meet at.) People get confused and won't come if the location changes each meeting.
- Open up the weekly facilitator position to anyone interested. Each week should have a different leader. We have included the introduction with notes for the facilitator.
- Limit each group to about 10-15 people. Any more than that and authenticity is challenged. We desire to build community and create a safe space to work through tough feelings.
- Read the introduction and closing in each meeting. Ritual is important. The subject of the meeting changes weekly, but having the start and ending the same allows participants to ground themselves.
- After the leader opens the floor for sharing, have participants use a talking piece to minimize cross talk.
- Create space for honesty and integrity. No one is forced to share and everyone who shares should limit their talking to a few minutes to create space for others.
- Promote each weekly meeting on social media and encourage members to invite friends and family.
- Connect regularly to the Good Grief Network hub (via email: [goodgriever@gmail.com](mailto:goodgriever@gmail.com) or monthly conference calls [TBD]) to share insights and suggestions for improvement. This manual is an evolution-in-progress, a collaborative process. It's not perfect, but the urgency of this work is more important than perfection. We know what worked for our meetings – but your gatherings will be different. Let us know how they're going. What are obstacles you're facing? What surprises you? Are members offering feedback?

# GOOD GRIEF NETWORK STEP PROGRAM

## INTRODUCTION

“We welcome you to the **Good Grief Network Step Program** and hope you will build psychosocial resilience and community within this fellowship. This group is not a certified therapy program; it is a place to cultivate love, support, and growth focused on collective grief.

We who live with an understanding of climate justice, the loss of our imagined future, ecocide or other systemic problems understand as perhaps few others can. We know the world is full of grief and suffering. We feel it and want to practice methods to cope and invest our energy in meaningful ways.

The **Good Grief Network** offers an opportunity where individuals can build resilience that empowers us to face the challenges of these overwhelming systemic issues without succumbing to numbness, depression, or denial. This work is about creating resilient humans who embrace and navigate vulnerability, our heavy human emotions, and the pain of the living in a destructive culture. Our goal, when each step has been worked, is to live grounded in wisdom with fresh ideas and perspectives. We awaken and begin to see the world with social constructions broken down and are able to look beyond current systems for solutions. And we start the steps again.

This program may also help lead to **meaningful action**. While action has many definitions, we’ll learn to access and strengthen our own unique skills, talents, and experiences. Good Grief doesn’t recommend a single course of action, as we realize systemic problems are complex. Instead, we use what we’ve learned and created to drive change in our own ways.

Please be respectful of the group and limit your sharing to a few minutes. Before sharing twice, create space for everyone to share once. Help others feel welcome to take part in the dialogue created. Speak your truths to the center of the room to eliminate cross talk.

This step program is loosely based on the Twelve Steps (adapted from Alcoholics Anonymous), which we try, little by little, one day at a time, to apply to our lives.”

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**GROUP INTRODUCTIONS** [the facilitator chooses a type of check in for the meeting].

## BUSINESS UPDATES

- “Is anyone willing to lead next week’s group?”
- “Are there any group announcements?”

## INTRODUCE THIS WEEK’S STEP

Read the introduction from the manual and if the facilitator wants to, share a personal story as it relates to this step.

## ANNOUNCE: The Floor Is Open For Sharing

5 Minutes Before Closing The Facilitator Asks: “As this meeting comes to a close, does anyone have a burning desire to share?”

## CLOSING

Announce Next Week’s Step That Will Be Covered.

“In closing, the opinions expressed here were strictly those of the person who gave them. Take what you liked and leave the rest.

We’ll be back next week to work the next step. We’d love to see you, too.

We’ll end by going around the circle with a check out [the facilitator chooses a type of check out].”

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## **Step 1: Accept The Problem And Its Severity.**

*It is in this step where we aim to understand the problematic ways in which humankind operates on this planet. When we catch glimpses of the problems and their severity, don’t look away. We must invite the grief to move through our whole animal body. The planet and our species need us to be awake and aware right now. This requires acknowledging the difficult truth of where we’re at as a culture.*

*We’ve lost our way. Consumerism, pervasive violence, global warming, the sixth mass extinction, water and food shortages, mass-produced propaganda, and skyrocketing rates of depression all point to the errors of our ways. Our systems are failing us.*

*A delicate balance exists between false optimism and nihilism. Reality exists within this balance.*

*Regardless of which collective problem most paralyzes us, remember that balance is a practice. We wobble. We fall. We get up and get to work again. Like any practice, balance gets easier the more we do it.*

