

GRIEF THAT DOESN'T HAVE A NAME



*A guide to the losses that don't come with funerals —
relationships, identity, possibility and the life you expected*

—
This workbook is for anyone carrying a grief
they have never quite been given permission to name.



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A note from Shelagh

This workbook is an attempt to give words to a kind of loss that may never have had them.

To make space for losses that have been quietly carried — sometimes for years, sometimes for decades — and to let them be acknowledged. Without judgement. Without a hierarchy of suffering. Without the requirement that they be explained or justified first.

Whatever you have lost, or are losing, or have been grieving without quite realising that was what you were doing — it counts. You are allowed to grieve it.

And that permission, I have found, is often where healing begins.

Grief, in the way most of us are taught to think about it, has a very particular shape. Someone dies. There is a funeral, a period of mourning, a gradual return to ordinary life. The people around you recognise what has happened. They bring food, send cards, ask how you are. There is a structure around it — imperfect, but present. The loss is named. The grief has somewhere to go.

But in more than twenty years of practice, the grief I have most often sat with is not that kind.

It is the grief that has no funeral. The grief that isn't always recognised as grief — by others, and sometimes by the person living it. Or that is recognised, but quietly felt to be illegitimate.

The end of a marriage, or a significant relationship — through separation, or a slow dissolution. The estrangement from a parent, a child, a close friend. The slow loss of someone to dementia, watching them disappear while their body remains. The career that ended before you were ready. The child that was never born. The life you imagined in detail, but that never arrived.

And sometimes the grief turns inward. We grieve the potential we didn't trust or pursue. The decisions we regret. The paths not taken. The version of ourselves that never quite came into being. There can be a particular sorrow in looking back and wondering who we might have become, had fear, or trauma, or self-doubt not shaped things so strongly.

These losses are real. The grief they produce is real.

Yet they are often harder to process, precisely because they arrive without permission to mourn. There is no ritual for the loss of a dream. No condolence card for a life that didn't unfold. No shared language for the quiet ending of something that once held meaning.

What I have learned, personally and professionally, is that the absence of recognition does not make a loss smaller. It often makes it lonelier. When grief is not witnessed, it becomes something we carry in isolation — adding another layer of suffering to what is already painful.

In my own life, I have grieved many things. But the losses tangled up with regret have been the hardest to come to terms with. They were shaped not only by sadness, but by shame, and self-recrimination — the belief that I should have known better, chosen differently, prevented the outcome altogether.

For a long time, rather than letting those feelings be grieved, I buried them. Part of me believed that holding on to regret would protect me — that self-criticism might prevent future mistakes. But grief does not disappear when it is pushed away. More often, it goes on quietly beneath the surface, shaping how we see ourselves and our past.

What I have slowly come to understand is that loss is simply part of being human. None of us move through life untouched by endings, disappointments, or choices we wish we could revisit. What has helped me most has not been self-punishment, but trust, time, patience, and self-compassion — not forcing resolution, but staying with what was lost long enough for it to be understood, and eventually softened.

Grief is what happens when something that mattered is no longer here in the form we knew it. It is painful, and it takes time. But it is also one of the ways we stay connected to what we have loved.

And when it is recognised — even quietly, even belatedly — it becomes something we no longer have to carry alone.

With warmth,

*Shelagh MacFarlane, MSc Counselling Psychology
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia*

How to use this workbook

This is a structured workbook, with space to write throughout. You can print it and work through it by hand, or use it as a framework for journalling alongside.

Some sections may feel more relevant to your particular loss than others. Follow that. Not every part will apply to every kind of grief, and you are the best judge of what is useful to you right now.

A note before you begin: grief is not a linear process, and working through a workbook about it won't be linear either. Some exercises may bring up more than you expected. If that happens, please be gentle with yourself.

You are not falling apart. You are, perhaps for the first time, letting yourself feel something that has been waiting a long time to be felt.

And if at any point what comes up feels too large to hold alone, please turn to the final section, which maps the support available to you.

