

What Counts as a Loss?

Naming the care, connection, and support that were missing

You can remember feeling alone without knowing what was missing.

Some losses have a date or an event. Others concern something that did not arrive: someone asking, noticing, protecting, encouraging, or helping you make sense of what happened. A loss can involve what happened and what did not happen.

When finding the words is the hard part

You may remember one moment, or a repeated pattern that felt ordinary at the time. If you cannot name the missing piece yet, these examples may help. Choose what fits; leave the rest.

Interest: Someone asking about your day and listening to the answer.

Comfort: Someone staying with you when you were upset.

Guidance: Help understanding a problem or learning something difficult.

Encouragement: Someone noticing your effort, even when you did not succeed.

Inclusion: Being invited into conversation, plans, or shared time.

Protection and repair: Someone stepping in, believing you, or returning to make things right.

What kind of attention did you need?

Attention is a legitimate need. If the word feels loaded, try describing the response you wanted: “I needed help,” “I wanted someone to ask,” or “I needed my effort to matter to someone.”

Context can explain. The missing care still matters.

You can understand a caregiver's circumstances and still recognize an unmet need. You do not have to investigate their motives, excuse their actions, confront them, or decide how you feel about them to describe your experience.



Give the missing piece a name

Choose an example that feels manageable. It may be old or recent. Write by hand or type in the shaded spaces. You can skip any prompt or return later.

01 What happened?

A moment or pattern. Describe what you remember; include uncertainty if needed.

02 What did not happen?

What response did you need? A question, shared time, help, comfort, protection?

03 What did I learn to call my response?

An old label, such as “too sensitive” or “needy,” or a judgment I made myself.

04 What might I call the loss now?

Try: “I needed ____ and did not receive it.” A tentative answer is enough.

Sorrow, anger, relief, confusion, or no clear feeling may show up. No particular response is required. You can stop here and notice what comes to mind later.

More reflection and conversation: eathumblepies.com

Educational reflection, not a diagnostic assessment or a substitute for therapy.

FURTHER READING | Doka (1989), Disenfranchised grief: Recognizing hidden sorrow.

Krause, Mendelson & Lynch (2003), “Childhood emotional invalidation and adult psychological distress: The mediating role of emotional inhibition,” *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 27, 199-213.

Simon, Raats & Erens (2024), “Neglecting the impact of childhood neglect: A scoping review of the relation between child neglect and emotion regulation in adulthood,” *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 153, 106802.

