



THE WORST GIRL GANG EVER

DOING YOUR GRIEF WORK



ADAPTED FROM

LIVING THE LIFE UNEXPECTED (BLUEBIRD/PANMACMILLAN, 2016/2020) BY
JODY DAY. CHAPTER 4 WWW.GATEWAY-WOMEN.COM/BOOK

Here are some ideas to help you continue with your grief work

- Read or re-read Chapter 4 in Jody Day's book, *Living the Life Unexpected*. It explores childless grief and includes sections on grieving as a couple, grieving as a solo woman and grandchildren grief, along with quotes from women (and men) around the world on their experience of grieving childlessness. www.gateway-women.com/book
- Become part of an online community for childless women, such as the Lighthouse Women online community or others that are springing up now. Research has shown that 'silent' members who read but don't post get as much healing from it as those who post comments and take a more 'active' part. www.gateway-women.com/community
- Join or set up a group for childless women in your area. It can be a social get-together in a coffee bar (or cocktail bar!), a picnic, dog-walking together, cultural outings or something more therapeutically minded where you meet up once a month (or weekly) to work through Jody's book together. The relief of being amongst kindred spirits cannot be underestimated. One of the wonderful and surprising aspects of a childless gathering, like those organised via the Lighthouse women online community, is that because you know you're not going to be ambushed by any child-related talk, you don't necessarily *need* to talk about your childlessness, but instead can have a gloriously interesting and fun conversation about just about anything!
www.gateway-women.com/community

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- **Find a grief counsellor or therapist – you might want to ask if they have experience with childlessness-related grief as many of us have found that therapists are not immune to the same unconscious prejudices as the rest of society. It’s important too that you feel you ‘click’ with them when you first meet them; if you don’t, keep looking. The quality of the relationship has a big impact on your experience, as this is an intimate relationship you’re entering, albeit a professional one. An infertility counsellor who hasn’t had children themselves might be a good choice: they ‘get’ grief... You’ll find more information about how to find a childless-aware therapist or coach on the the Gateway Women website. <https://gateway-women.com/resources/finding-a-counsellor/>**
 - **Explore the lives of childless and childfree women around the world, both contemporary and historical. Jody has been building a gallery of them, with photos and mini-biographies, for the last few years now and you can browse through more than 500 women’s stories. It’s good to know that others have gone before us into this unknown territory and have found a way through. www.bit.ly/gw-rolemodels**

- Spend time in nature. Nature is all about cycles of change, loss and rebirth. Spend a year really trying to notice the nature around you as it changes through the seasons. See how something always follows on from the end of something . . . Be reassured that you are a part of nature and part of the same process. There will be new growth in your heart and in your life. You might even like to go on some sort of wilderness retreat, which can be a very cathartic process of getting in touch with your own ‘nature’.



▪ Engage in some form of creative practice to produce work inspired by your loss and in a nurturing, collective way where you can share that with others. It might be creative writing, music, singing, sculpture, painting, etc. If such a group doesn't exist in your area, you might like to think about approaching a grief counsellor and asking them to start one, or bringing together a group of childless women yourself.

▪ Declutter your living space in the company of another childless woman with whom you can share the stories attached to the things you are releasing. You can then do the same for her. A wonderful guide to decluttering is Marie Kondo's *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying*.

▪ Meditation and mindfulness practices can be a good way to learn to pay attention to where our mind is running off to, and the stories that we are telling ourselves, some of which may be making us miserable. Learning to separate our consciousness from the grief-filled narrative running in our mind can be really helpful; it's also good for the opposite: leaning right into it and seeing what's really going on, and what lies beyond or behind it . . .

▪ Yoga can be wonderful, although you may find doing it at home with a great video is preferable to attending classes, which can be a magnet for pregnant women. Some forms of yoga, such as Ashtanga, aren't recommended for pregnant women, so can be a good option if you wanted to take a class! There are now more childless yoga teachers offering classes - seek them out!