- 01** What grief actually is, and the many forms it takes
- 02** Ambiguous and disenfranchised grief — the losses that go unrecognised
- 03** How grief actually works — and the myth of the stages
- 04** How unprocessed grief shows up — in the body and in behaviour
- 05** What grieving actually requires
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- 07** Finding the right level of support

SECTION 1

What grief actually is

And the many forms it takes

Grief is the natural response to loss.

That sounds simple. But its implications are wide, because loss is so much broader than death.

At its core, grief arises when something that mattered is no longer available in the form we knew it — when the future we were leaning toward no longer unfolds as we imagined. It is the process by which we adjust to a changed reality. It cannot be rushed, bypassed, or reasoned away.

And it is, in its own way, an expression of love. We only grieve what has mattered to us.

Death is the loss our culture most readily recognises. But grief arises in response to many other kinds of loss — most of which go unnamed.

The ending of a significant relationship, where the other person is still alive, and where sadness is often complicated by anger or ambiguity.

Estrangement, where the absence stays open-ended, and hope and loss live side by side without resolution.

The end of a life chapter — retirement, redundancy, the closing of a career or an identity that once shaped your sense of who you were.

Reproductive grief — infertility, pregnancy loss, the end of imagined futures around children — so often unspoken, and deeply isolating.

The grief of a changed body, through illness, injury, or ageing, when a familiar sense of physical self is no longer available.

The loss of homeland, culture, or belonging — particularly for those who have migrated, or lived between places.

And the quieter grief of a life unlived — the paths not taken, the versions of ourselves that never quite formed.

Each of these has its own texture. But they share something: they matter, and they deserve to be named as grief. Without that, people are left carrying something significant with no language for it — and that absence of language can deepen the suffering.

Exercise 1 Naming your losses

Taking them seriously

This exercise asks something that may feel unfamiliar — to take seriously, and to name, the losses you are carrying. Including the ones you have never been sure you were allowed to call losses.

Making the list

Include the obvious and the less obvious. The losses others recognised, and the ones that went unacknowledged. The ones that happened in a moment, and the ones that gathered slowly. Losses of people, of roles, of futures, of possibilities, of versions of yourself.

No need to justify

You don't need to rank them or justify them. You simply need to name them. For many people, this is itself significant — the first time certain losses have been acknowledged at all.

Exercise 2 The loss that is most alive right now

Trusting your instinct

Of the losses you named, which one feels most present, most unresolved, most in need of attention? It may not be the most dramatic. It may not be the one you feel most entitled to grieve. Trust your instinct rather than your judgement here.

Writing into it

Write a little about this particular loss — what happened, what it has meant, and what you haven't yet had the space to fully feel about it.

SECTION 2

Ambiguous and disenfranchised grief

The losses that go unrecognised

There are two ideas from the grief literature that are so useful for the people who most need this workbook that I want to introduce them directly.

Ambiguous loss. And disenfranchised grief.

Ambiguous loss

Ambiguous loss was described by the family therapist Pauline Boss: loss that comes without the clarity or closure that death, however painful, provides.

It takes two forms.

The first is someone physically absent, but psychologically present — a person who has died without a body being found, a child who was abducted, an estranged family member whose absence is never resolved.

The second, and more common, is someone physically present, but psychologically absent — a parent with dementia who no longer recognises you, a partner who has withdrawn so completely that the relationship is a shell of what it was, an addiction that has taken someone away while their body remains.

Ambiguous loss is particularly hard to grieve, because the normal processes of mourning aren't available. You cannot hold a funeral for someone who is still alive. You cannot mourn an estrangement with the same support that surrounds a death.

The loss is real. The container for it does not exist. And so it tends to be carried — quietly, and indefinitely, without resolution.

Disenfranchised grief

Disenfranchised grief is a term introduced by the researcher Kenneth Doka: grief that isn't acknowledged or validated by the social world around the person experiencing it.

This happens for a few reasons.

