

The
DINNER PARTY

A GUIDE TO
CREATING
YOUR VERY OWN
GRIEF RITUAL
RECIPE BOOK

Greetings!

Let's start by saying we're so damn sorry for whatever and whoever has brought you to this toolkit, as wholly inadequate as it is to say. Whether grief is an old acquaintance or a new one, brought on by the sweeping pandemic bringing you into its undertow, we're deeply glad you've found us.

While humans have been dying, and thus grieving, for as long as we've been around, there's something about the uniqueness of each experience that makes us feel like we must be the first—and the only—person who's had to navigate life following a major loss. Surely, if someone else had felt this way, they would have had the humanity to plant some kind of roadsigns, or left some kind of manual in the glove compartment. We look, mostly unsuccessfully, for the ultimate atlas, the 10 steps to staunching the ache of loss or the loneliness that accompanies it.

But someone else's manual wouldn't work for you, anyway. And, you're already on your way to accessing your own. Grief is deeply personal. Just as each person, each relationship, each belief system, each ideal day, each love, and each death is exquisitely unique, so is our individual response to losing someone. There is no one-size fits all, because it's up to each of us to do our own inner-exploration and design our own way through. That might sound terribly complex and like the last thing you have energy for at this moment, but we've come up with this process with moments of grief-brain in mind. Give it a spin, and see how you feel.

What do we mean by grief rituals?

That's where ritual comes into play. And no, not like you're thinking. The stuffy dictionary definition of ritual, as in "a religious or solemn ceremony consisting of a series of actions performed according to a prescribed order," isn't what we're concerned with. **We're interested in personal ritual as a way of carving out a space and time to name something you desire—something you want to kindle or release, a day you want to commemorate, or a new chapter you want to start—and through your own creativity and intuition, design a moment where you can experience that desire.** It might be something you commit to weekly or maybe it gets the job done once. It might incorporate a practice you've been curious about, or might take the most mundane things in your life and treat them as sacred. It might be done with a group of people you love, or completely alone. Regardless, this toolkit will help you take the tangled knots of feelings, the holidays looming, or the things in need of celebration, and guide you toward coming up with your own uniquely personal and perfectly messy ways of moving through.

The Ivy League science behind it

And, to appease both your inner skeptic and your magnificent inner scientist, grief ritual has actually been studied in the hallowed halls of Harvard, and is proven to help - get this! - whether you believe in their effectiveness or not. Researchers Norton and Gino of the Business School found that participants who participated in grief rituals reported feeling lower levels of grief. And while we often think of grief rituals as public rites like wearing black for an ascribed period of time, or religiously-tied like sitting shiva or holding a wake, the rituals that were reported to be most helpful were private, and non-religious. It was a woman taking her husband's car to get washed every Sunday, or another person cutting and burning photographs in a park that did the trick. Lesson learned: you are your own best expert. In a 2013 study, researchers Michael Norton and Francesca Gino found that the participants who had found a way to move forward (note: not to be confused with on) were the ones who'd embraced "personal rituals." Authors Lorraine Hedtke and John Winslade call it "crafting" your own response.

How does this thing work?

So what the heck does your grief ritual look, sound, taste, smell or feel like? For some of us, family traditions or ancestral practices are working. For others, those traditions and languages feel hollow, as we grow more distant from the religious beliefs of those who came before us. Oftentimes, going through the motions of inherited rituals that are meant to help but leave us feeling nothing can be even more crazy-making. And, as spirituality and ritual is becoming more and more productized—god bless the USA—we can be left wondering why the sage super-pack that was supposed to delete our grief hasn't kicked in yet, or feel trepidation around experimenting with other practices we've only heard of, for just fear of appropriation or disrespect.

We feel you on all fronts. That's why we've designed the following simple pages to help you organize and brainstorm, and to treat ritual creation like you're in your own personal test kitchen. We're big fans of what happens around a dinner table (obviously), and the steps leading up to it. We'll be guiding you through your “pantry”—the ingredients you already have on hand—to compose a recipe based on a need, or a desire you want to tap into. Whether your ritual actually produces something edible or not, we know that rolling up your sleeves and letting yourself go into flour-on-the-face experimentation mode will help you refine what's true for you.

As our cravings change, so will our rituals. Try some things out, and don't get discouraged if one is a flop. If you have found a ritual that is serving you, return to this simple reflection process as your needs and desires change. Want some inspiration? We've included a varied list of rituals Dinner Partiers have shared with us recently to get your own creative juices flowing. We've also written down some of the “rules of the kitchen,” principles to keep in mind as you tinker. Whether you're facing the upcoming anniversary of a death, or moving apartments; whether you just can't shake a certain feeling, or want to cultivate something new, our hope is that these steps help create the space to figure out how to get through the gauntlet of these challenging transitions—and maybe even make them moments marked by empowerment, connection, deepening, and love.

