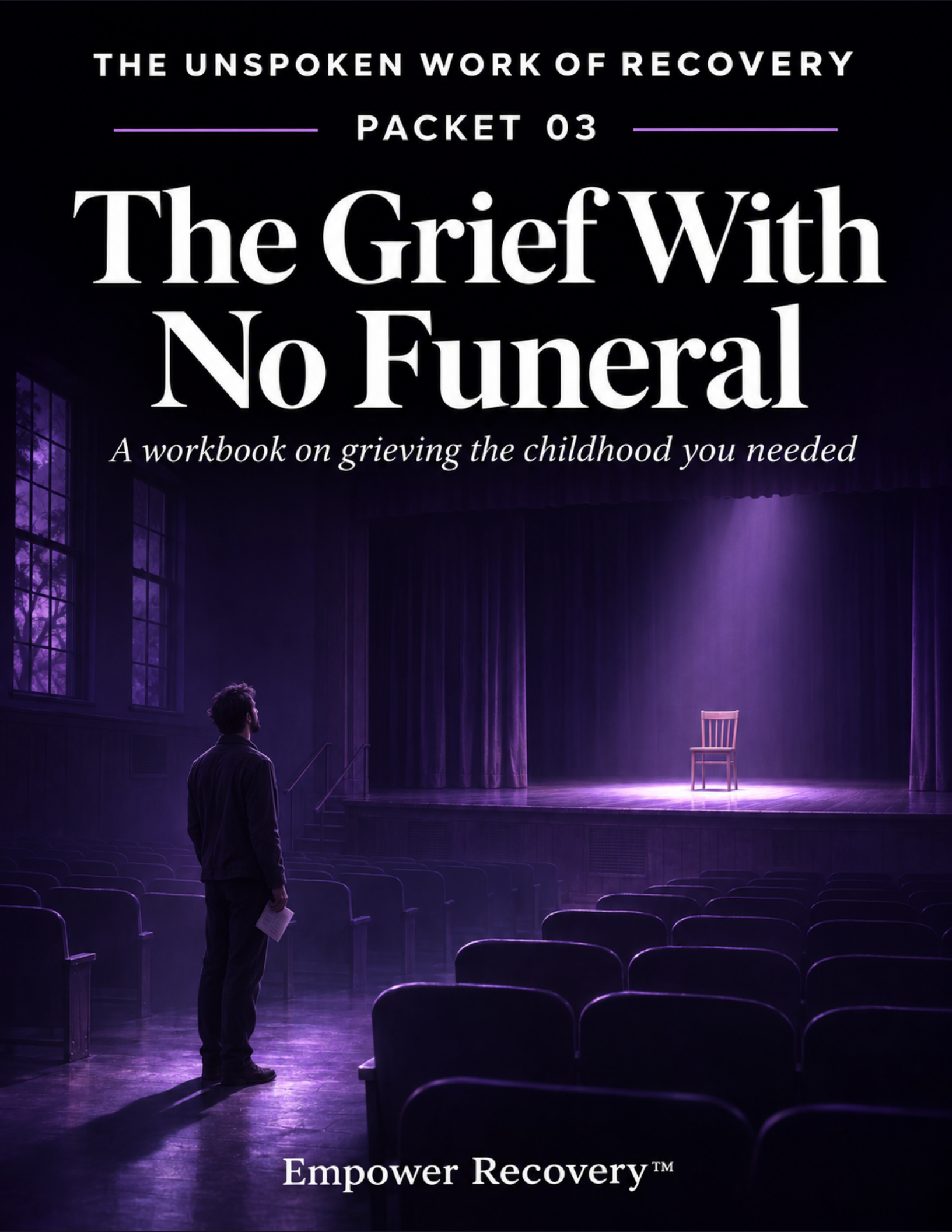
THE UNSPOKEN WORK OF RECOVERY

PACKET 03

The Grief With No Funeral

A workbook on grieving the childhood you needed



Empower Recovery™

WELCOME

There is room for this grief

A self-guided, nonclinical workbook for adults.

There are losses people know how to gather around. Then there is the loss you struggle to explain because it concerns something you needed and never had, or a relationship that remains part of your life even as you grieve what it has been.

You can begin with an ordinary moment that stayed with you. Read only, try one prompt, use an imagined example, or bring a page to someone you trust. Use as much detail as you choose. Keep any writing private if that is what you prefer.

CHOOSE YOUR PACE

If the subject feels like too much today, pause and return to an ordinary activity, or reach out to someone you trust. You can also choose to work through a page with a licensed mental health clinician. Find support options on page 16.

