

Meeting Script

INTRODUCTION

"We welcome you to the **Good Grief Network Step Program** and hope you will build personal resilience and empowerment, and strengthen community ties within this fellowship. This group is not a therapy program nor is it a space to dwell in our heavy emotions. Instead, it is a place to cultivate love, support, and growth focused on collective grief and widespread systems collapse. We seek to find the delicate balance between unrealistic optimism and angry nihilism.

We who live with an understanding of climate injustice, the loss of our imagined future, ecocide, and 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, despair, or denial. This work is about embracing and navigating 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. We practice the steps as tools moving forward.

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. The Good Grief Network 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 from your heart and your truth - we are not here to convince others of our beliefs, but to be witnessed on our journey and help raise consciousness.

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

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

BUSINESS UPDATES

- “Are there any group announcements?”
- [Optional] “Who is willing to lead next week’s meeting?”

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. After sharing a story, announce that the floor is now open for others to share.

ANNOUNCE: The Floor Is Open For Sharing

10 Minutes Before Closing The Facilitator Asks:

"As this meeting comes to a close, does anyone have a burning desire to share?"

WRAPPING UP

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

Announce Next Week’s Step That Will Be Covered.

CLOSING

"In closing, thank you for showing up with your hearts and minds today. It takes tremendous courage to look at the systemic predicaments we’re facing. A helpful reminder to you, 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. Don’t forget to move your body and show yourself patience and compassion along the way."

Step 1

Accept The Severity of the Predicament

"Acceptance does not mean surrender. It does not mean resignation. Acceptance means I am finally available to the entire spectrum of creative response."

—Trebbe Johnson

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.

We've lost our way. Consumerism, pervasive violence, the climate crisis, water and food shortages, mass-produced propaganda, uneven distribution of wealth, the sixth mass extinction and skyrocketing rates of depression all point to the errors of our ways. The COVID-19 pandemic reveals the fragility of our current systems and ways of being.

A delicate balance exists between false optimism and overwhelming pessimism. Reality exists between these two polarities. We aim to live within these two extremes.

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 severity of the predicament. After accurately discerning where we are, we can focus on the path to arrive where we want to be.

Step 2

Acknowledge That I Am Part Of The Problem & The Solutions

"Walls turned sideways are bridges."

—Angela Davis

By living within the Western paradigm, we've all played a part in getting us to where we're at culturally, socially, ecologically, and politically. We do what we can to minimize our ecological footprint. Still, many of us drive, fly, and over-consume. We buy into the consumerist ideology, failing 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. Let us each reclaim our agency where we have it and simultaneously show ourselves compassion when we face impossible choices, remembering that corporations profit from making us believe we have to be perfect before we can hold them accountable for their grievous wrongdoings.

Once we're aware of these systems and our role in perpetuating them, we can no longer be held captive by our guilt and shame. We begin to dissolve our cognitive dissonance and see things as they are. There isn't time to be suffocated by feelings 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.

The work of this time is about building bridges where we've previously constructed walls internally and externally. Where can we open to connection instead of seeing only barriers?

Step 3

Practice Being With Uncertainty

"No one can possibly know what is about to happen: it is happening, each time, for the first time, for the only time."

—James Baldwin

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 our perceptions are limited. There is more to existence than we can take in. 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/fold response when we experience the unexpected. This allows us to respond from a place of patience and compassion. We must befriend uncertainty to exist in this time and place, and to preserve our sanity.

Step 4

Honor My Mortality & The Mortality Of All

"A civilization that denies death ends by denying life."

—Octavio Paz

Death is a natural and normal part of every 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. Yet, the high rate in which we humans are killing off other species feels nearly impossible to take in. 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 knowing death is inevitable and avoid becoming obsessed by it or dwelling in the dark? We are alive for such a short time. Heart attacks, accidents, and illness hurl curve balls at the ones we love and us. Nothing is guaranteed. Death and life are interrelated. One cannot exist without the other. Once we accept the inevitability of death, we can be more alive in the present moment.

