



# **POLITICAL GRIEF TOOLKIT**

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*Political grief can be overwhelming,  
leaving us feeling isolated, powerless, or  
uncertain about how to move forward.*

This toolkit is designed to guide you through the experience, helping you name your grief and explore practices that promote healing and resilience.

The first sections provide foundational insights into political grief, offering practical strategies and habits that can be applied across various grief experiences. Later sections focus on specific aspects of political grief, providing tools and resources you can turn to when they resonate most. Finally, a special section (for those interested) explores the intersection of spirituality and political grief, offering additional pathways for meaning and connection.

**Whether you read this toolkit cover-to-cover or use it as a resource during critical moments, it aims to support you in finding clarity, strength, and hope amid the challenges of political grief.**

You may have picked up this toolkit because the weight of political events feels deeply personal and inescapable.

- Perhaps you've experienced a profound sense of loss—loss of rights, safety, or hope.
- Or maybe you're grappling with anger, disillusionment, or helplessness in the face of injustice.
- Political decisions, societal shifts, or the erosion of shared values may have left you questioning your place in the world or mourning a future that feels uncertain.

If any of this resonates, you're not alone.

Political grief is a real and valid response to living in tumultuous times, and this toolkit was created to help you navigate those feelings and find constructive, healing paths forward.

Brad and Jeremy bring a powerful combination of expertise, passion, and experience to guide readers through the complexities of political grief. Brad's 20+ years of leadership in change management equip him to help individuals navigate uncertainty and develop strategies for meaningful personal and societal impact. His dedication to empowering others to build a better world aligns seamlessly with the transformative journey this toolkit offers.

Jeremy's extensive clinical experience, particularly with individuals and families navigating identity and life transitions, provides a compassionate and informed lens to understanding grief's multifaceted nature. His commitment to education, ethics, and reflexivity ensures thoughtful, grounded guidance rooted in both practice and research.

Together, Brad and Jeremy offer a unique blend of leadership, empathy, and expertise, making them the right guides for this challenging yet hopeful moment.

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# INTRODUCTION TO POLITICAL GRIEF

*Political grief is a deeply personal and collective response to the political, social, or cultural shifts that impact our sense of stability, identity, or belonging.*

It arises when we experience loss tied to societal changes—whether that’s the erosion of rights, the dismantling of institutions we rely on, or the disconnection from values we hold dear.

Unlike other forms of grief, political grief often lacks clear rituals or community acknowledgment, making it harder to process. Instead, it can manifest as frustration, hopelessness, fear, or even apathy, leaving us questioning how to move forward.

This grief doesn’t just affect the individual experiencing it—it ripples through relationships with friends, family, and communities. Disagreements about values or the interpretation of events can strain or sever relationships, while shared grief may deepen connections but also amplify collective despair.

For many, political grief creates tension between wanting to stay informed and engaged while also preserving mental and emotional well-being. The weight of these emotions can lead to burnout, withdrawal, or a sense of helplessness that feels insurmountable.

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***“Within the acknowledgement and processing of political grief lies immense power.”***

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Yet, within the acknowledgment and processing of political grief lies immense power. Confronting grief allows us to turn pain into purpose, finding meaning and agency amid uncertainty. It offers a pathway to transform despair into action, isolation into connection, and loss into a catalyst for personal and collective growth.

This workbook is a tool to help you navigate that journey—offering practical strategies, insights, and reflective practices to turn political grief into a source of resilience and strength for yourself and those around you.

# IDENTIFYING MY GRIEF





## IDENTIFYING MY GRIEF

Political grief is not just mourning the outcome of an election. An election or other political moment may be connected to your political grief, but most likely, the grief you feel is about more than a loss. In fact, you could feel political grief even after the candidate or policy you support won.

The following prompts are designed for you to use in processing and identifying what you are presently grieving.

Since grief, including political grief, can come and go – reappearing when we least expect it – this short questionnaire is something you can revisit and use to reflect on your grief.

- Describe and articulate what you are grieving, the best you can. It may be helpful to create a word cloud or mind map to assist in this process.
- What are the stories your mind tells you about what you are grieving?
- What emotions come up before, during, and after a grief moment?
- What does your body feel before, during, and after a grief moment?
- What do you feel like doing, saying, or expressing before, during, and after a grief moment?
- What have you found helpful?
- What have you found that is not helpful?

An abstract graphic design featuring a dark blue background. On the left, a tall white vertical bar extends from the top. Below the text, there are six smaller light blue vertical bars of equal height. The bottom half of the image is filled with a pattern of alternating red and white vertical stripes, resembling the stripes of the American flag.

# PRACTICES TO HELP

## PRACTICES DURING POLITICAL GRIEF

We all need to develop skills and habits to help us through our grief. Political grief is no exception.

This section offers a variety of tools, practices, and habits you can build into your routine or use when needed. Some are simple, others a little more difficult. Most will be familiar, especially if you've dealt with grief before. Don't dismiss them because of familiarity or simplicity, there is still power in small actions and shifts in our mindsets.

### GRATITUDE

Expressing gratitude – being thankful – is connected with many benefits for physical health and mental health. It can reduce disease risk and anxiety as well as improve moods and sleep. That's a lot of power for this simple act.

Of course, being thankful when it feels like the world is falling apart – when we're afraid, hopeless, angry, or full of regret – can be challenging. But being grateful doesn't have to be overwhelming or expressed in elaborate ways.

You will benefit the most from Gratitude if you practice it *every day*. We can be thankful for a silly meme sent from a friend, for the way the sunlight beams through the window, for the comfort of a heavy blanket. Our thanksgiving doesn't have to be profound, it just needs to be noticed and acknowledged.