This workbook is for education and reflection. Its focus is the childhood you needed and the relationship you may still wish could change.

What would make this a manageable time and place to begin?

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OPENING ARTICLE

Grieving a Childhood You Never Had

At a Sunday cookout, Daniel watched his cousin’s daughter tell her mother a story about a frog. Her mother set down her phone. She waited through the part about the bucket, which took a while, and asked what happened to the frog. By the time Daniel drove home he had forgotten the end of the story. He could still see the phone lying facedown.

He was glad someone listened to that child. He was also sad in a way he could not explain to anyone who asked how the cookout went. What he had seen was small enough to miss. It was also a picture of something he had wanted again and again.

Your loss might be a room where you could cry, someone who would come when they said they would, or an adult who knew enough about your day to ask a second question. You may remember good things, too. The person you wanted more from may still send a birthday text. A single message can hold affection, disappointment, and the old hope that next time the conversation will go differently.

Pauline Boss’s work on ambiguous loss offers language for losses that remain unclear or open-ended. [1] That idea may help when a relationship continues while the closeness you hoped for remains out of reach. You get to decide whether the term fits your experience.

That night, Daniel told a friend about the cookout. This time he left the frog in the story. His friend listened long enough for him to explain why it mattered.

A QUESTION TO CARRY FORWARD

What ordinary thing would have meant a great deal to me?

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3 / AWARENESS

Name what you missed

One specific detail can give a broad feeling somewhere to land.

“I missed being cared for” may be exactly right. If you want to make it more concrete, ask what care would have looked like on a Tuesday. A ride home when you were scared to call. An adult who kept a promise. Someone who came back after an argument to talk it through.

WORDS TO BORROW

Protection · **Comfort** · **Attention** · **Consistency** · **Celebration** · **Play** · **Privacy** · **Repair** · **Being believed**

One ordinary thing I wish had been there is…

What would that have given me?

What words feel accurate enough for this loss today?

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3 / AWARENESS

Notice what brings it back

Use a recent moment. It might be a holiday invitation, a child's graduation, a brief phone call, or seeing someone receive the apology you wish you had heard. You can simply note where you were and what stood out.

A WORKED EXAMPLE

"A friend told me his father calls just to check in. I smiled, changed the subject, and felt quiet on the drive home. I realized I still wanted someone to call because they were thinking of me."

What was happening when the feeling showed up?

What did I notice in my thoughts, feelings, or actions?

What did that moment bring into view? What helped me afterward?

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3 / AWARENESS

Give mixed feelings some room

You may miss someone and feel relieved when they cancel a visit. You may be grateful for what they provided and angry about what they asked you to manage. If two feelings are here today, you can give each a line. If you feel blank or unsure, those words belong here too.

TRY TWO TRUE SENTENCES

“I remember laughing with my father on Saturday mornings.”
“I still wish he had asked why I stopped talking at dinner.”

One feeling or memory I can acknowledge is…

Another feeling or memory that can sit beside it is…

If I let both be true for today, what would I stop asking myself to prove?

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6 / ALIGNMENT

Tell the wish from the evidence

Use recent patterns to decide what you want to count on today.

You may still want a parent or caregiver to hear your side, apologize, or ask what you need. Put the wish into words. Then look at what has happened when you made similar requests or spent time together. The two answers can help you plan what to share, when to leave, or whom to call afterward.

AN EXAMPLE

What I hope for: A conversation in which my mother asks about my childhood and hears the answer.
What I've observed: She talks easily about practical plans and changes the subject when I bring up the past.
What I can choose: Keep our next call brief and bring the harder conversation to someone who can listen.

What am I still hoping this person will offer?

What have they consistently shown they can offer right now?

Given both answers, what choice is available to me?

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6 / ALIGNMENT

Decide what kind of care you want now

The care you wanted then can help you recognize what would matter now. Maybe you want someone to listen to good news. Maybe you need steadiness after a family call, or a place where someone can hear you without changing the subject.

THREE PLACES TO LOOK

Something I can give myself: Leave time after a difficult visit instead of scheduling another obligation.
Something I can ask for: Ask a friend for a walk and ten minutes to talk.
Something I can seek with support: Ask a counselor about space to talk through family grief.

What kind of care fits this moment?

Who or what could realistically offer part of it?

What is one thing I can do if that option is unavailable?