Sometimes the relationship isn't seen as significant enough to warrant serious grief — the end of a friendship, a relationship that was never formally committed, the loss of a colleague who mattered far more than the word 'colleague' implies.

Sometimes the loss itself isn't recognised — reproductive loss, the loss of a pet, the loss of a role or an identity.

And sometimes the griever isn't seen as entitled to grieve — a former partner excluded from mourning, someone whose complicated relationship with the person who died makes their grief seem ambiguous or out of place.

What all of these share is the absence of social permission. And that absence is not neutral.

The acknowledgement of grief does real psychological work. It confirms the loss was real. It gives the feelings somewhere to go. It communicates that what happened mattered, and that your pain makes sense.

When that acknowledgement is missing, the grief has to be carried alone. And grief carried alone tends to go underground — not resolved, but hidden. Where it keeps shaping behaviour, relationships, and wellbeing in ways that are very hard to trace back to their source.

Exercise 3 Has your grief been recognised?

By others

Thinking about the losses you named in Section 1 — have they been acknowledged by the people around you as significant?

By you

Or have you minimised them yourself — told yourself you had no right to feel so bad, that others had it worse, that you should be over it by now?

What it has cost

Write about the specific ways particular losses have gone unacknowledged — by others, or by you. What has that lack of acknowledgement cost you?

SECTION 3

How grief actually works

And the myth of the stages

Almost everyone has heard of the five stages of grief — denial, anger, bargaining, depression, acceptance — introduced by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross in her 1969 work on death and dying.

The model has been so widely adopted that, for many people, it has become the main way they understand grief.

And it has caused, I think, a fair amount of harm. Not because Kübler-Ross's observations were wrong, but because the way the model gets used suggests grief is linear — a predictable sequence, with a definite end point.

It is not.

The research on grief — which has grown enormously since her foundational work — paints a much more complex, much more individual, and ultimately much more hopeful picture.

What the research actually shows

Grief is not linear. People don't move through stages in order. They move back and forth. They get stuck. They feel fine, and then are ambushed by a wave of feeling months or even years later. The same person can feel acceptance in the morning and acute anguish by the afternoon, and something like peace again by evening. This is not a failure to grieve correctly. It is how grief works.

Grief is not uniform. People grieve very differently — in how intensely they feel, how openly they express it, how long it takes, what helps. The dominant cultural model, which prizes open emotional expression and 'processing' feelings out loud, simply doesn't describe how many people grieve. And treating those who grieve differently — more quietly, more practically, faster or slower — as though they are doing it wrong causes real harm.

Grief does not have a fixed end point. The goal isn't to stop feeling the loss. It is to find a way to carry it that lets life continue — to integrate it, rather than be consumed by it. Many people keep what researchers call a continuing bond with what or whom they have lost — a relationship with the absence that changes over time, but doesn't simply end. This isn't pathological. It's normal.

Grief can be delayed. People under real practical pressure after a loss — who have to function, who have to care for others, who can't afford to fall apart — sometimes find that grief arrives much later, once the pressure eases. Delayed grief is no less real. And it can be frightening when it comes, because it may feel out of proportion to what's currently happening. Understanding that it is delayed grief, not a breakdown, can be an enormous relief.

The dual process model

One of the most useful frameworks to come out of contemporary grief research is the dual process model, developed by Margaret Stroebe and Henk Schut.

Rather than stages, it describes grief as an oscillation between two orientations.

Loss-orientation — attending to the grief itself: feeling it, processing it, adjusting to what is gone.

And restoration-orientation — attending to the demands of life going forward: rebuilding, adjusting to new roles and circumstances, finding new sources of meaning.

Healthy grieving moves between the two. It doesn't stay fixed in either.

This is reassuring, because it normalises what so many grieving people find confusing. That you can feel devastated, and then laugh at a joke. That you can have a good day, and then feel guilty about it. Grief does not require constant suffering — and the stretches of restoration and forward movement are not a betrayal of the loss. They are part of how people survive it.

Exercise 4 How have you been grieving?