Consider these strategies for practicing gratitude:

- ***Gratitude Journal.*** Dedicate a notebook or journal as a place to gather the things you're thankful for. Carry it with you and add items throughout the day. Or dedicate time in your daily routine to add your thanksgiving for the day.
- ***End of Day Review.*** As you finish up the day, identify at least three things you're thankful for during the day.
- ***#Gratitude Images.*** Build a habit of taking photographs of things you see that make you grateful. Spread your gratitude by posting them on your Instagram or social media account.
- ***Gratitude Walk.*** Combine gratitude with some fresh air. Take a walk to identify things to be grateful for in your surroundings or in your day.
- ***Thank You Letter Habit.*** You can feel better and make someone else feel better when you share your gratitude. Start a daily or weekly habit of writing thank you messages to people you're thankful for – or for something they did that you're grateful. A handwritten note dropped in the mail can brighten someone's day, but so can a simple text message of gratitude.
- ***Kickstart Gratitude*** with the Mayo Clinic Health System's free [Discover Gratitude](#) program. This email-based, 30-day program sends you daily emails for a month with prompts, videos, and aids to develop your gratitude muscle.

## JOURNALING

Expressive writing can help you process complex emotions and enable you to work through your grief constructively. When grieving, it is important to acknowledge your feelings and release your thoughts. Writing your thoughts can provide clarity and help you better understand ourselves.

Journaling is different from just thinking or reflecting in your head. You don't have to have special notebooks, pens, or paper (but you can!), but here are two things to keep in mind for journaling:

- ***Write by hand.*** Try to avoid journaling on your electronic device, typing it on your computer, or just thinking the thoughts in your head. There's something powerful about writing things out by hand. Bonus points if you try it with your non-dominant hand.
- ***Don't worry about punctuation, spelling, or grammar.*** Use the words or images that best express your feelings and thoughts. Write the things that need to be said. Don't worry about editing for grammar or for others. You're journaling just for you.

In the "Identifying My Grief" section of this toolkit, you already practiced some expressive writing. That tool can be repeated as often as you like to help process your grief.

Later sections of this toolkit also provide useful journaling prompts for reflecting during the different elements of political grief.

## PHYSICAL CARE

Our mental and physical health are extremely interconnected. As such, the things that are good for our physical bodies are almost always good for our mental health, too. Eating well, getting plenty of sleep, and physical activity are helpful in managing our political grief.

Move your body – especially outdoors, because nature has also proven to reduce stress and improve mental wellbeing. And it can be a welcome reprieve from politics!

Some things to try:

- **10,000 Steps.** Set a goal to get 10,000 steps every day. Most people get around 1,000 steps in 10 minutes in a casual walk. Setting a similar goal for your day can keep you moving throughout the day.
- **Get 7+ hours of sleep.** People who sleep at least 7 hours a night tend to have less health problems than those who sleep less than that. Set a routine for getting to bed, stay off screens before bedtime, and make sleep a priority. (A daily nap is also good for you!)
- **Eat well.** Good nutrition can help you feel better. It's not necessary to give up snacks or treats that comfort you, but don't exchange them for nutritious food. Be mindful (but don't judge) when you notice emotions guiding your hunger or food choices.
- **Find a walking buddy.** A friend in the evening, a neighbor in the morning, or a coworker at lunch can make a great walking buddy. Having someone

scheduled to join you for a walk can add just the right amount of peer pressure to keep you moving.

- ***Join a fitness class or sports club.*** There are often many options for joining a regular fitness class, pickleball club, or gym. Get active trying something new or getting back into an activity you may have long since given up.

## COMMUNITY

Being in community and avoiding isolation is perhaps one of the most important practices for dealing with your political grief.

Already in this section, there have been multiple tools suggested to be done *with others*. That's because being in community is a vital part of mental health, healing, and handling our grief. Lean in to involvement and time with your community, especially in person when possible.

Community can be hard . . . especially if your community tends to affiliate differently than you do or may not be feeling the grief you're experiencing. So here are some things to consider about community:

- ***Be with safe people.*** Being in community doesn't require you to put yourself into groups where you cannot be yourself – with all your feelings, grief, and ideas. Be sure you are safe – physically and emotionally – as you engage with others, join gatherings, or attend personal events. If a community or event becomes

unsafe, give yourself permission to leave without needing to defend your choices to anyone.

- ***Create connections outside of politics.*** Talk with friends and family about non-political topics. Get and stay connected without needing to argue over policy or candidates, and without needing to explain in detail the underlying reasons for your political grief. Let yourself be loved and love on others, even while seeing the world differently. Time for political discussions, debates, and healthy arguments can come later.
- ***Honor relationships.*** It can be possible to honor and care for others who don't give honor in return. Find ways to honor relationships and people you care about in healthy ways that align with your values. You don't have to make peace with your "crazy uncle" who sees the world and politics completely differently, but it is often possible to honor the relationship by being with him while also protecting your safety. So, don't avoid the holiday dinner with family, find ways to engage safely and in ways that show your love and care.
- ***Communicate about your grief.*** Be purposeful in telling others about your grief experience. This can help prevent misunderstandings if you're not "yourself" around others or if you grow disconnected because of your grief. You could do this in a written letter or email shared with friends.



## SET BOUNDARIES

Setting healthy boundaries while grieving can help provide space for healing and other positive activities to occur. You can set boundaries for relationships and for your time to protect your mental space and to maintain healthy relationships.

- ***Focus on what you can control.*** One reason political grief can be overwhelming is because there is so much outside of your control. First, identify what is within your control. Make a list. You might include things like how you spend your time, how you react or respond, who you interact with, and what you will do with your feelings.
- ***Limit your news consumption.*** When feeling overwhelmed with political grief, it may be helpful to step away from political news either completely (for a time) or in a limited way.
  - *Turn off news alerts and notifications.*
  - *Choose 1 or 2 trusted new sources you want to stay connected with.*
  - *Set a limit to how much you will engage with this new source each day or week.* Consider choosing to read only one daily news compilation email, or to watch one local news show to stay up-to-date, or to spend only 15 minutes consuming news each day.
  - *Keep out of the comments sections – as a commenter or reader.*

