

WORKSHEET 3 · CHAPTER THREE · THIS FEELS LIKE GRIEF

Creating Your Loss Timeline

Often we're not grieving one thing. We're grieving many things, all at once.

To anyone just starting this journey, I want you to understand something I didn't know at first: your grief is not too much. **You're not too much.** There is no "right" way to do this. There is no timeline.

You don't ever have to get over it. You do have to learn to get through it. You can cry, scream, bargain, or accept. And then do it all again, as many times as it takes.

When everything changes, it doesn't happen all at once. It happens in waves.

One loss.

Then another.

Then another.

Some are obvious, like losing your health, your body, or your sense of safety. Others are less obvious, like losing energy, independence, confidence, or your old sense of self.

And when losses stack up, it can become overwhelming. Heavy. Hard to make sense of. That's why creating a loss timeline can be so helpful.

EXERCISE 1

Create Your Loss Timeline

Take a few slow, deep breaths. Then think back to your earliest loss. Make a mark near the left edge of the line below and write the age you were beneath it. Describe the loss in a word or two above the line. Continue for all the major losses in your life.

Include not only the death of a loved one or a pet, but also the loss of a job, a big move, loss of safety or innocence from abuse, major mental or medical health crises — and, of course, your diagnosis and every loss that came with your treatment.



You may want more room than this. A clean sheet of paper or a spread in your journal works just as well — draw one long horizontal line and begin.

Losses You Might Notice

At diagnosis

- Loss of innocence
- Loss of control
- Loss of safety
- Loss of feeling healthy

Around surgery

- Loss of your body
- Loss of identity
- Loss of physical strength
- Loss of privacy

During treatment

- Loss of energy
- Loss of independence
- Loss of normal routines
- Loss of feeling like yourself

After treatment

- Loss of your “before” life
- Loss of feeling safe
- Loss of confidence in your body
- Loss of future expectations

You may also notice losses connected to relationships, work or career, parenting, social life, finances, faith, and identity.

You weren't just dealing with cancer. You were dealing with grief.

Why This Helps

When you name your losses, something shifts. Your struggle finally makes sense. You stop judging yourself for not “moving on.” You stop feeling like you’re overreacting. Because you can finally see:

Of course this is hard.

Of course you’re grieving.

Of course you’re still processing.

You’ve lost so much. And grief is a natural response to loss — even when that loss isn’t obvious to others.

EXERCISE 2

Grieve Your Losses

Creating your loss timeline is only the first step. The next — and often the harder one — is allowing yourself to sit with each loss and grieve it.

Many of us move from one loss to the next without ever giving ourselves time to process. We keep going. We push forward. We tell ourselves to be strong. But grief doesn’t disappear just because we don’t stop to feel it. It waits. It shows up as exhaustion. As irritability. As anxiety. As sadness without a clear cause, or a feeling of being stuck.

When you feel ready, go back through each loss and notice which ones still haven’t been grieved. Then ask:

What did this loss take from me?

How did this change my life?

What was hardest about this?

What do I still miss?

You may notice emotions coming up — sadness, anger, fear, even relief. All of it is valid. You don't have to force anything, do it perfectly, or do it all at once. Sometimes simply acknowledging the loss is enough.

I lost my health.

I lost my sense of safety.

I lost the life I thought I'd have.

EXERCISE 3

Use TEARS to Grieve

Once you've identified and begun to sit with your losses, you may find you need help letting the grief come. The TEARS method can help.

- T** Talk about it — over and over, as many times as you need, for as long as you need.
- E** Exercise or move your body — pouring your grief into each movement.
- A** Artistic expression — creativity is another great way to access and work through grief.
- R** Record or write — your feelings, thoughts and experiences — in a journal, or even a voice memo.
- S** Sob — And sob. And sob. Let yourself feel every feeling you feel. Tears truly are healing.

Grief isn't something to rush through. It's something to move through at your own pace. And when you allow yourself to feel and grieve each loss, something important happens: you begin to carry the grief differently. It may still be there, but it feels less heavy. Less confusing. Because you're no longer pushing it away — you're making space for it. And that space is where healing begins.

A Gentle Reminder

You don't have to complete all of this at once. You don't even have to finish it. Just start.

Sometimes seeing a few of your losses written down can bring clarity — and compassion — for yourself. Because when you see what you've been carrying, it becomes easier to understand why you feel the way you do. And that's often where healing begins.

This worksheet accompanies Chapter Three of *Reluctant Warrior: A Memoir & Breast Cancer Emotional Survival Guide* by Dr. Christina Hibbert. It is a reflective exercise, not therapy or medical care. If it brings up more than you expected, that makes sense —

please consider bringing it to someone who can sit with you in it.