What you recognise

Looking at how grief actually works, what do you recognise in your own experience? Has it felt linear, or non-linear?

The way that's natural to you

Have you let yourself grieve in the way that is natural for you — or have you tried to grieve in the way you felt you were supposed to?

Delayed grief

Have you experienced grief arriving late — feeling something now that you couldn't afford to feel at the time?

Exercise 5 The grief that ambushed you

When it arrives unannounced

Grief often arrives unexpectedly — triggered by something small and apparently unrelated, surfacing just when you thought you were past it. Has this happened for you? What tends to trigger it?

What it feels like

What does it feel like when it arrives without warning? Understanding your own patterns — including the triggers — is a real step toward meeting them with more compassion, and less alarm.

SECTION 4

How unprocessed grief shows up

In the body and in behaviour

Grief that has never been given space to be felt does not simply disappear.

It goes somewhere. And where it tends to go is into the body, into behaviour, and into the patterns of daily life — often in ways that are very hard to connect back to their source.

In the body

The physical experience of grief is real, and well documented.

In the acute phase, it produces responses that closely resemble physical illness: disrupted sleep, altered appetite, fatigue, chest tightness, difficulty breathing, a sense of heaviness. The brain's response to loss activates some of the same pathways as physical pain — which is why the language of heartbreak is not only metaphor.

Grief that has been carried a long time without expression tends to settle in the body as chronic tension, unexplained physical symptoms, or a generalised flatness — a dampening of aliveness that touches everything without being clearly locatable.

Some people describe it as numbness: not acutely painful, but not fully alive either. Others carry it as a persistent weight — a heaviness present even in moments that should feel light.

In behaviour

Unprocessed grief shows up in behaviour in ways rarely connected to their source.

Chronic busyness — staying so occupied that there is no room for the feelings to surface.

Difficulty with closeness — a guardedness that grew up as protection against further loss.

Anger out of proportion to its trigger — because anger is often the more reachable surface emotion, particularly for people who learned that sadness wasn't safe.

Difficulty with transitions, anniversaries, or any moment that carries the flavour of an ending.

A low-level sadness so familiar it no longer registers as sadness — just as the way things are.

And perhaps most tellingly: a difficulty being fully present in joy. When grief has gone unprocessed for a long time, it can place an invisible ceiling on happiness — a sense that it isn't quite safe to feel too good, too content, too at ease, because something might take it away.

This is not pessimism. It is the psyche's learned response to a loss that was never grieved.

Exercise 6 Where does your grief live?

In the body

Thinking about what you are carrying — the losses you named earlier — where do you sense it in your body?

In behaviour

And where do you recognise it in your behaviour? Which of the patterns above feel familiar, even if you hadn't previously connected them to grief?

Getting specific

Write as specifically as you can. The more precisely you can locate where the grief has gone, the more available it becomes to be gently worked with.

SECTION 5

What grieving actually requires

And what it does not

If grief cannot be skipped, argued away, or thought through — and it cannot — then the real question is: what does it actually need? What are the conditions under which grief moves, rather than staying lodged?

Permission

The first thing grieving asks for is permission.

This sounds simple. And yet it is the very thing most people with unnamed grief have not been able to give themselves.

Permission to acknowledge that something was lost. Permission to call it a loss — regardless of whether others recognise it, regardless of whether it comes with a socially approved form of mourning. Permission to feel what you feel about it, without the added burden of deciding whether your feelings are proportionate or justified first.

Space

The second thing grieving asks for is space — actual, protected time and attention given to the loss.

Not necessarily dramatic, or prolonged. But some deliberate turning toward, rather than the constant turning away.

Grief met in small doses, given regular attention, tends to move more reliably than grief ignored until it becomes overwhelming.

Witness

The third thing grieving asks for is witness.

This is what the rituals around death, imperfect as they are, try to provide: the experience of someone else acknowledging that something significant has happened, that the pain is real, that the loss matters.