- **Curate your social media.** It may be helpful while experiencing political grief to take a break or limit your social media intake and participation. Rather than giving it up completely (or unfriending everyone), you can use social media settings to curate your own experience: reset your feed, mute or hide accounts you may want to connect with in the future but don't need to see right now, or change your privacy settings for your posts. Stay connected with safe people you know rather than getting pulled into the "suggested posts," bots, memes, or political debates. You may also choose to ask a friend to help with this task if you want to protect yourself from exposure to certain content.
- **Set boundaries for conversations.** It's okay to end a conversation or a topic of a conversation to protect your own mental space or to help maintain a healthy relationship. In doing so, you don't have to defend or explain your boundaries; just be respectful and move on. Here are some pocket phrases you may want to use:
  - *"I'm hearing how passionate you are about this. I'm feeling overwhelmed with this topic. Can we talk about something else?"*
  - *"I appreciate that you want to talk to me about this, but I'm not able to right now. Can we chat about it later?"*
  - *"I'm not feeling comfortable with this topic. Thank you for understanding."*

- *“I’m concerned that this discussion might negatively impact our relationship. I think we should pause on this particular topic.”*
- *“I need to leave this conversation.”*

## SHIFT YOUR FOCUS

Change your focus from politics to other things that need your attention – family, friends, your booklist, or projects that can make a difference for others.

Take breaks from political activities. Build breaks into your schedule and, if possible, plan time off or to get away from your normal daily routines.

Learn a new skill online or from a friend or expert, start a new hobby, or return to an old one – especially something you know to be soothing. Need some ideas:

- **Arts & crafts.** Calligraphy, crochet, cross stitch, drawing, jewelry making, knitting, model cars, origami, painting, photography, scrapbooking, tie dying, woodworking
- **Performance.** Acting, baton twirling, beatboxing, choir, comedy, dancing, karaoke, puppetry, singing
- **Interests.** Arcade games, astrology, being a fan of ..., board games, computers, fantasy football, fixing cars, garage saleing, geocaching, magic, shopping, travel
- **Outdoors.** Archery, astronomy, ATVs, beachcombing, bicycling, bird watching, camping, dumpster diving,

fishing, hiking, horseback riding, hunting, motorbikes, rafting, rock climbing, sailing, skateboarding, surfing

- **Collecting.** Antiques, artwork, dolls, books, buttons, coins, cards, comic books, leaves, posters, seashells
- **Service.** Candy striper, food collection, building houses, mentoring youth, reading to elderly or kids, rescuing animals, tutoring

## TEND SOMETHING

Find something to tend – something outside of yourself (and politics) you can use your hands and body to take care of. Water the grass, plant seeds, mend a fence, mow the yard, weed the garden, care for a pet, refurbish a piece of furniture, power wash something, the options are nearly endless. The goal is to notice the goodness inside of us still has power to make a difference in the world around us.

## MINDFULNESS

Focusing on the present moment helps reduce anxiety about future political events and centers your emotions. There are many tools to practice mindfulness – from breathing or meditation exercises to coloring books. Mindfulness works best when you do one thing at a time without making judgements of yourself or others.

To be mindful:

- **Observe.** This brings you into the present. Focus on one thing at a time and notice without describing it. Observe

things inside yourself or outside of yourself. If you get distracted, notice it and return your focus.

- **Describe.** Put words to what you notice. Describe only what you observe and don't add or subtract from what you see. You can describe things inside yourself or outside yourself. Describe without making interpretations or judgements.
- **Participate.** Be fully present in whatever activity you're doing. If possible, lose yourself in the activity. Participating can be really hard.

## SELF-COMPASSION & COMPASSION FOR OTHERS

Be gentle with yourself and don't let your inner voice be too harsh. Identify times you have needed compassion or patience and remember those times when interacting with others who need your compassion or patience.

Try this meditation script for self-compassion:

- 1) Begin by getting comfortable. Move from doing to non-doing. Bring attention to your breathing. Follow your breath as it comes in and then out of your body without trying to change it. Simply be aware of it and any feelings associated with it. Give full attention to each in breath and then to each out breath.
- 2) Be in the moment with each breath. If distracting thoughts arise, acknowledge them without becoming involved and return to this practice.

- 3) Take a moment to set an intention for this practice. For example, “to open my heart,” “to cultivate loving-kindness,” or “to care for myself.”
- 4) Bring to mind a person or pet you are happy to see and feel deep love. Imagine or sense them and notice the feelings that arise in your body – maybe a smile or warmth. Whatever it is, allow it to be felt.
- 5) Let go of this person or pet and continue to keep in awareness the feelings that have arisen.
- 6) Bring yourself to mind now and see if you can offer loving kindness to yourself by letting these words become your words:

*May I be safe. May I be happy. May I be healthy.*

*May I live in peace, no matter what I am given.*

*May my heart be filled with love and kindness.*

- 7) Notice the feelings and sensations that arise and let them be. Now try offering loving kindness to someone who supports you. Bring that person to mind and let these words become your words:

*May you be safe. May you be happy. May you be healthy.*

*May you live in peace, no matter what you are given.*

*May your heart be filled with love and kindness.*

- 8) Notice the feelings and sensations that arise and let them be. Once feelings for a loved one flow easily, turn your attention to someone with whom you have difficulty – not the most difficult person, maybe someone who brings feelings of irritation. See if you can

let these words become your words as you keep this person in awareness:

*May you be safe. May you be happy. May you be healthy.*

*May you live in peace, no matter what you are given.*

*May your heart be filled with love and kindness.*

- 9) Notice the feelings and sensations that arise and let them be. Now bring to mind the community you are part of. Imagine your family, colleagues, or neighbors. Fan out your attention until you include yourself in this offering of loving kindness as you let these words become your words:

*May we be safe. May we be happy. May we be healthy.*

*May we live in peace, no matter what we are given.*

*May our hearts be filled with love and kindness.*

The image features a dark blue background. On the left, there is a vertical white bar. To its right, the text 'PERSONAL CARE PLAN' is written in large, white, bold, sans-serif capital letters. At the bottom of the image, there is a horizontal band with a pattern of vertical stripes. This band is divided into two main color sections: a red section on the left and a white section on the right. The white section contains six vertical blue bars of equal height, which are evenly spaced.