*Now is the time to rise to the challenge. Let’s envision new ways of existing, together. First, we accept the problem and its severity. After accurately discerning where we are, we can focus on the path to arrive where we want to be.*

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## **Step 2: Acknowledge That I Am Part Of The Problem As Well As The Solution.**

*By living within the Western paradigm, we’re all responsible for where we’re at culturally, socially, ecologically, and politically. Many of us do what we can to minimize our carbon footprint. Still, we drive, fly, and consume. We buy into the “American Dream,” shortchanging ourselves because of our flaws and fail to notice how the system is designed to enslave us with debt. We must confront the old notion that our ability to consume defines our individual worth.*

*Once we’re aware of these systems and our role in perpetuating them, they cannot hold us captive.*

*There isn’t time for feeling shame about our roles in the problems. We’re using the tools provided by this system to help create a just future. With this level of acceptance, we can address and correct these problematic habits little by little and create systems that actually serve our planet and us.*

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## **Step 3: Practice Sitting With Uncertainty.**

*This culture is rigid. We’re conditioned to make little, or no, room for uncertainty. We want guarantees, plans, and perfection. We desire to feel secure and think certainty means security. Yet, control is an illusion. We can calculate the odds of every risk, but there is always some amount of uncertainty that exists. We minimize risks by making smart choices and planning, but there will always be external forces beyond our control. We live on a dynamic planet and have myopic senses. There is more to existence than we can perceive. Can we give up our need to control the outcomes of our actions? The more we convince ourselves of a certain outcome, the less resilient we are. Can you take risks and chances and find meaning in our daily lives knowing that our existence is unpredictable?*

*Practicing flexibility moves us out of a fight/flight/freeze response when we experience the unexpected. This allows us to respond from a place of patience and compassion. Can we learn to sit with the vulnerability of uncertainty?*

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## **Step 4: Confront My Own Mortality And The Mortality Of All.**

*Death is a natural and normal part of the life cycle. You will die, as all living things do. Nothing is free from death—not pets, not that person you’re certain you can’t live without, not even the sun. Death is natural. Still, the rate in which we humans are killing off other species is unfathomable. We’re extinguishing other species so quickly that we’ve entered the Sixth Mass Extinction event on Earth. Humankind has become the first species to control the course of evolution.*

*How do we remain present with the inevitability of death without becoming obsessed by it or dwelling in the dark? Death and life are interrelated. One cannot exist without the other. It is through death that meaning is made. We are alive for such a short time. Heart attacks, accidents, and illness hurl curve balls at us and the ones we love. Nothing is guaranteed. Once we accept the inevitability of death, we can be more alive in the present moment.*

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## **Step 5: Feel My Feelings.**

*Experiencing difficult emotions allow us to more profoundly feel positive ones like joy, gratitude, and comfort. Artist and author, Kahlil Gibran said, “The deeper that sorrow carves into your being the more joy you can contain. Is not the cup that holds your wine the very cup that was burned in the potter’s oven?”*

*The further you delve into the process of building psychosocial resilience, the better you understand the damage created when avoiding painful feelings. Was avoiding painful feelings a lifelong pattern for you? All humans have a similar range of emotions. We all feel them to varying degrees and some are more pleasant than others to experience.*

*Brené Brown, shame researcher and storyteller, argues that we must be willing to feel everything to be fully alive. We can’t selectively numb our emotions; if we try to escape the difficult feelings, we mute the pleasant ones too. It diminishes our ability to completely experience life. Despair, grief, shame, rage, and sadness must all be acknowledged and worked through. Brown argues, “To foreclose on our emotional life out of a fear that the costs will be too high is to walk away from the very thing that gives purpose and meaning to living.” We must be willing to feel the heavy feelings and allow them to move through us; they get stuck when we deny or fight them instead of allowing the transitory states to have their moment. All emotions are transient and recurrent. For example, we don’t “face our despair,” and then never have to think about it again. Feelings are lenses that color our perception of the world. Try each lens on without judgment. What is it about each different perspective that helps create a richer, fuller life?*

*It’s critical to learn methods for processing our feelings because we’re all ultimately alone. Community offers solace and support, but each of us wakes up and falls asleep in our mind. If we can’t work through our own feelings, the help of a community is limited. We must each commit to a full life experience and build community from that place.*

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## **Step 6: Do Inner Work.**

*Whether we like it or not, our personal wounds add weight to the already heavy emotions we feel on a collective level.*

*We can deny, repress, or run from our personal struggles until we collapse under their weight. Or, we can face them with courage, recognizing that feelings are both mental and physical experiences that shape, but do not define us. In doing so, we choose to use this extra baggage as strength-training to build us up rather than break us down. In other words, will we let our hearts break open or remain closed?*