▪ Take up drumming and dance: traditional societies have always used drumming, singing and dance as part of their way to process grief and it's a wonderful way to move some of the feelings that can get 'stuck' in our bodies during grief. Gabrielle Roth created a form of dance practice called 'Five Rhythms' (you absolutely don't need to be able to dance to do it!) and classes take place all over the world. It's a set sequence of five different 'tempo's and is a great way to release blocked energy. Because grief doesn't just live in our thoughts . . .



- **Many women find journaling, Julia Cameron's 'Morning Pages' or anonymous blogging helpful.**
- **Watching films that make you laugh and cry can be powerful grief work. Some of us find that we don't have the ability to concentrate for a whole film at home during grief and that going to the cinema works better. It's also quite liberating to let our emotions rip in a private yet collective space. Tracey Cleantis has a 'Movie Rx' section at the end of each chapter of her book, The Next Happy if you'd like some inspiration.**
- **Mournful music that allows our sadness to rise to the surface and find expression can be helpful, particularly for those for whom tears don't seem to be coming easily at the moment. Film scores, which track the emotional journey of the storyline, can often be very evocative. Check out the Gateway Women's Playlist on Spotify too. It's called "Songs for Gateway Women!" and has been created by members of the Gateway Women Community.**

▪ Collect quotes on grief and grief recovery. You can write these down on index cards or in a special notebook, turn them into an ‘art journal’ or even keep them on a digital pin-board such as Pinterest. See Jody’s grief & loss collection on Pinterest here: bit.ly/gw-grief

▪ Attend, listen to or watch comedy, whatever makes you really laugh.



It’s a great relief during grief. Developing a rather ‘dark’ sense of humour is also very common during grief and is a normal and healthy human response to distress. The darker the shadow, the brighter the light. (One word of warning on stand-up comedy shows: it now seems quite fashionable for male comics to talk about the highs and lows of parenthood, so check before you go!) There are some great comedy podcasts, and most comedians have something on their websites you can download.

▪ Taking care of a pet can be a wonderful outlet for our nurturing – both giving and receiving. For many childless women, nursing a pet from a rescue centre back to health and happiness has been a major part of their recovery. Others have found great reassurance in the way that our pets love us unconditionally when we feel at our most unlovable and like a burden to those around us. Research into Animal Assisted Therapy (AAT) has shown that the human–animal bond can be highly effective in supporting humans through the grief process, whether in the palliative care environment or in the home.



▪ Buddy up with another childless woman and work through Jody’s book together; you can connect through online communities like Lighthouse Women at first and then progress to meeting up face to face.

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- **Start your own blog about your grief, or comment on other grief-related blogs in order to get a dialogue going. This can be anonymous – whatever makes it possible for you to share your experience with others who understand and respond. You can read the blogs that Jody’s written about grief here, and see other blogs she recommends: <https://gateway-women.com/blog-2/>**
 - **Read books about other women’s recovery from childlessness and discuss them with other childless women, either online or face-to-face. See Jody’s list of recommended books here: bit.ly/gw-rec-books**
 - **Become familiar with Kübler-Ross’s Five Stages of Grief as they show up in all areas of life. Learning to name what you are experiencing with increasing precision will really help you process your grief. You can find out more about this in Chapter 4 of Jody’s book, and she also lists other useful books here: bit.ly/gw-rec-books**

- Supporting other childless women in *their* grief work can be profoundly healing. Perhaps offer your support to a woman who is creating a ritual, or doing a big declutter? And don’t ever minimize how powerful it can be for you to share some of your experience with someone who is struggling in an online forum - it can be enough to feel that we can be ‘of use’ and that can be very reassuring when we’re grieving and may be feeling a bit ‘useless’.

- Talk, talk, talk about your situation with other childless women who ‘get it’ until you’re bored with talking about it. Boredom with talking about our story is a good sign that we’ve processed that part of our grief. It’s an ongoing process, though – each layer needs to be worked through. Listen, listen, listen too, to other childless women and be that non-judgemental, advice-free and empathetic sounding board that we all need to do our grief work.

- Become a world-champion napper! Grief is exhausting physically, mentally and emotionally. If you imagine that your brain is being rewired with a whole new identity to take you forwards in life, perhaps you can stop feeling guilty about it and get extra rest whenever you can. Try it without an alarm clock for the deluxe version.