# PERSONAL CARE PLAN



# PERSONAL CARE PLAN

1. List the self-care habits **you are using now** to manage your political grief and stay healthy:

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

2. List the self-care habits **you would like to use** but are not currently practicing:

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

3. Identify the **obstacles** keeping you from practicing these habits:

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

4. Identify **solutions** to address these obstacles:

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

5. Select **one habit** you want to begin practicing and complete the sentences below:

Today, I commit to \_\_\_\_\_

I want to do this because \_\_\_\_\_

I will accomplish this by \_\_\_\_\_



# ELEMENTS OF POLITICAL GRIEF

## ELEMENTS OF POLITICAL GRIEF

Grief presents itself in our bodies and lives in different ways – it can even appear to go away completely only to surprise us in a reappearance later.

Many people are at least familiar with the basics of the Kübler-Ross Model, commonly known as the Five Stages of Grief. This model helps us remember grief presents in different ways, is cyclical and non-linear, and is different for each person. But these five stages are neither universal nor exhaustive.

Since grief is experienced in a variety of ways (not in a set of stages, phases, or steps), we use the term *elements* to look at the multitude of ways one might experience political grief. The elements highlighted in the *Political Grief Toolkit* include:

- **DENIAL:** *disbelief or refusal to acknowledge the facts of the situation*
- **ANGER:** *frustration and resentment in response to a loss or injustice*
- **FEAR & UNCERTAINTY:** *insecurity following a loss of stability or trust*
- **SAD & HOPELESS:** *sorrow, despair, or a deep sense of powerlessness*
- **REGRET:** *a deep sense of wishing things could have turned out differently, with an idealized view of what might have been*
- **ACTIVATED:** *a heightened sense of motivation, action, and engagement*

***These six elements appear to be common ways individuals experience political grief.*** The remainder of this toolkit focuses on these elements and strategies for understanding and experiencing these elements in healthy, constructive ways.

For each element, we've added tools for *Making Meaning*. The intent is to find ways to honor your grief and transform it toward purpose. This is inspired by David Kessler's "finding meaning" stage of grief added to the Kübler-Ross Model. But rather than being its own element, meaning can grow out of any of your grief experiences.

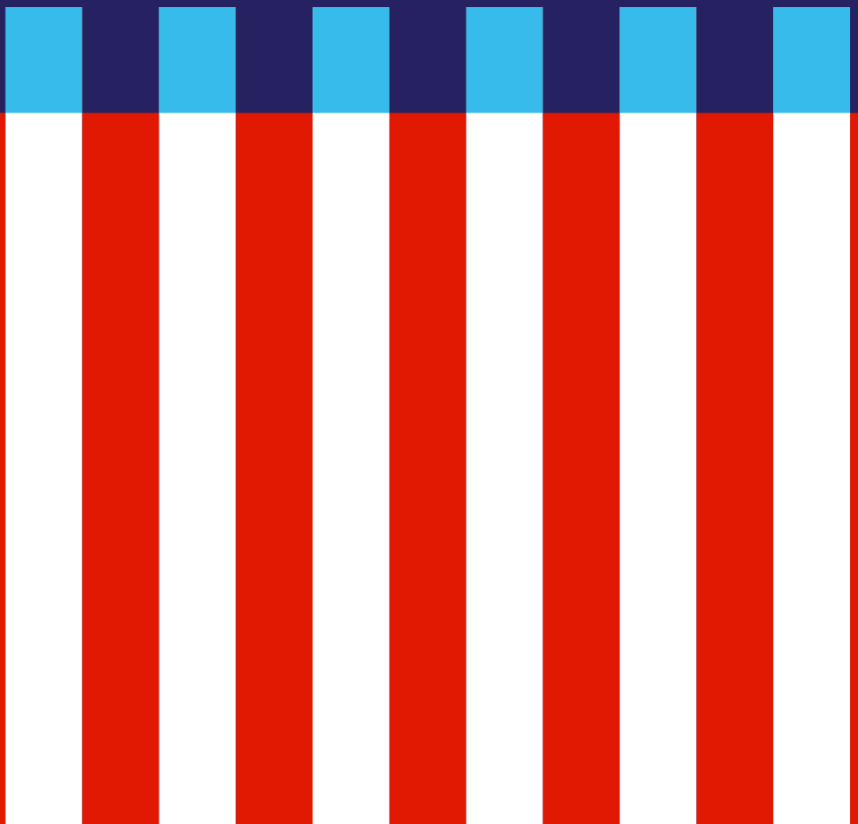
***These elements are not universal.*** You may not experience all of them. That's normal.

***These elements are not exhaustive.*** Your political grief experience will be unique to you and may include elements not identified. When none of these fit your experience, take a few moments to reflect and identify what you are feeling and experiencing. Revisit the "Identifying My Grief" section and reflect on the following questions as you identify the element.

- What does your experience sound like?
- What feelings am I experiencing?
- What might be at the root of this unique element?
- What steps might I take to constructively experience this unique element of grief?

The next section, "Assessing My Political Grief," is a simple tool to evaluate which element you may be experiencing. Use it as often as you like to find specific tools relevant to your current experience.

# ASSESSING MY GRIEF



# ASSESSING MY POLITICAL GRIEF

Grief is a complex, nonlinear process. It's normal to move between different elements of grief moment-to-moment – and especially over the course of a day, week, or month.

It is helpful to focus on tools that align with the grief element you're currently experiencing. This tool can be used repeatedly to help you identify which elements you most strongly identify with in that moment.

## INSTRUCTIONS

Reflect on how strongly you identify (on a scale of 1-5) with each statement to help assess which element you might be experiencing.

- \_\_\_ 1. I have a hard time accepting the reality of the political situation and often try to ignore it.
- \_\_\_ 2. I find myself thinking that the issues aren't as bad as they seem, or that they will "work themselves out."
- \_\_\_ 3. I avoid discussing or engaging with politics because it feels too overwhelming or confusing.
  
- \_\_\_ 4. I feel frustrated or angry about the current political situation, and it seems like everything is wrong.
- \_\_\_ 5. I often have outbursts or find myself thinking about how unfair things are.
- \_\_\_ 6. I feel like the people in power are not doing enough, or they are making things worse, and I want to express that frustration.