For unnamed grief, that witness is often missing. One of the things this workbook can offer is a small measure of it. But real witness — from a trusted person, or from a therapist — tends to move grief in ways private reflection alone often cannot.

Time

The fourth thing grieving asks for is time — and a tolerance for the non-linearity we looked at earlier.

Grief is not efficient. It circles back. It takes longer than we think it should. It interrupts the parts of life that demand forward motion.

Learning to tolerate that — to trust that the circling is not a sign something is wrong, but simply grief doing what grief does — is itself a significant part of the work.

What grieving does not require

It does not require you to achieve closure — a word I am a little sceptical of, because it implies a door that can be firmly shut, and loss rarely works that way. What it asks for is integration: the loss becoming part of the story of your life in a way you can carry, rather than something that carries you.

It does not require you to stop loving, missing, or being connected to what was lost. Continuing to feel the loss, to miss what was, to hold someone or something in your heart after they are gone — this is not a failure to move on. It is the ongoing expression of something that mattered.

It does not require you to find meaning, or silver linings. The pressure to locate the lesson in loss, to be grateful for the growth, to turn suffering into wisdom — all of this can be useful, eventually, for some people. But imposed too early, it becomes a way of bypassing grief rather than moving through it. First the loss needs to be felt. The meaning, if it comes, comes later.

Exercise 7 What your grief needs

Listening for it

Thinking about the losses you've been reflecting on, what do you sense your grief most needs right now? More permission? More space? A witness? Simply time?

No wrong answers

There are no wrong answers here. The question is an invitation to listen to what is being asked of you — rather than what you think you should be doing.

Exercise 8 A letter to your loss

Optional

This one is optional — use it only if it feels right.

The letter

Write a short letter to someone, or something, you have lost. Not to send — just to say what has never been said. What you miss. What you wish had been different. What the loss has meant. What you are still carrying.

For you

You don't need to share it with anyone. It is for you. And for many people, putting into words what has only ever been felt is itself a real form of release.

SECTION 6

Finding meaning

When you and grief are ready

Listening to what grief may be trying to tell you

One of the things many people eventually discover about grief is that, alongside the pain, there can also be a quiet invitation.

Not an invitation to “move on.”

Not an invitation to explain away the loss or find a silver lining.

And certainly not an invitation to be grateful for what happened.

Meaning is not about making the loss acceptable.

As grief expert David Kessler writes, meaning is not found in the death itself. Meaning is found in what we do after the loss, in what we carry forward, and in how the experience changes us.

For a long time, grief may feel like it has only one message:

“This hurts.”

And that message deserves to be heard.

But over time, other messages sometimes begin to emerge.

Perhaps grief is reminding you of how deeply you loved.

Perhaps it is showing you what truly matters to you.

Perhaps it is highlighting needs that have gone unattended, relationships that matter, values you want to live by, or parts of yourself that need care and attention.

Sometimes grief asks:

“What do I want to carry forward?”

Sometimes it asks:

“What matters enough that I don’t want to lose it?”

And sometimes its message is simply:

“Love is still here.”

The relationship may have changed, but love does not disappear.

Meaning does not arrive on a schedule. It cannot be forced. And there is no requirement to find some profound life lesson.

For some people, meaning might involve telling stories about the person they lost, continuing traditions, or sharing what they learned from them with others.

For others, meaning might involve becoming more present with family, choosing a different way of living, advocating for something important, reconnecting with spirituality, or simply appreciating ordinary moments more deeply.

Sometimes meaning is surprisingly small.

It might be making your mother's recipe.

Listening to your partner's favourite song.

Tending a garden.

Speaking more kindly to yourself because of what you have lived through.

Meaning does not erase grief.

The sadness and the meaning often exist side by side.

In many ways, meaning becomes one of the ways love continues.

Reflection questions

There is no need to answer all of these. Let yourself be drawn to the ones that speak to you, and leave the rest. You can return to them another time.

1. If your grief had something important it wanted you to know, what might it be trying to tell you?

Write whatever comes to mind, even if it feels uncertain or incomplete.