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6 / ALIGNMENT

Make a plan for a difficult day

Choose an upcoming occasion that may stir this grief. It could be a birthday, a family dinner, or an ordinary call. Plan for before, during, and after. If you are unsure about attending or answering, use this page to consider what choices you have.

A SMALL PLAN

Before: Decide how long to stay and how to get home.
During: Step outside if I need a pause.
After: Send a message to the friend who said they could check in.

What day or situation am I planning for?

What choice would give me more room before or during it?

What would help afterward? Who could I ask ahead of time?

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9 / INTEGRATION

Choose a way to acknowledge the loss

Pick a brief option, adapt it, or leave this page for another time.

WRITE A PRIVATE NOTE

Try one or two sentences beginning “I wish someone had…” or “I wanted you to know…” Keep, discard, or leave the note unfinished. This exercise can stay private.

MARK IT IN YOUR OWN WAY

Take a short walk, place a meaningful object somewhere you can see it, or set aside a quiet minute and say the words you chose. Give yourself room to stop.

LET SOMEONE WITNESS IT

Share one sentence with a person you trust. You can ask them to listen and leave the details there.

The option that feels right for me, if any, is…

How will I give myself room to pause or get support?

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9 / INTEGRATION

Ask someone to listen

Choose someone who has respected your privacy and listened before. Tell them what kind of conversation you want and ask whether they have room for it. You can keep the background private.

SAMPLE WORDS

“Something ordinary brought up sadness about my childhood. Do you have ten minutes to listen? I’d like to talk a little before we get into advice.”

“I don’t want to go into details today. Would you take a walk with me?”

Who might I ask, and what makes this person a good fit?

What would I say? What would I like to keep private?

If they’re unavailable, how else could I get some company or support?

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9 / INTEGRATION

Notice what changed and what you need next

Come back after trying a small step, or after deciding to wait. The grief may feel different, or it may feel much the same. Look for what you learned about the conditions that made room for it.

What did I try, change, or decide to postpone?

What felt useful, uncomfortable, or unfinished afterward?

What would I choose to repeat or do differently?

What kind of support do I want next, and when will I check in?

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OPTIONAL SPIRITUAL REFLECTION

A place for the unanswered

Some people bring grief to a Higher Power. Others find steadiness in silence, a walk, or being heard by someone who can stay with a difficult feeling. Use whatever form of reflection feels like your own.

If you are used to looking for a lesson in every loss, try leaving this one open for a minute. You can say what happened, what mattered, or what you still wish had been different. Let your next act of care be small enough to do today.

GOOD ORDERLY DIRECTION

"With Good Orderly Direction today I choose to give this grief a place. May I speak honestly about what I miss, receive the care that is available, and let the unanswered questions rest for now."

What would I say if I had a quiet place to be heard?

What is one act of care I can make room for today?

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REUSABLE WORKSHEET

My one-page grief map

Write as much or as little as feels right. Return to this page whenever you want.

3 · Awareness | What did I miss?

6 · Alignment | What still hurts?

9 · Integration | What would help me feel less alone with it now?

A LINE TO KEEP

“I can give this loss a place, even if I’m the first person to name it.”

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SUPPORT AND REFERENCES

Find support and further reading

If this work brings up distress that feels hard to carry or regularly affects daily life, a licensed mental health clinician can help you explore support options. In the United States, FindTreatment.gov can help you find mental health and substance use treatment services. [2]

WORDS FOR A FIRST CONVERSATION

“I’m grieving some things I needed growing up, and a relationship I still wish were different. I’d like help talking about what comes up now. Can we go at a pace I can manage?”

Further reading

[1] University of Minnesota College of Education and Human Development. Ambiguous Loss: When Closure Doesn’t Exist. An introduction to Pauline Boss’s work on losses that remain unresolved or unclear.

[2] Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Treatment Locators. U.S. behavioral health service directories and information.

What question or present-day example would I want to bring to a conversation?

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REFERENCE

Glossary and topic index

Acknowledgment. Giving a loss words, time, or a place in your attention.

Ambiguous loss. A loss whose circumstances or boundaries remain unclear or unresolved. [1]

Grief. The response to a meaningful loss. In this packet, the focus is care and closeness you needed or hoped for.

Ritual. An intentional action used here to mark a loss or give it a moment of attention.

Witness. Someone you choose to hear or sit with what you share.

FIND A TOPIC

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Difficult days and reminders	**06, 10**
Grief map	**15**
Mixed feelings	**07**
Ongoing relationships and expectations	**04, 08**
Sources and support	**12, 16**
Unmet childhood needs	**04–05**

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