- \_\_\_ 7. I often feel a sense of loss or deep sadness.
- \_\_\_ 8. I find it hard to see a way forward or believe that positive change is possible.
- \_\_\_ 9. Sometimes I feel emotionally drained and disconnected from hope for the future.
  
- \_\_\_ 10. I often think about past actions or decisions I now regret, especially when it comes to political involvement.
- \_\_\_ 11. I find myself questioning if I could have done more or if I made the wrong choices in the past.
- \_\_\_ 12. I wish I had reacted differently to certain political events or participated in different ways.
  
- \_\_\_ 13. I feel driven to take action – whether it’s through activism, social media, or community involvement.
- \_\_\_ 14. I’m constantly thinking about how to make a difference and what I can do to create change.
- \_\_\_ 15. I find myself feeling energized, motivated, and focused on a cause.
  
- \_\_\_ 16. I often feel anxious or fearful about what the future holds.
- \_\_\_ 17. I’m uncertain about the direction we’re going or what the future might look like for me and others.
- \_\_\_ 18. I worry about the impact of current political decisions on my life, my loved ones, or society as a whole.

# ASSESSMENT SCORING

The remainder of this toolkit includes practices specific to the various elements of political grief. As you identify which element you are currently experiencing, you can go to the element’s section for relevant information.

If you scored HIGH on these questions:	You might be experiencing...	Visit the related section of this toolkit on page:
Questions 1-2-3	Denial	33
Questions 4-5-6	Anger	36
Questions 7-8-9	Sad & Hopeless	43
Questions 10-11-12	Regret	47
Questions 13-14-15	Activated	50
Questions 16-17-18	Fear & Uncertainty	40





# DENIAL

**The DENIAL element** of political grief can show up as disbelief in an outcome, avoidance of facing facts, or a refusal to acknowledge the significance of a political shift. It can lead to feeling numb and can delay the emotional experience related to political grief.

### **WHAT DENIAL COULD SOUND LIKE:**

- “This can’t be happening.”
- “There must be a mistake.”
- “They’ve got this wrong.”
- “This many people could not have voted for \_\_\_\_.”
- “The truth will come out eventually.”

### **REFLECTION EXERCISES FOR DENIAL ELEMENT:**

*Write out your responses to the following questions:*

- What about this situation is unbelievable? What is not surprising? What did I expect to happen?
- What can I control in this situation? What actions should I take next?
- How am I trying to escape from the new political reality?
- What am I feeling right now? How have I allowed myself to express these feelings? How have I bottled up these feelings?
- Who can I trust to talk to about what’s happening inside me right now? What step(s) can I take to share with them?

## **PRACTICES TO FOCUS ON DURING DENIAL:**

- ☐ *Somatic exercises* like grounding techniques, progressive muscle relaxation, or deep breathing can help you be in the moment, acknowledge your body and surroundings, and alleviate anxiety.
- ☐ Avoid an overwhelming flood of news by scheduling a *“Reality Check” Routine*.
  - Turn off or pause notifications, emails, or alerts from news sources.
  - Identify 1-2 trustworthy news sources.
  - Decide on a time limit for exploring the news . . . keep it short – under 15 minutes – when experiencing this element.
  - Schedule your daily time for checking your news source and set a timer as you begin. Put it away when time expires.

## **MAKING MEANING DURING DENIAL**

Educating yourself in small, bite-sized pieces about policies and political change can be a good way to cope with Denial and prepare yourself for continued political engagement.

Navigating denial may also help you articulate personal core values that can find new expressions through the grief process.

An abstract graphic design featuring a dark blue background. On the left, a tall white vertical bar extends from the bottom to the top. To its right, the word "ANGER" is written in large, bold, white capital letters. Below the word, there are six light blue vertical bars of equal height, each positioned above a white vertical bar. These white bars are set against a background of alternating red and white vertical stripes that span the width of the image.

# ANGER

**The ANGER element** of political grief emerges from frustration and resentment in response to a loss or injustice. The anger may be directed toward political figures, the political system itself, supporters of opposing positions, supporters of your own position, or even at yourself. This element can amplify feelings of powerlessness and of betrayal.

### **WHAT ANGER COULD SOUND LIKE:**

- “Why is this happening to me?”
- “How could they do this to me /people like me /our community?”
- “We’ll show them!”
- “I’m never speaking to them again!”

### **REFLECTION EXERCISES FOR ANGER:**

*Write out your responses to the following questions:*

- What are the main sources of my anger right now?
- How does my anger feel in my body?
- What beliefs, values, or identities of mine feel threatened?
- How would I like to respond to this anger?
- What might my anger say if it could speak?
- What would help me feel more at peace right now?
- What might I learn from this anger?

## PRACTICES TO FOCUS ON DURING ANGER:

- ❑ *Physical Activity* is especially important during the anger element. Plan regular releases of energy and pent-up adrenaline throughout your day and week. Take a walk/jog/run, dance, punch the couch, do jumping jacks, go to the gym.
  - Even better: *find others to join you!* Ask a friend to join you for a walk, at the gym, or get a group together to play ultimate frisbee, basketball, or table tennis.
- ❑ *4-7-8 Breathing* to calm yourself and anxiety. Take a deep breath in through your nostrils for a count of 4. Hold your breath for a count of 7. Forcibly release your breath through your mouth for a count of 8. Repeat.
- ❑ *Creative expression* of your anger and feelings. Listen to, sing/play, or write a song; draw, doodle, paint, or create a craft visualizing your feelings.

