

## “7 Things Every Spiritual Director Must Know about Companioning Those in Grief”

Jan Lundy, D.Min., Psy.D.,  
Director, The Metta Center

1. It is vital that spiritual directors have engaged in the deep work of acknowledging their personal losses and tending to their feelings of grief. Unless we have done so, we cannot fully understand the spiritual nature of grief work. We cannot compassionately care for others in grief if we have not done the same for ourselves.
2. There are *no stages of grief* that one passes through. Unfortunately, this belief is prevalent in our culture due to a misunderstanding of the work of Elisabeth Kubler-Ross who theorized 5 stages of grief that *dying* people may go through, not grievers themselves.
3. There is no timeline for grief. Grief takes as long as it takes. Every person’s grief is unique and needs to be addressed as such. Grief is a natural (spiritual) process not a medical or psychological disorder.
4. Because of the many misconceptions about grief and loss in our culture (we live in a death avoidant society), psychoeducation\* is necessary for those in grief, their families, and we who companion them; the focus being on normalizing grief while meeting their physical, cognitive, emotional, social and spiritual needs. Meeting these needs fosters acceptance, integration of loss, and reorientation toward a meaningful life.
5. There is no such thing as *closure* when it comes to grief. Feelings of grief may never go away, though we hope they will soften with time. Grief is present because we were deeply attached to something or to someone we loved. Grief and love are two sides of the same coin; we grieve because we love.
6. Grief companions need to have a clear understanding of their personal beliefs about grief and loss, dying and the afterlife. This is necessary so we don’t impose our “agenda” on those in grief through religious expectations or platitudes of comfort which minimize their experience. It is crucial we know what is appropriate to say so we don’t cause further pain, shame or guilt.
7. Grief companioning requires the deepest listening yet, as well as unlimited patience. Grief moves slowly and sacred stories of grief take time to unfold—sometimes years for unacknowledged grief to come to the surface. Frances Weller states that the soul moves as slowly as a glacier, and because grief work is soul work, we need to slow down the process in order to provide compassionate presence and care to those in grief—no matter how long this takes.

*\*Grief Psychoeducation is a process of educating those in grief about grief itself, as well as the mourning process. This enhances well-being through coping strategies, support, helpful resources, and meaningful engagement.*

©2025, Janice L. Lundy

Dr. Jan Lundy is the Director of The Metta Center which offers specialized training in spiritual companionship, including Certification in Grief Companionship. She is a spiritual director and pastoral counselor in private practice. Jan is pleased to serve as the Gerald May Professor of Spiritual Direction and Counseling at The Graduate Theological Foundation.

To learn more visit:

[www.GriefCompanionTraining.com](http://www.GriefCompanionTraining.com)

[www.JanLundy.com](http://www.JanLundy.com)