2. What has this loss revealed about what matters most to you?

Consider relationships, values, priorities, or ways of living.

3. What qualities, lessons, or memories from the person you lost do you want to carry forward?

How might those continue to live through you?

4. Has this experience changed the way you see yourself, other people, or life itself?

In what ways?

5. Are there needs, feelings, or truths that grief has brought to your attention that you might otherwise have overlooked?

6. If love could take action, what might it look like now?

What is one way you could express that love in your life today?

7. What traditions, rituals, stories, or memories help you maintain a connection with the person or life that was lost?

8. What would it mean to honour this loss, rather than simply recover from it?

9. What do you hope you never lose from this relationship or this chapter of your life?

10. If meaning unfolds slowly, what might it be enough to remain curious about right now?

Remember, you do not need to have answers to these questions. Meaning is rarely something we discover all at once. More often, it is something that gradually reveals itself as we continue to love, remember, and live.

Exercise 9 Writing into the questions

However much feels right

Use this space to write into whichever of the reflection questions above drew you in. There is no need to be tidy or complete — a few honest sentences are worth more than a polished answer. Meaning tends to emerge in the writing, not before it.

SECTION 7

Finding the right level of support

From self-directed work to specialist care

Grief is one of the areas of human experience where self-directed work has the most genuine value — and also one where professional support can make a particularly real difference, when the grief is complex, prolonged, or has been carried alone for a very long time.

What you can do on your own

Naming the loss — clearly, specifically, without minimising it — is itself meaningful, and the exercises in this workbook are designed to support that. Many people find that writing about a loss, even privately, begins to shift something that has felt stuck.

Creating your own rituals of acknowledgement is undervalued, and genuinely useful. The reason death comes with rituals is that they provide a container — a structured moment in which the loss is marked, witnessed, honoured. For losses that arrive without rituals, making your own, however simple, can serve the same purpose. Lighting a candle. Writing a letter. Visiting a place that held meaning. Marking an anniversary. These small acts tell the psyche that the loss was real, and mattered.

Letting yourself feel, without immediately trying to manage or resolve the feeling, is one of the simplest and hardest things grief asks of us. Grief moves when it is felt. Emotions that are consistently suppressed don't disappear — they accumulate. Giving grief some of what it's asking for — through tears, through writing, through talking, through whatever form of expression feels most natural — tends to produce movement, rather than simply more pain.

Seeking the witness of trusted people — telling someone what you are carrying, and letting them simply be with you in it — matters more than most people realise. You don't need them to fix anything. You need them to know.

When a therapist can help

Therapy is particularly valuable for grief when the loss is ambiguous or disenfranchised and has never been properly acknowledged; when grief has been delayed or suppressed for a long time and is now surfacing with an intensity that feels unmanageable; when it connects to earlier losses that were also never processed, creating a cumulative weight far greater than any single loss would explain; when grief has become complicated — marked by prolonged, intense yearning, an inability to accept the reality of the loss, or significant impairment lasting more than a year; or when the isolation of carrying unnamed grief has become its own source of suffering.

In therapy, grief finds the witness it most needs. A skilled therapist does not try to move grief along faster than it is ready to move. They sit with it. They help you find words for what has not yet had them. They hold the loss alongside you, in a way that eases the isolation unnamed grief so reliably produces.

Compassionate Inquiry is particularly well suited to grief work — especially when the losses have early roots, when present grief connects to an earlier attachment wound or a childhood loss that was never

properly mourned. IFS is also valuable, particularly when parts of you have developed specifically to manage the grief — to keep busy, to stay strong, to not feel — and those protective strategies are now causing difficulties of their own.

When a psychiatrist may be needed

If grief has produced, or sits alongside, significant depression — persistent low mood, an inability to function, the loss of any capacity to feel — psychiatric assessment is appropriate. What's sometimes called complicated grief, or prolonged grief disorder, in its most severe forms may benefit from specific treatment approaches, and sometimes from medication to address the accompanying depression. Your GP is the right starting point for a referral.