## MAKING MEANING DURING ANGER

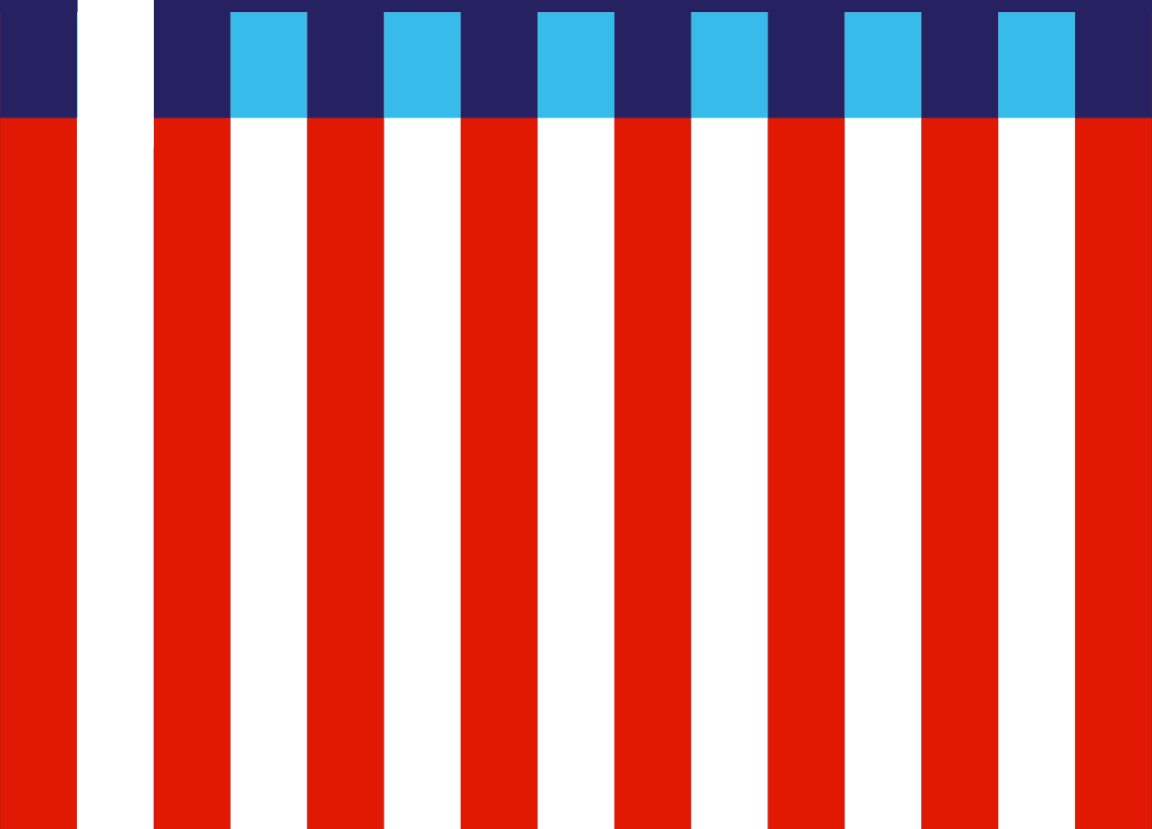
Anger can lead to feelings of powerlessness and often stem from resentment and frustration. As you look at making meaning out of this element of political grief, identify ways you might channel your anger toward advocacy.

A good way to begin: *practice compassion for others*. How?

1. Think of a time when you needed compassion.
2. Practice self-compassion by recognizing and validating your own feelings. Be gentle with yourself and your inner critic.

3. Try to see the situation from the other person's point of view. Ask yourself, "What might they be feeling or thinking right now?"
4. Find a way to express your compassion for this person – whether in a written note, a digital message, a phone call, and/or an act of service or needed gift.

# FEAR & UNCERTAINTY





**The FEAR & UNCERTAINTY element** of political grief often emerges in response to the loss of stability or trust in the political system, values, or people you previously depended on. Fear can also play a role in other elements like denial, anger, or sadness.

**WHAT FEAR COULD SOUND LIKE:**

- “I don’t know what’s going to happen to me /people like me / my community now.”
- “I no longer belong in this place.”
- “I cannot trust anyone.”
- “Can these relationships ever be mended?”
- “When will I ever feel safe again?”

**REFLECTION EXERCISES FOR FEAR & UNCERTAINTY:**

*Write out your responses to the following questions:*

- What specific political outcomes or changes am I most afraid of? What about them feels most unsettling to me?
- In what ways do I feel I’ve lost control or power in this situation? What, if anything, can I still control or influence in my response?
- What unknowns about the future feel most daunting?
- How do I typically cope with uncertainty in other areas of my life?

- What are some potential positive outcomes that could come from this political situation? How might I contribute to these?
- How is my political grief affecting my relationships or social interactions?

### **PRACTICES TO FOCUS ON DURING FEAR & UNCERTAINTY:**

- ☐ *Download your What-If's?* Make a written list of the specific scenarios, fears, and concerns you have. Writing them down will help get them out of your head. After getting them down on paper, evaluate their likelihood of happening. Consider similar challenges you've faced in the past and identify ways you can prepare for possibilities.
- ☐ *Build Community.* If you're not already involved in a community of people who may share your fears and concerns or that you can ally with, then find one. Attend the meeting or gathering, get re-connected, and go hang out with them – in person, virtually, and regularly.

### **MAKING MEANING DURING FEAR & UNCERTAINTY**

Our fears often grow when they conflict with our values and the things or people we cherish and love. Your current fears may be teaching you something valuable about yourself and your beliefs.

*What legacy do you want to build?* Identify your most important values and the contributions you want to make on the future. Allow these to guide your next steps and actions in the uncertain times ahead of you.



**SAD &  
HOPELESS**

**The SAD & HOPELESS element** of political grief is marked by feelings of sorrow and despair, often accompanied by a sense of powerlessness in the face of political outcomes or societal issues. There may be a deep sense of loss – of ideals, values, leaders, relationships, or a vision of the future. It often leads to feeling stuck, unmotivated, and disengaged.

### **WHAT SAD & HOPELESS COULD SOUND LIKE:**

- “What’s the point? Nothing I do matters.”
- “I just feel so alone in all this.”
- “I feel like I don’t belong in this world anymore.”
- “I don’t know how to move forward from here.”
- “I don’t understand how people can ignore what’s happening – it’s heartbreaking.”
- “I’m tired of hoping. It hurts too much.”
- “I feel like everything I believed in has been shattered.”
- “It feels like the world is going backward, and there’s nothing I can do about it.”
- “I want to check out and not care anymore, but I can’t seem to stop caring.”

### **JOURNALING DURING SAD & HOPELESS:**

*Write out your responses to the following questions:*

- What specific aspects of the political situation make me feel the most sad or disillusioned? How does this sadness feel in my body? Where do I feel it most strongly?

