Session 18: Grief, Loss, and Letting Go with Boundaries

Duration: 60 minutes • Recovery education group. Ensure all participants are seated and ready

Materials: Workbooks; tissues (always, for this week especially); the Session 18 handout (Losses, Honors, and One Boundary)

Learning objectives — by the end of this session, participants will be able to:

- Name the losses carried into recovery — people, years, health, roles, and the substance itself
- Describe grief as a non-linear process with no program deadline
- Set one boundary that protects their grief and recovery in a specific relationship or setting

Opening (3 minutes)

Newcomer bridge (60 seconds): This is Phase 2 — Healing. The one idea today is that grief moves in waves, not stages, and boundaries protect the mourner. You are welcome here without earlier sessions; everything you need for today is in this session. Recovery is a season of funerals — for people, for years, for health and roles, and, said plainly, for the substance itself. Unnamed grief does not dissolve; it leaks. Today we name the losses, name how grief actually moves — in waves, not stages — and set one boundary that protects the mourner.

Check-in prompt (8 minutes)

Name, craving 0–10, one word for your week — then: "What loss sits underneath your recovery that nobody has ever really asked you about?" Log every craving score on the roster.

Passing is honored — you may pass any question, prompt, or practice without explanation, step out and rejoin, and choose a partner-only option where one is offered.

Teaching (20 minutes)

Recovery is a season of funerals: for people who died while we were using or because we were; for years, custody, careers, and health that will not come back; for the version of ourselves we planned to be; and — said plainly in this room — for the substance and the life around it, which for many was friend, medicine, and identity in one. Unnamed grief does not dissolve; it leaks, usually as anger, numbness, or a craving with no obvious trigger. Grief has no schedule and no stages a person passes in order; waves return at anniversaries, places, and songs, and each wave is workable with the tools already built — HALT, the honest-expression work of Session 17, community, and the Crisis Plan. Boundaries belong in this session because grief makes us porous: the relative who wants us at the gathering where everyone drinks, the old friend whose comfort is a relapse route. A boundary here is a grief-protection practice: how I will honor what I lost without re-entering what cost me everything.

- **Mourning the substance is honest, not disloyal** We can grieve what it gave us (relief, belonging, quiet) while refusing what it took. Both truths in one sentence is emotional adulthood, and it ends the secret romance that fuels relapse.

- **Waves, not stages** Expect grief to ambush ordinary days. A wave is not a setback and not a sign of weak recovery; it is love and loss doing what they do. Plan for anniversaries the way we plan for triggers.
- **Presence over explanations** In our own and others' grief, presence beats explanations. This community practices showing up, bringing food, and sitting with people in their grief — not explaining why it happened.
- **Boundaries protect the mourner** Saying no to a place, a toast, or a conversation is not rejection of the people; it is how the grieving person stays alive to love them longer.

Sources & Evidence — Facilitator background — do not teach

Grief is taught in this session as waves, not stages, with no program deadline, and with one grief-protecting boundary set for a specific relationship or setting (SAMHSA, 2014a; Najavits, 2002). Key sources for this session: SAMHSA (2014a), TIP 57; SAMHSA (2014b); Najavits (2002); SAMHSA (2020), TIP 42. Evidence strength: Moderate; strong as a practice framework. Spiritual practice: Lament and letting go — correlates with grief work practiced with boundaries; evidence: Moderate (Najavits, 2002). Full citations: Appendix H. The session's Scripture material is in its optional handout (Appendix I), as theological foundation, quoted from the King James Version. Informed by Seeking Safety principles; Seeking Safety itself is not delivered.

'Evidence strength' grades the correlated mechanism, not the spiritual practice itself

Pause midway through teaching: ask, "What part of that sounds most like your life right now?" Take two or three answers, connect them to the teaching, and continue. Teach in your own words — the bullets are your map, not a script to read aloud.

Discussion questions (10 minutes)

1. Which loss is loudest right now — and which one have you never named until today?
2. Have you ever felt guilty for grieving the using life? What does this session do with that guilt?
3. What dates, places, or songs carry your waves — and who knows about them?
4. What boundary would your grief set this month if it could speak?

Skill practice (12 minutes)

Participants write a Losses and Honors list in their workbook: each loss named in one line, beside one way they will honor it in recovery (a visit, a letter not sent, a donation of time, an anniversary plan). Then each person drafts one grief-protecting boundary as a complete, kind sentence they could actually say: 'I love you and I want to be there. I'll come for dinner and leave before the drinking starts, and here's my ride plan.' Pairs rehearse the sentence aloud.

Personal application — homework (5 minutes)

Have one honoring act this week, however small, and write about the wave if it came. Tell one safe person your boundary sentence before you need to use it. Participants write it in their workbook before leaving. Facilitator: name the homework again at the door as people leave.

Facilitator notes and cautions

Expect tears; normalize them, offer tissues and water, and do not rush to comfort people out of their grief with quick comfort. If a death was recent, a loss involves a child, or grief is accompanied by hopelessness about living, follow up individually after group and use the referral and Crisis Protocol pathways as indicated. Facilitators do not conduct grief counseling beyond this education session.

Closing (2 minutes)

A wave is not a setback. Do one small honoring act this week, and tell one safe person your boundary sentence before you need it. Next phase: relationships — the roles we played and the lines we draw.

Fidelity check for this session: objectives named at the start ☐ craving scores logged ☐ skill practice completed in full ☐ homework written down by participants ☐ session note filed today ☐



PHASE 3 — REBUILDING: RELATIONSHIPS AND LIFE

Week 4 — Pain, Trauma, and Honest Expression (continued)