The work of this time asks us to be brave and courageous. Eventually, death comes for us all. So, how do we cultivate the most meaningful journey while we're here? Let's live while we're alive because how we die matters and we die how we live.

Step 5

Do Inner Work

"If you begin to understand what you are without trying to change it, then what you are undergoes a transformation."

—Jiddu Krishnamurti

Our personal wounds add weight to the heavy emotions we feel on a collective level. We can deny, repress, or run from our personal struggles until we collapse under them. 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 and its weight for strength-training a little at a time, rather than collapsing underneath it. Our grief then becomes a tool for connection instead of a roadblock to plough through or avoid.

Our culture has deemed some of our feelings acceptable and others taboo. Many of us have received messages that it is inappropriate to share honestly and openly about the heavy or painful feelings we experience. Because of this, there is a tendency to “think” our emotions instead of being willing to “feel” them. Until we can feel the full range of our emotions, we cannot truly confront the systemic predicaments facing us. Limiting our range of feelings prevents us from being fully alive. 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?

All emotions are transient and recurrent. For example, we don’t “face our despair,” and then never have to think about it again. When the despair comes back, we greet it as an old friend and sit with it. We can ask, “What does this feeling have to teach me?”

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.

Step 6

Develop Awareness of Brain Patterns & Perception

"Your assumptions are your windows on the world. Scrub them off every once in a while, or the light won't come in."

—Isaac Asimov

We think we are rational creatures, but we are not. We construct our reality based on the information collected and processed by our instincts, cognitive biases, five senses, and complex thinking. The combination 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. In noticing our biases, we can begin to see reality as it is, not as we want it to be.

An untrained brain will always react without awareness of our limitations, but we can help our minds become calmer, steadier, and less reactive. This is essential when confronting our wicked systemic predicaments. Practices like meditation, yoga, gratitude, mindfulness and creating beauty and meaning help rewire our brains, creating new neural pathways helping to overcome reactions from instincts and cognitive biases.

In other words, we must learn how to cultivate a non-reactive state of being instead of allowing our limited perceptions to be in control. adrienne maree brown, author of *Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds*, reminds us to feed what we want to grow. Are we cultivating and nourishing a world based in reality or clouded by our perceptions?

Step 7

Practice Gratitude, Witness Beauty, & Create Meaning

“The more clearly we can focus our attention on the wonders and realities of the universe about us, the less taste we shall have for destruction.”

—Rachel Carson

Through tools like meditation, mindfulness, yoga, and utilizing gratitude, we can train our brain to respond to stimuli in a non-reactionary way. Between the sensationalized 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 better 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.

Beauty and meaning are not optional; we need them to survive. In Viktor Frankl's *Man's Search for Meaning*, he uses examples from his time spent in a concentration camp to remind us that 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, hopelessness, 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.

Step 8

Take Breaks & Rest

"Caring for myself is not a self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare."

—Audre Lorde, *A Burst of Light*

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. If we continue trying to push through, we become dysregulated, making us unable to receive new information and insight. A daily practice coupled with space and time can help you recharge. 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.

Are you willing to give yourself this moment to recharge? The work will be there when you return.

Step 9

Show Up

"The moment that you feel that, just possibly, you're walking down the street naked, exposing too much of your heart and your mind and what exists on the inside, showing too much of yourself. That's the moment you may be starting to get it right."
—Neil Gaiman

Now that we have 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 downplay 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 lean into the discomfort, showing up for what makes us vulnerable. We cannot allow the 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. We must take chances. And we must commit to being the main character in each of our lives.

Show up for yourself.

Step 10

Reinvest Into Meaningful Efforts

"You never change things by fighting the existing reality. To change something, build a new model that makes the existing model obsolete."

—R. Buckminster Fuller

The final step is to use the wisdom, energy, and resilience 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 insight 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 effort must come from our inner stillness and from our Love 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.

Now is the time for each person to find their 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 calm and outward reverence. These actions can be informed by the intersection of where our skillsets meet our passions and experience. A truly just and sustainable world can only exist once we are awake, resilient, and re-connected.