- What is making me feel like nothing will change?
- What would a hopeful future look like to me, and why does it feel so far away?
- What part of the world or society do I mourn for the most?
- How does this sadness or hopelessness affect my relationships with others?
- What does it feel like to be disconnected from the world right now?
- What can I do to be kind to myself in this moment of despair?
- How can I acknowledge the pain of others without it overwhelming me?
- When I think of giving up, what does that look like? What keeps me from fully giving in to that feeling?
- Who can I turn to for comfort, support, or to simply share my feelings without judgement? How might I express my grief to someone I trust?
- How might this sadness and hopelessness shape the way I engage with the world when I'm ready? What is one thing I'd like to do differently when I start feeling better?

### **PRACTICES TO FOCUS ON DURING SAD & HOPELESS:**

- ☐ *Get outdoors.* Nature improves your mood, use it to your advantage. Find an outdoor space or park (large or small) to walk, sit, lay, or play – take off your shoes and

feel the ground. Set goals to spend at least 30-60 minutes outdoors each day.

- ❑ *Limit news consumption.* Silence alerts and notifications from news sources. Instead, set a time limit and identify a source you will go to for checking in on the news. Your limit could be daily, weekly, or even monthly.
- ❑ *Practice self-compassion.* Validate your feelings, and if possible, share them with someone you trust. Don't over-analyze your feelings and be careful and compassionate with yourself. Give a voice to your feelings without diagnosing or pathologizing yourself.

## **MAKING MEANING DURING SAD & HOPELESS**

Don't isolate yourself in your grief – even when experiencing the element of Sad & Hopeless. Being in community with others is one of the most effective ways for us to experience our grief.

Visit with a friend or family member, meet someone new, or attend a community gathering. Don't let yourself substitute written messaging or emails for the power of an in-person visit or audio/video call. Hug, hold hands, feel human touch, cry together, laugh together, eat together – experience life with other humans.



# REGRET

**The REGRET element** of political grief often emerges as a deep sense of wishing things had turned out differently with a focus on missed opportunities, decisions or actions not taken, or an idealized view of how things could have been. It can feel like a burden or cycle of revisiting the past to replay actions or rethink “if only” circumstances. Regret is most often associated with actions not taken.

### **WHAT REGRET COULD SOUND LIKE:**

- “If only I had \_\_\_\_” (canvassed, talked to more people, convinced my family, posted more information, spoke up, voted, voted differently, supported a different candidate/policy).
- “What if more people had \_\_\_\_”
- “If we could just go back and do it differently.”
- “Why can’t things return to how they used to be?”
- “I wish that conversation had gone differently.”
- “I should have done more.”

### **REFLECTION EXERCISES FOR REGRET:**

*Write out your responses to the following questions:*

- What specific political choices or actions do I regret? What circumstances or beliefs led me to make these choices?
- Am I holding myself to an unrealistic standard in these situations? What might I say to a friend who has similar regrets?
- How can I be more compassionate with myself? What would it take for me to forgive myself (or others) for these regrets? How have you dealt with regret in other situations in your past?



- What actions can I take now to repair the damage done by my regrets (especially in my relationships with others)? What actions can I take now that align with my values?
- What lessons can I learn from my regrets? How might I use these lessons in the future?

### **PRACTICES TO FOCUS ON DURING REGRET:**

- ☐ *Download your If-Onlys.* If you could go back and change something, what would you do differently, why? Make a list of your answers. Writing them down will help get them out of your head space. Consider whether the idealized outcomes could have realistically occurred or if they might represent a desire for control.
- ☐ *Change your focus* to other things that need your attention (and are in your control). Hug your family, pet your cat, walk your dog, read a book, work on a project, create something new, make dinner with friends.

### **MAKING MEANING DURING REGRET**

To make meaning during Regret, work toward shifting your focus from the past to the present and future. Consider the lessons you can learn from your regrets and how that can improve your decisions and actions moving forward. Identify actions that you can take which align with your values, recognizing what you cannot change. Set small, positive goals that are not dependent on external political outcomes.



# ACTIVATED

**The ACTIVATED element** of political grief often transforms feelings of sorrow, fear, or regret into a heightened sense of motivation, action, and engagement. It can be a healthy channeling of emotional energy into constructive actions . . . but it can sometimes be a way to avoid handling our emotions and grief or moving on too fast.

### **WHAT ACTIVATED COULD SOUND LIKE:**

- “I’ve been here before, know what needs to be done, and I’m ready to fight.”
- “We don’t have time for that, we must act now.”
- “Get up, throw some dirt on it, and get moving.”
- “I wish things had turned out differently, and I’m ready to build the future I want to see.”

### **REFLECTION EXERCISES FOR ACTIVATED:**

*Write out your responses to the following questions:*

- What is the source of my enthusiasm and motivation to take action right now? How might anger or sadness be motivating me?
- What emotions am I hiding to avoid acknowledging or letting myself feel?
- How can I remain compassionate toward those who hold different views? What common ground can I find with others?
- How does engaging in this work help me process my political grief?

- How can I balance my passion for change and action with self-care and avoid burning out?
- How does the work I'm activated for align with the person I want to be, my values, and the relationships I want to have?

### **PRACTICES TO FOCUS ON DURING ACTIVATED:**

- ☐ *Avoid escaping or bottling up your feelings.* Regularly reflect on your motivation sources and allow yourself to experience other elements of political grief to build stronger resilience and impact.
- ☐ *Celebrate small wins of positive change.* Change often takes time and faces resistance. Notice the steps toward success – even the smallest ones! – and celebrate them along the way.
- ☐ *Find others who are Activated and participate in hobbies, service projects, or group gatherings* that make a positive difference in your community. Consider non-political ways to make a positive difference.
- ☐ *Encourage others with your engagement . . .* remembering to acknowledge and accept they may not be activated now but are experiencing other elements of grief.
- ☐ *Deepen your understanding and compassion for others* by seeking constructive discussions with people of different viewpoints.

## **MAKING MEANING DURING ACTIVATED**

Those who are experiencing the element of Activated in political grief are usually all about making meaning. (Except when they're Activated to avoid their grief. Don't do that.)