With hope, love, and elbow bumps.

Carla Fernandez and The Dinner Party Team

March 2020

With special thanks to the Dinner Partiers who've been a part of Finding What Feeds Us to date, sharing what's working to create spaciousness and nourishment as we go through the unimaginable.

STEP 1

Open up the pantry for ingredients

DOING A BRAIN AND HEART DUMP OF THE THINGS THAT MAKE US FEEL A CERTAIN WAY.

People

As you sit with your grief, do you find that you want to spend time:

- ALONE
- WITH A CLOSE FRIEND
- IN A GROUP
- OTHER

List three people who feel life-giving to be around:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Remind yourself of that person who doesn't really get you right now, even if you love each other a whole lot:

Places

List three places where you feel particularly connected to your person(s):

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Are there any places you want to give yourself permission to avoid?

- 1.
- 2.

Are there places that are easy for you to access that feel intriguing, soothing, or are drawing you in - even if not connected to your person(s)?

STEP
1

Open up the pantry for ingredients

DOING A BRAIN AND HEART DUMP OF THE THINGS THAT MAKE US FEEL A CERTAIN WAY.

Comforts & Vibes

List three activities that give you comfort - whether it's to help you move through a feeling, or get up and out of them!

1.

2.

3.

What are the supplies you might want to pack into your ritual kit?

(i.e. candles, a particular food, a certain piece of clothing, a joint, a face mask, a hammer, a journal, a flask full of whiskey)

Playlist

If you were to set a playlist to cultivate a feeling, which songs would you start with:

I've Got This Playlist:

Rekindling Memories Playlist:

Plate Smashing Playlist:

STEP
3

Choose your ingredients

USE YOUR PANTRY INVENTORY TO MAKE A LIST OF INGREDIENTS YOU WANT TO WEAVE TOGETHER.

Instructions

Read through your ingredients, and circle 3 to 8 words that you think would help create the experience you're craving.

List those ingredients here

1.

5.

2.

6.

3.

7.

4.

8.

STEP
4

Decide on a dish

DESCRIBE IN A FEW WORDS WHAT RITUAL YOU'RE GOING TO EXPERIMENT WITH?

In honor of:

I will:

With:

At:

With the intention of:

**Regardless of how it
goes, I'll take care
of myself by:**

Step into your test
kitchen and remember:

“The soul is like a wild animal—tough, resilient, savvy, self-sufficient and yet exceedingly shy. If we want to see a wild animal, the last thing we should do is to go crashing through the woods, shouting for the creature to come out. But if we are willing to walk quietly into the woods and sit silently for an hour or two at the base of a tree, the creature we are waiting for may well emerge, and out of the corner of an eye we will catch a glimpse of the precious wildness we seek.”

PARKER J. PALMER
*A Hidden Wholeness: The Journey
Toward an Undivided Life*

Reflect on your recipe

SO, HOW WAS IT? WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

WHAT SURPRISED YOU?

WHAT MIGHT YOU CHANGE?

About The Dinner Party

We're a platform for grieving 20-, 30-, and early 40-somethings to find peer community and build lasting relationships. We screen, train and support a growing network of peer hosts, and connect them to 12-15 people nearby who share a similar age and loss experience.

Every Dinner Partier has lost a parent, sibling, partner, child, family member, and/or a close friend, only to find themselves facing a vacuum of support: too old for youth grief support and too young for traditional bereavement groups. Today, 4,000+ active members gather bimonthly at nearly 300 tables in more than 100 cities and towns worldwide, for a chance to #realtalk about loss and life after – a topic that would be “taboo” or “too much” at any other Dinner Party – with others who've been there too.

Our vision

We foresee a day in which people find amidst their deepest struggle the source of their deepest strength by connecting with others who've been there too, in an environment that's accessible and familiar, and marked by deep connections over time; a day in which grief is free of stigma and silence; and in which those who've lived through loss or hardship, whatever its form, are recognized not as objects of pity, but as better listeners and better leaders, characterized by profound empathy, resilience, agency, and a commitment to living a life of meaning.

[More at thedinnerparty.org](https://thedinnerparty.org)

The
DINNER PARTY

**Share your ritual
recipe with us:**

info@thedinnerparty.org

[#findingwhatfeedsus](https://twitter.com/findingwhatfeedsus)