A simple way to orient yourself

- Begin with self-directed work — naming, writing, creating ritual, seeking the witness of trusted people — if you have a supportive environment and the grief, while painful, is not significantly impairing your ability to function.
- Consider therapy if the grief has been carried alone for a long time; if it is complex or ambiguous; if it connects to earlier unprocessed losses; if it is producing prolonged difficulty functioning; or if the isolation of unnamed grief has become its own source of suffering.
- Seek psychiatric assessment if significant depression has developed alongside the grief, or if you are struggling to manage basic daily activities.

Whatever level of support feels right, the most important thing this workbook asks of you is simply this: take seriously what you are carrying. Give it the status of a real loss. Stop requiring it to justify itself before you'll let yourself grieve it. The losses that don't come with funerals are still losses. The grief they produce is still grief. And you are still allowed to mourn.

About Shelagh MacFarlane, MSc

Shelagh MacFarlane is a Canadian-British counselling psychologist with more than 20 years in private practice. She has lived in Southeast Asia for 26 years and works with clients across the world via Zoom. Before retraining as a psychologist, Shelagh had a career as a professional orchestral violinist — an experience that shaped her understanding of performance, perfectionism, and the psychological cost of maintaining a composed exterior when the interior is anything but.

Her approach

Shelagh works integratively, drawing on Internal Family Systems (IFS), Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), Compassionate Inquiry (developed by Dr Gabor Maté), inner-child work, Gestalt techniques, and mindfulness-based approaches. She does not apply a single model to every person. The work is shaped by who you are, where you are, and what you need. She works with individuals, couples, and families. Her particular areas of focus include anxiety, burnout, life transitions, relationship difficulties, identity questions, expat mental health, and the long-term psychological effects of growing up or living between cultures.

Qualifications and background

- MSc Counselling Psychology — United Kingdom
- Counselling Diploma — Canada
- Registered member, British Columbia Psychological Association (BCPA)
- Certified Executive Coach
- Member, International Practitioners of Holistic Medicine (IPHM)
- Trained in Compassionate Inquiry (Dr Gabor Maté)
- Former crisis line counsellor, Befrienders Malaysia
- Volunteer counselling: Malaysian Cancer Society, All Women's Action Society, UNHCR (supporting Afghan and Myanmar refugees)
- Communications and life-skills training across Asia, Africa, and the United States

Get in touch

Shelagh offers a free 15-minute initial consultation by WhatsApp or video call — no obligation, no pressure. This is a chance to ask questions, get a sense of whether the fit feels right, and understand what working together might look like. Sessions are conducted by video call at times that work across time zones. All enquiries are handled personally by Shelagh and treated with complete discretion.

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When the colour has drained out, and effort no longer seems to reach.

04 Grief That Doesn't Have a Name

For the losses that come without a funeral, and are grieved alone.

05 Navigating a Life Transition

For the uncertain middle — when one chapter has ended and the next has not begun.

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*Some losses are not seen.
Some griefs are not recognised.
Some endings do not come with rituals.
This workbook is for those losses.*



We live in a world that only makes space for certain kinds of grief. When our losses don't fit the expected script, we are left to carry them in silence. This workbook offers compassionate guidance, practical tools, and gentle space to honour the griefs that have no name but are deeply real.

INSIDE YOU'LL FIND:

-  The many forms of grief that don't come with funerals
-  Why unrecognised grief can be so isolating and confusing
-  How disenfranchised grief affects your mind, body and relationships
-  Tools to help you validate, express and move through your grief
-  Ways to find meaning, connection and self-compassion
-  Gentle guidance for creating a life that makes space for both what was lost and what is still possible

*Your grief is real. Even if no one else sees it.
Even if no one else understands it.
You are not making it up.
You are not alone.
This grief matters. You matter.*



Shelagh MacFarlane

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20+ years in private practice

Supporting thoughtful,
lasting change through
insight, compassion,
and connection.



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