*Create a plan for engagement.* How will you engage with political issues going forward – volunteer, vote, stay informed – without burning out or getting overwhelmed? How will you stay in touch with what you're feeling? Clarify your values and legacy to better align your engagement. Build a community of others to stay accountable to healthy engagement and to share experiences of positive change in the world.



***SPECIAL ADDITION:***

**SPIRITUALITY  
& POLITICAL GRIEF**

## SPIRITUALITY IN POLITICAL GRIEF

The interconnectedness of physical, mental, and social health includes the aspect of spirituality. So, it should not be completely ignored in a toolkit for addressing political grief.

And yet, some have negative experiences with spirituality – particularly with spiritual communities that have failed to live up to their values. Unfortunately for some, spiritual communities further perpetuate political grief. If that's you, this may be a section you want to skip. That's why we've included this as a special section instead of integrating spirituality into the above sections.

But if you are a spiritual person, you may have noticed many places where spiritual practices would easily be applied into the practices provided. You are encouraged to adapt and integrate your own spiritual practices that help you engage in reflection, hope, calming, and connecting beyond yourself and your grief. This is good!

### HOW SPIRITUALITY CAN SUPPORT US IN POLITICAL GRIEF

- **Purpose.** Spirituality often helps people feel connected to a higher authority that can provide a sense of purpose and resilience even during struggles.
- **Ritual.** Spiritual practices such as prayer, meditation, or lighting candles can become rituals for processing grief. Participating in these rituals – individually or with others – can provide an opportunity to mourn in political grief.

- **Values.** Most spirituality streams provide a set of core principles or values (such as compassion and forgiveness). These can guide our thoughts and actions. It is helpful to align these values with your actions and your practices for coping with political grief.
- **Community.** Spiritual communities can provide connection and safe places for support, sharing, and expressing grief. Participating in gatherings, worship, or other activities with a spiritual community reminds us we're not alone.
- **Reflection.** Many spiritual practices encourage inner reflection and examination for personal transformation. These can be applied and helpful when struggling with political grief.
- **Language.** Ancient texts in spirituality (such as the Book of Psalms in the Bible) often provide language to express emotions and feelings – not just on a personal level, but even lamenting the actions of a group of people or a nation. These can help us process our sorrow, and perhaps help us move toward hope.

Each aspect of our physical, mental, emotional, social, and spiritual well-being impacts the other aspects. So, regardless of your stream of spirituality, focusing your heart and attention toward spiritual practices, spiritual community, and the language and values of spirituality can add an additional level of support in facing political grief.



## **We created this toolkit to support you in navigating the challenges of political grief.**

If you find that additional help or support would be beneficial, we encourage you to connect with trusted individuals in your community or seek professional assistance in your area.

Resources like [Inclusive Therapists](#) and [Therapy Den](#) offer directories that may be valuable starting points.

### **We want to hear from *you!***

Share your feedback, suggestions,  
questions, most (and least) helpful tools,  
or the unique elements of  
political grief you identified.

[REVIEW THE TOOLKIT →](#)



**Or contact us directly at  
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**DR. BRAD CARTER, EdD,** has been teaching others about leadership and change management for over 20 years while working as a non-profit, business, and educational executive.

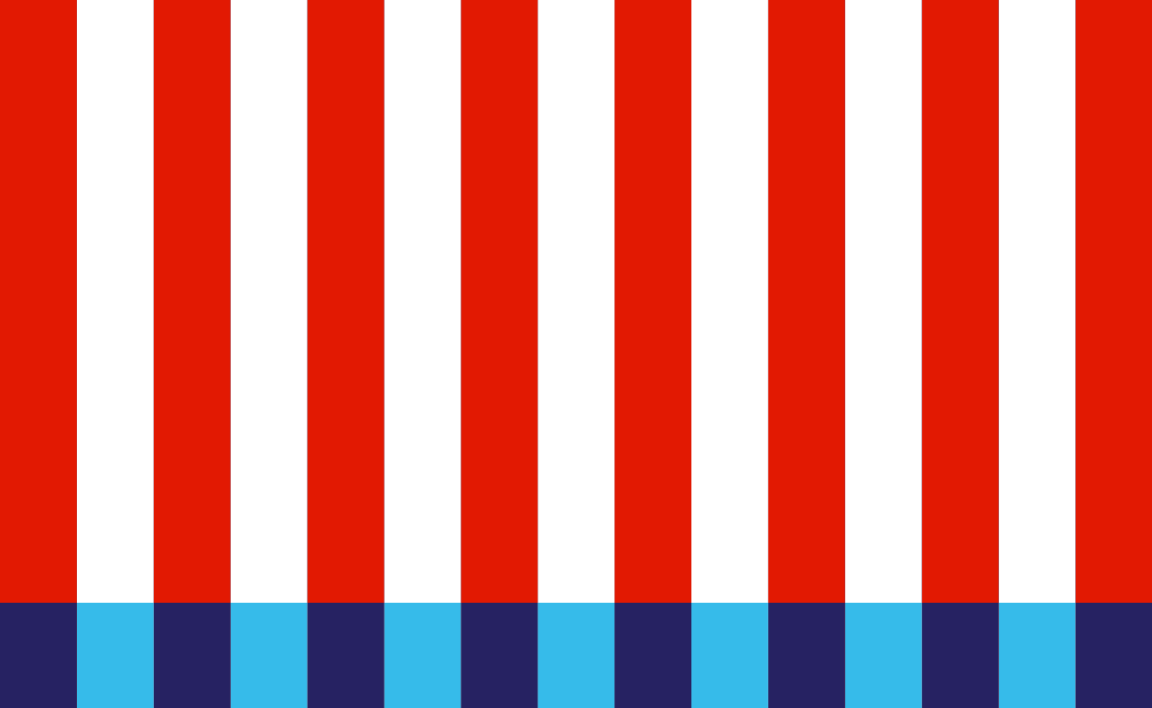


He is a trained coach helping executives and emerging leaders build a life of success personally and professionally. He is passionate about helping others succeed in making the world a better place.

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