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## Grief happens in the body.

### How?

- aggravated physical pain
- physical exhaustion or extreme fatigue
- cognitive effects
- elevated cortisol levels from stress
- sleep disturbances
- lower immune response
- elevated blood pressure and heart rate
- increased risk of death from *any other cause*

## A massage can really help.

- provide relief for body pain
- possibly lower cortisol and stress levels
- possibly ease sleep disturbances
- provide a kind human connection
- create a safe, private space to rest
- become part of important self-nourishment during a difficult time

## Common concerns:

- You can choose to remain dressed to your **comfort level**. You are always in charge of your massage, whether it's your 1st or 100th time.
- Unless you request it, **we won't do deep tissue or uncomfortable techniques on a newly bereaved or grieving person**. Gentle to moderate pressure, and relaxation or Swedish sequences are best.
- Consider only working "grief safe" areas: face and scalp, neck and back, calves and feet, arms and hands
- Please don't be shy about **tailoring your massage** to what's needed TODAY.

*Just massaging hands and feet for 25 minutes once a week has measurable benefits.*

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## Recommended Resources

### ABOUT GRIEF AND MASSAGE

- What Does it Mean to Hold Space for Someone?  
[upliftconnect.com/hold-space](http://upliftconnect.com/hold-space)
- The Institute for Grief Massage  
[griefmassage.org](http://griefmassage.org)

### GOOD GRIEF SUPPORT ON THE WEB

- The Center for Complicated Grief  
[complicatedgrief.columbia.edu](http://complicatedgrief.columbia.edu)
- Refuge in Grief with Megan Devine  
[refugeingrief.com](http://refugeingrief.com)
- Modern Loss. Candid conversation about grief  
[modernloss.com](http://modernloss.com)

### OTHER HELPFUL MODALITIES TO TRY

- Local grief support groups, grief counselors, and therapists
- Acupuncture and/or Eastern Medicine
- Reiki or other energy work
- Yoga or meditation
- Creative writing or other activities



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

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# Grief Massage

how massage therapy can actually help in times of grief or loss



*"Grief is a contraction, a tightening.  
Softening is kindness."  
- Megan Devine, RefugeInGrief.com*

## Grief is human and it hurts.

As massage therapists, it is a privilege and honor to work with:

- bereaved people
- caregivers of chronically/terminally ill people
- people going through other painful life transitions: divorce, pregnancy loss, postpartum anxiety, health crisis, financial or personal traumas, and many other challenging changes

## The #1 way we can help:

WE DON'T TRY TO FIX ANYTHING.



Imagine that we are the eye of the hurricane of your experience. We create **a quiet and safe cove where you are welcome to take refuge** for a bit before returning to the chaos and tumult of the moment.

We do not engage with the hurricane (the details of your storm are none of our business!) but are willing to stay steady so that you, finally, can take a break from it.

**It's an honor to hold this space for you.**



## Our Scope of Practice

**NO EMOTIONAL COUNSELING HAPPENS HERE.**

**As massage therapists**, we do not practice in such a way that elicits emotion or processes emotional experiences, even ones that may come up during a massage. Instead, we seek to **dissipate some physical symptoms** associated with the experience of grief, loss or mourning.

**WE "HOLD SPACE" INSTEAD.** Emotional release is normal, and might come up during or after massages. **We are ready for this.** We don't stifle, explain away, or say "it's ok, it'll be ok." We don't offer tissues unless they're asked for. We stay close, quiet, and maintain slow, steady contact.

- **All booking and intake steps are simple.** Grieving is hard work. Booking a massage shouldn't be.
- **Prebooking is easy.** Create a new healing ritual to look forward to, especially around meaningful holidays, anniversaries, or birthdays.
- **Gift Certificates.** Family and friends often want to help but don't know how. We can help your loved ones to "sponsor" your regular massages.

## Complicated Grief

In about 7% of cases, grief gets stuck or frozen, and a person is unable to function in their lives. Complicated Grief may require help from a trained mental health professional and is typically considered when grief symptoms don't improve or get worse after 12-18 months.

Especially prevalent following neonatal, spousal, violent or sudden deaths and among:

- men more than women
- socially-isolated people with lower incomes
- histories of depression or current depression
- those with difficult childhood experiences, and/or a history of many important losses

## Precautions

If you think that you might need more mental or emotional health support than we provide, please ask for suggestions. **We have a network of wonderful local professionals who can help.**

## Contraindications

Any client presenting severe distress, suicidal thoughts or ideations will be referred **to a mental health professional, hotline, 911, or a local emergency room.**