*Personal grief from past trauma, disappointments, and losses can help or hurt our activism. When we face our individual struggles with courage, it makes us more compassionate, resilient, and open. The choice to ignore or repress our individual baggage compounds the despair and hopelessness when we dig into collective problems.*

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## **Step 7: Take Breaks And Rest As Needed.**

*Each of us has personal limitations that we must respect. When our mind or body requires rest, take a break. Being in a place of awareness and vulnerability is taxing, and because we've committed to feeling our feelings and working through past trauma, we'll have cultivated enough self-awareness to know when each of us needs to take a step back for a moment and regroup. Do what you need to do to refresh yourself and return to the work. Otherwise, we risk burning out. We need you and your energy. Maya Angelou said, "Every person deserves a day away in which no problems are confronted, no solutions searched for. On that day we need to withdraw from the cares which will not withdraw from us." Are you willing to give yourself this moment to recharge?*

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## **Step 8: Develop Awareness of Brain Patterns & Perception.**

*This step encapsulates three aspects: 1) The human mind is full of biases, which shape the way each of us engages with the world. We construct our reality based on the information collected and processed by our instincts, five senses, and complex thinking. The combination of the three is limiting. We can't know what we don't know and if we never learn how our brain overcompensates for our limitations, we are held captive by the illusion that we are rational beings. It's a delicate dance that can sometimes leave us feeling confused about why we respond in particular ways.*

*2) Through practices like meditation, mindfulness, yoga, and utilizing gratitude, we can train our brain to respond to external stimuli in a non-reactionary way. Between the outrageous daily news, intra- and interpersonal drama, and the weight of our collective problems all competing for our attention and reactions, each moment can seem overwhelming. Through mindfulness practices, we fight the paradigm of stress and speed and drop into the slower parts of our brain where we have control over our reactions. We can observe our thoughts instead of identifying as them. We remove ourselves from the daily hype that leaves us reaching for our next addictive fix to cover up the intensity of our problems. These practices gift us moments of calm and lucidity amidst the chaos.*

*3) Beauty and meaning are not optional; we need them to survive. Creating meaning and finding beauty are matters of perspective. They are available to us if we make the decision to pursue them. Terry Tempest Williams writes that, "Finding beauty in a broken world is creating beauty in the world we find." No matter the situation, we can find a beautiful action, connection, scene, or moment. Beauty and meaning sustain us as reminders that there is something outside of us worth living for.*

*Desperation, depression, and threats to our safety may make it seem that meaning and beauty aren't available, but as long as there is life, they exist. We only have to make the effort to look and remember times we have encountered beauty and meaning to help sustain ourselves.*

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## **Step 9: Show Up.**

*Now that we've done some healing through self-reflection and building self-awareness, we need to turn the focus externally. When we're feeling vulnerable, we're quick to diminish our experiences by hiding or internalizing that which makes us feel exposed. Part of the human condition involves encountering these uneasy situations and instead of shying away, we push through the discomfort and show up for what makes us vulnerable. We shouldn't let fear of pain or humiliation stop us from participating in life. There is strength in pushing through that which makes us uncomfortable. There is power and energy in asserting that we're not going away. Life exists in the moments we show up. To shy away from these experiences is to miss the essence of being alive. So, we must be brave. Take chances. Commit to being the main character of your life. Show up for yourself.*

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## **Step 10: Reinvest Myself Into Problem-Solving Efforts.**

*The final step is to use the wisdom, energy, and inner peace that we've cultivated through the other steps to inform our every action. When we're open to our interconnectedness to all beings and the natural world, we make decisions based on compassion and reverence instead of egocentric motivations. Instead of thoughtless and selfish actions, we reinvest ourselves with an understanding of the consequences to the larger world. This new type of action must come from our inner stillness and from our reverence for each other, the natural world, and ourselves. It will be well-intentioned and well-informed, colored by how we see the world. Unless we've undergone an intensive process that forces us to seek truth from within ourselves, instead of having "truth" pushed on us, any action with regard to our collective problems will perpetuate the same social and economic systems that are failing us. As the wise R. Buckminster Fuller said, "You never change things by fighting the existing reality. To change something, build a new model that makes the existing model obsolete."*

*Now is a time for each person to find her/his opportunity to be powerful. Action and power don't have to mean risking arrest or giving up on civilized society and living in a yurt. Action and power exist in the decisions we make with respect and love toward other beings, the natural world, and ourselves. Our next moves must be made from a place of inner resilience and outward reverence. A truly just and sustainable world is made up of awake and resilient people.*